

Jerusalem and the Work of Discontinuity

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He was not changing a technique, but an ontology.

John Berger, “Seker Ahmet and the Forest”¹

In a review of Kamal Boullata’s 2009 book *Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present*, the critic Jean Fisher noted that “among Boullata’s most stunning insights . . . is that the crucible of Palestinian modernism is to be found in the Arabisation and progressive naturalisation of Byzantine iconography.”² But Boullata himself did not follow this course. Instead, the Orthodox icon stimulated him to travel down a path away from the increasing naturalization of figural art toward varieties of abstraction, distilling the nonlinear perspective that lies at the existential heart of Orthodox iconography to create a modern artistic expression of a radically different sort from the Palestinian artists whose work he analyses in his book. Why did he take such a different path?

Boullata has frequently observed that his own artistic impulse was first formed by three modes of artistic creation that coexisted in Jerusalem, where he was born and grew up: Byzantine icons, Arabic calligraphy, and Islamic ornament. He has not elaborated on the role of the Orthodox icon except to mention that his first lessons in painting were from the icon painter Khalil Halabi, who taught him to organize the multiple planes of an icon by the use of a grid. In his chapter “Peregrination Between Religious and Secular Painting,” Boullata also mentions “reverse perspective,” which he gleaned from the Byzantine art historian André Grabar, whose teacher in early twentieth-century St. Petersburg, Dimitri Ainalov, had coined the expression.³ Boullata’s intuitive conceptual kinship with early twentieth-century Russian theorists and artists reverberates across his work, although it is rarely made explicit. Taking my cue from Boullata’s argument for the affinities between modern European painting and Arab art,⁴ I want to explore further the affinities of modern abstraction and the Orthodox icon in his work. To do this, I will concentrate on Jerusalem, the city that gave him a way of seeing and experiencing the world that brings together the ancient and the modern to pose a challenge for the eternal present. I will also examine Boullata’s work in closer relationship to another Orthodox-bred painter, Wassily Kandinsky, the acclaimed father of nonobjective art and the artist Boullata most frequently invokes, along with Henri Matisse, Paul Klee, and Pablo Picasso.

Seeing Boullata's work from an Orthodox angle allows us to contemplate his artistic language not only, as is usually the case, in the context of Palestinian and Arab art, or the binary opposition between Western and Arab art, but as participating in the ongoing experimentations released by the political crises and cultural collisions that sparked early twentieth-century abstract art, above all in Moscow, where the icon's nonlinear perspective stimulated seminal change. The strongest affinity between these early twentieth-century artists and Boullata is their insistence on multiple planes, their embrace of the polycentric, and their rejection of unilinear perspective and the fixity, both visual and spiritual, that it compels on the viewer. What needs to be brought out more clearly is the liturgical expectation that pervades Boullata's work in a manner so modern and so implicit as to have passed largely unnoticed. By evoking liturgy, I refer to what Kandinsky and his Russian Orthodox contemporaries variously termed "synthesis" or "Gesamtkunstwerk," in writing about the iconostasis and the Church as material symbols of a holistic, animated artistic creation. The shared expectation is that art is total and our relationship to it participatory. Art acts, leads and integrates as a provocation to the participant who stands vitally before it. Most importantly, the Orthodox matrix generated the assumption that the visual has the power to elicit change, and that the visual is part of a complex anagogic practice involving image, word, and act. This expectation runs through Boullata's visual and written work with its strong roots still enmeshed in his early formation in Jerusalem, the home away from which he has lived in exile since 1967.

Abstracting Jerusalem

How an Islamic aesthetic after a Byzantine tradition came to life as the direct product of a Qur'anic verse.

Kamal Boullata, "Journeying through Transparency," lecture, April 2018

Jerusalem is the generative point of Boullata's life and work. In Jerusalem, memory of the city's multiple pasts is configured through the relationships of its architecture—Jewish, Christian, Muslim—and the lives that connect the disjunctive histories of these structures across the urban topography. As a boy, Boullata would play games with his friends on the roof of his family home in Harat al-Nasara, the Old City's Christian quarter between the Bab al-Khalil/Jaffa Gate and the Birkat Hammam al-Batrak/Pool of the Patriarch's Bath (or simply the Birkat al-Khan as Boullata and his neighbors knew it), just off the *decumanus* of

the Roman grid plan imposed on the already ancient city. Every place has multiple names, multiple stories.

“Each of us had our own dome,” Boullata explained while showing me a black-and-white photograph, pointing to the low domestic dome rising to the right of the impatient twelve-year-old boy posing for his older brother Issa, who wanted to try out his new camera. The comment made perfect sense coming from an artist for whom geometry would become the key to his aesthetic practice. The entire Old City was a geometrical laboratory. From the family roof you could see the high dome of the Basilica of the Resurrection, the lower, flatter dome over the Tomb of Christ, the Rotunda, known colloquially as Nuss-iddinya, the “navel of the world,” partly obscured by the rectangular Crusader belfry. Further to the right was Umar’s mosque commemorating the spot where the caliph is believed to have knelt and prayed, at a discreet distance from the tomb, when he received the Christian city’s surrender from its patriarch Sophronius in 637.

Mosques and churches punctuate Jerusalem’s densely built Old City and knowledge of their names imparts some order to the organic accumulations and encroachments. Both Boullata and Kandinsky sketched from a young age, both were strongly attracted to color, and were aware that they inhabited cities full of sacred spaces. Kandinsky’s memory of his native Moscow, the “New Jerusalem,” was linked with churches and the act of naming, as he recalled his father “reciting in reverential tones the innumerable churches, with their wonderful ancient names.”⁵ Boullata’s father initiated his son into another world of words, also linked with a liturgical sense of space and community. In the 1940s and 1950s, while Kamal still lived in the family home, Yusuf Boullata would plan his midday *arak* and *salat al-dhuhr* to coincide with the aesthetic pleasure of listening to the Qur’an recitation on the radio. Silence filled the stone house as no one dared to interrupt the melodic voice penetrating the whitewashed spaces. This was still a world of the radio, but not yet of the loudspeaker. The call to prayer was performed by the muezzin’s undistorted voice. Church bells were rung by hand, not played from recordings. Kamal’s earliest aural memories are also spatial since every day, five times, the adjacency and relatedness of each neighborhood’s mosque was reaffirmed by its muezzin whose distinctive voice confirmed the city’s shape. “Allahu Akbar” echoed neighborhood by neighborhood, spreading a sound ornament across the city. Christians were part of this space, they shared aesthetic expectations of the Arabic language with their Muslim neighbors. Boullata’s father would tell the story of the time when

a Christian living in the Muslim quarter complained to the Awqaf administration about a newly appointed muezzin on aesthetic grounds. The staff was convinced and had the muezzin removed out of earshot and replaced by a more sensitive colleague.⁶ From his earliest formation, Boullata understood community and place through the beauty of the Arabic language and, in particular, the Qur'an.

The family's parish church was dedicated to Mar Ya'qub/St. James, the Brother of the Lord, situated as close as it could be to the entrance of the Basilica of the Resurrection. Architects knew that blessings increased with proximity. Most of the services were performed in Arabic punctuated with Byzantine Greek, especially the chanting. Some icons, too, were bilingual, with the saint's name painted in Arabic and Greek language and script. Orthodox ritual overflows with sensual pleasures that distract the young or the bored and lead the attentive across into spiritual delight and wonder: the honeyed scent of wax candles that are pliable in an impatient child's fingers, the pungent aroma of incense, the flame of the floating wick in the colored glass cup of the hanging lamp that casts its light and shadow on the face of the saint whose icon it honors, the sound of the bells on the censer, and the rustling of the priest's colorful, shiny vestments as he passes. This gaudy theater is the holy Orthodox Church embracing all its members, from professional gossips to divine fools, regardless of geography. Kandinsky would write to friends in 1936 that he was "spiritually present" in Old Moscow as he and his wife Nina listened to the radio broadcast of the midnight Easter service, longing for its awesome beauty.⁷

In addition to its iconographic, gestural, and sensual richness, Jerusalem's liturgical life in its broadest sense endowed Boullata with the expectation of contrast and disjunction, the knowledge that what you see is not-only-what-it-seems. He grew up with reciprocal shifts: word and image / material and immaterial / visible and invisible / God and man. His own inseparable activities, his shifts between painting and writing, he explains as interdependent in "the way one's sight relies upon two eyes to discern the full scope of the same object."⁸ To explain the practice of painting, Boullata alights on the priest's ritual action during the moment in the liturgy when he bows before the chalice and paten, the holy gifts he has carried in procession and laid on the altar, and utters a prayer, the *epiclesis* or invocation at which the bread and wine will be consecrated and transformed into the body and blood of Christ. The transformation is marked by the words "Amen, Amen, Amen," a spoken gesture that activates the shift between planes in order to move between potential and

real. “The transcendental mystery embedded in the meaning of the Greek word [*epiclesis*] sums up the state experienced during the physical act of painting by which I seek to invoke the recreation of a *place* through the language of geometric abstraction. John Berger once wrote ‘the transcendental face of art is always a form of prayer.’”⁹ Boullata’s choice of the *epiclesis* to explain his own practice repeats the movement and resistance to fixity that lies at the heart of the Orthodox *cosmotheoria* that is his birthright.

But a *cosmotheoria* cannot be limited by church walls; it is public and communal and private. One of Boullata’s early recollections is keeping watch in a darkening room, waiting for an angel to descend to the family icons illuminated by a votive light in an upper corner of a room, as in Orthodox homes everywhere.¹⁰ Angel-visited Jerusalem condenses the whole spectrum from hope to despair, fragmentation to recomposition, polycenteredness, and the longing for unity. This collision of possibilities, of material conceptions and immaterial planes, “takes place” in Jerusalem, in buildings made of squares and circles. Boullata likes to observe that the most pivotal sacred centers of his polycentric, polysemous city are sacred rocks: the Rotunda, the Chapel of the Ascension, the Dome of the Rock.¹¹ These rocks emerging from the bedrock of Jerusalem are like the dot above or below an Arabic word, a much-beloved device in Boullata’s paintings that he uses to pivot meaning, forcing the viewer to play with the ambiguities and alternations of meanings inherent in the Arabic language, such as “Kun Fayakun” (Be and it becomes, Qur’an II.117) [**fig. 1 “Kun Fayakun” (Be and it becomes, Qur’an II.117) (1983)**]. These singular sacred rocks are like the insight of the ninth-century mystic al-Junayd (whom Boullata likes to quote), who, after years of studying the Qur’an, came to focus on the single letter “ba,” “which looks like a crescent floating above a dot”¹²; or like the angels in Orthodox-bred Igor Stravinsky’s recollection of Dionysius the Areopagite: “the greater the dignity of the angels in the celestial hierarchy, the fewer words they use; so that the most elevated of all pronounces only a single syllable”¹³; or Kandinsky’s distillation of Moscow: “The sun dissolves the whole of Moscow into a single spot, which, like a wild tuba, sets all one’s soul vibrating.”¹⁴ But Boullata’s work never settles for long on the singular, striving instead to draw out the movement of every encounter between the material holy place and its immaterial counterpart: like the shift between “al-Zahir / al-Batin” (the Manifest, the Hidden) in his 1983 silkscreen [**fig. 2 “al-Zahir / al-Batin” (the Manifest, the Hidden) (1983)**].

Boullata's work aspires to this shifting power active in Jerusalem. The art historian Gülru Necipoğlu has described this shift in a discussion of the Islamic visual tradition as:

The intuitive passage from aesthetic pleasure and wonder to metaphysical or mystical rapture. . . . This passage was facilitated by an anagogical mentality (ascent from the visible to the spiritual/heavenly) and the habit of connective thinking that equated microcosm with macrocosm in both Christian and Muslim contexts alike, well into the modern era.¹⁵

The "habit of connective thinking" joins the holy sites of Jerusalem, as each is in oblique conversation with the other, each is an acting-out of the passage between tangible place and transcendent reality.

The most potent conversation may well be between the Dome of the Rock, built around 691–92, and the Kathisma, the magnificent mid-fifth-century church built just three miles away over the rock on which Mary rested while traveling to Bethlehem, where she would give birth to Jesus, as held in local tradition.¹⁶ By the eleventh century, the Kathisma had fallen into ruin, but excavation and study have revealed a nearly identical octagonal plan for both buildings. In addition to their plan, the two sites share a reverence for Mary. In the Dome of the Rock, Mary's appearance is cautionary and corrective. The Qur'anic inscriptions on the inner octagonal arcade remind the viewer that:

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the messenger of God, and His word which He imparted to Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not say "Three." Refrain, it is better for you. Rather, God is one god. Praise be to Him that He should have a son!¹⁷

On the other hand, the Muslim adoption of the Marian cult is evident at the Kathisma church thanks to the discovery of a mihrab inside the Christian shrine, datable to a few decades after the Dome of the Rock's completion. The contemporary shrine floor is decorated with mosaics featuring a palm tree, linking the site with the Islamized version of the story in which Mary leans on a palm tree as she rests.¹⁸ I have noted that in his writings Boullata draws parallels between the Dome of the Rock and the other rock-centered shrines known to him as a child, the Rotunda and the Chapel of the Ascension. The Kathisma was discovered as

recently as the 1990s and now, though only an archaeological site, joins the company of the other concentric Jerusalemite holy places. The Kathisma reveals in its multiple phases precisely the sort of associative experimentation with inherited traditions that is so characteristic of late antique and early Islamic visual and theological culture, and also so typical of Boullata's own engagement with Christian and Muslim aesthetic traditions in his work. The vital "anagogical mentality" behind such experimentation was, and is, fueled by the knowledge that images have power to shift the viewer across planes.

Boullata's education in seeing began with the buildings of Jerusalem and the connective tissue of life around them. Added to this was his sketching at the Dome of the Rock and the hours spent preparing the grid surface for Jerusalem's last icon painter.¹⁹ At the same time, in the early 1960s, while still attending St. George's School in Jerusalem and only a few years before he would leave Jerusalem to study studio art in Rome, Boullata came into contact with modern artists through books borrowed from the British Council and the American Cultural Center. No one who knows his work will be surprised that the experimentation with light and color in Claude Monet's painting captivated him most. While Monet's color opened a new perspective in his accumulating visual education, Boullata was also drawn to artists' writings, Vincent van Gogh's letters, but especially Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art* (1912). Boullata's respect for Monet is something else that he shared with Kandinsky. In the autobiographical essay "Rückblicke," which prefaced the album *Kandinsky, 1901–1913* (1913), Kandinsky wrote that two events in Moscow in 1896: seeing Monet's *Haystack* and a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, "shook me to the depths of my being,"²⁰ provoking his turn to abandon his law career to become an artist.

At this stage of his life, to have thought of himself as "Orthodox" would have been alien for Boullata (as it would have been for Kandinsky), he was al-Qudsi, from Jerusalem, a name at which the swirl of identities converged. He had to go away from Jerusalem to begin to separate out the multiple perspectives that constituted the sources for his kaleidoscopic intuition of the "full scope," and even then, his writing and art work show a visceral resistance to such separating out of disparate parts that work together as a complex whole. Instead, he persisted experimenting with the "habit of connective thinking that equated microcosm with macrocosm in both Christian and Muslim contexts alike." For both Kandinsky and Boullata, their roots in the Orthodox visual world did not hold them down to

traditional forms, but inspired them to keep those forms alive, and the only way to do that was through dramatic pruning to bring forth new life.

Kandinsky, the Icon and Concrete Abstraction

Painting is like a thundering collision of different worlds that are destined in and through conflict to create that new world called the work. Technically, every work of art comes into being in the same way as the cosmos—by means of catastrophes, which ultimately create out of the cacophony of the various instruments in that symphony we call the music of the spheres. The creation of the work of art is the creation of the world.
Wassily Kandinsky, “Reminiscences”²¹

Entering In

For Boullata and Kandinsky the fruit that eventually emerged after this pruning down to abstraction was very different. But how could the Orthodox icon predispose them each to nonfigural art? In addition to his early interest in Kandinsky’s writings, Boullata has often pointed out that Kandinsky visited the celebrated *Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst* (Masterpieces of Mohammadan art) exhibition held in Munich from October 1910 to February 1911, and that before that he had spent December 1904 to April 1905 in Tunisia. Kandinsky kept no diary during that visit. But when his fellow artist and companion in Tunisia, Gabriele Münter, was asked in 1958 about Kandinsky’s first tendencies toward abstraction, she remarked that “the Moslem interdiction of representational painting seemed to stir his imagination and that was when I first heard him say that objects disturbed him.”²² Münter was in the best position to comment, but in the surviving drawings from this time an empathy with a projected or assumed Islamic iconophobia or aniconism is not overt.²³ We may see the impact of the Tunisian experience more clearly half a decade later, when Kandinsky reviewed the Munich exhibition, expressing sympathy for an aesthetic he discerned above all in Persian painting, which is of course figural and so runs counter to assumptions that the figure (or object) was Kandinsky’s focal point in his encounter with Eastern culture.

In October–November 1910 Kandinsky published his review in the Russian-language journal *Apollon*, for which he wrote as an art correspondent in Munich. He notes that the exhibition of “Eastern art” (not “Mohammadan”) displayed “a huge collection of the most

diverse objects,” but he focuses on one type, “the most arresting of all and closest to us today—Persian miniatures.”²⁴ The Persian miniature’s:

Simplicity is almost barbaric, its complexity bewildering. Its elegance is that of a highly refined people lost in sensuous dreams. It has a seriousness, a strength, and occasionally a crudity of draftsmanship such as one finds in the old icons. . . . It seemed to me I could envisage the artist himself living so naturally in this ‘internal’ world, speaking of it so naturally, that the external could never be for him terrifying or pernicious, since it served his ends, placing at his feet a whole wealth of pictorial possibilities.

Before he left the academic world and legal profession to dedicate himself to the life of art, Kandinsky had traveled in 1889 to the province of Vologda as an ethnographer of the Zyrian people and a legal scholar investigating peasant criminal law.²⁵ When he recollected the expedition in 1913, his visual memory was color-based, spatial, and gestural: the “magical houses . . . taught me to move within the picture, to live in the picture.” He recalled the impact of entering into the small, colorful, domestic spaces with the “beautiful” corner where the “painted and printed pictures of the saints” were perpetually illuminated by a red lamp.²⁶ One cannot help remembering Boullata’s domestic icons, or even Kazimir Malevich’s first Black Square, placed very consciously in an upper corner of the exhibition space in the place of an icon. Back in Moscow churches, Kandinsky was overwhelmed by the same feeling he had experienced in the provincial houses that had reawakened a dormant awareness. His aim in his own painting now became to let “the viewer ‘stroll’ within the picture, forcing him to become absorbed in the picture, forgetful of himself.” Entering his painting was meant to be like stepping into a church.²⁷ He wanted a “‘simple’ man” encountering his work to feel as if he were in church,²⁸ that he who opens his soul to the experience would feel “blessed” through the act of looking.²⁹

This sensual awareness of being inside a work of art, participating in it, is part of the answer to the question of how the Orthodox icon might lead an artist to nonfigural representation. One of Boullata’s most cherished essays by his late friend John Berger is “Seker Ahmet and the Forest” (1979), which grapples with precisely this interiority and the expectation of entering in that Kandinsky felt when confronted with the Zyrian houses and, twenty years later, the Persian miniature; and which other contemporaneous Russian and

European artists were searching for through their own work. Artists and theoreticians of art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries struggled to respond to the political upheaval, spiritual crisis, and projections for renewal all around them, and nowhere more passionately than in Russia. The icon as part of a whole, active environment, whether in a house or a church, played its role in facilitating a breakthrough in relearning about conceptions of space, depth, light, and color. In retrospect, we see how the first three decades of the twentieth century were a time of tremendous quickening and cross-fertilization for questions about how art works and what to expect from it. The emptiness of mimetic representation, the provocation of photography, the pursuit of spirituality in its material forms, the urgency of renewal, experimentation with color and nonobjective expression, themes that converge in Boullata's visual work and writings, first intersected at this time in overwhelmingly rapid reactions and initiatives, so fast as to make separating out influence and sequence almost irrelevant.

From 1906 onwards, the development of new restoration methods led to the rediscovery of medieval Russian icons and intense discussions about the role of the icon and the iconostasis, liturgical practice, and the communal church as the Orthodox "Gesamtkunstwerk." Galvanizing this rush for renewal was the appearance of great art collectors, above all Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin, who in 1898 began collecting modern art and transformed his mansion in Moscow into a gallery, with a room dedicated to his Gauguins, which he referred to as his "iconostasis."³⁰ While contemporary painting was his main passion, his interests included Islamic art and icons—his brother would lend objects to the Munich exhibition. In 1907, inconsolable after the death of his wife, Lydia, Shchukin traveled to the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai and mentions in his diary being shown by one Father Pachomius the restoration work on early seventeenth-century icons.³¹ In 1909 Shchukin commissioned *La Musique* and *La Danse* from Matisse; at the end of that year, Kandinsky saw them and other works by Matisse at Shchukin's home. In 1911, the year Matisse traveled to see the Munich exhibition of Muhammadan masterpieces, he also visited Shchukin in Moscow. While Kandinsky was writing home about the Islamic exhibition in Munich, Matisse was quoted in the Moscow press for his enthusiasm about icons, "Yesterday I saw a collection of old Russian icons. This is truly great art. . . . We should study them in order to understand art,"³² and "the icons are a supremely interesting example of primitive painting. Such a wealth of pure color, such spontaneity of expression I have never seen anywhere else. This is Moscow's finest heritage."³³ That same year, 1911, Kandinsky read

his *On the Spiritual in Art* as a lecture in St. Petersburg. At the time, he was still based in Munich, before the war forced him back to Moscow for a dynamic period between 1914 and 1921, when he was involved with teaching art and discussing the still opening possibilities for art of the past, present, and future in young Bolshevik Russia.

Reverse Perspective

One of his fellow teachers at the Higher Art and Technical Studios (VKhUTEMAS) was the priest, mathematician, natural scientist, philosopher, and theoretician of art Pavel Florensky, who was also Kandinsky's neighbor in Moscow.³⁴ Both Florensky and Kandinsky were moved by the charismatic thinker Vladimir Solovyov, and both were close friends of Father Sergei Bulgakov. Future research promises to shed more light on the wide areas of shared interest between Kandinsky and Florensky, but even the titles of some of Florensky's much talked-about lectures and articles speak for themselves: "Church Ritual as a Synthesis of the Arts" (1918), "Reverse Perspective" (1919), "Iconostasis" (1922), and his published monographs, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914) and *Imaginariness of Geometry* (1922).³⁵ Considered a genius and a work of art by friends and acquaintances, Florensky directed his prodigious curiosity about what is real and what is true first toward training as a mathematician and scientist, and then to the priesthood, which he entered at age thirty, in 1911.

Contradiction and discontinuity were central to Florensky's understanding of how human reason and imagination coexist. But for Florensky, all concepts had to be applied and experienced. Rather than a dead end, Florensky seized contradiction as a way of moving forward in a foreshadowing of Kandinsky's powerful manifesto of "not 'either/or' but 'and'," formulated over a decade later in order to break down the meaningless arguments pitting traditional art against modern art, to which we shall return. Florensky perceived that contradiction provokes and impels us to look harder through the surface meaning to deeper realities, and break the rigid illusion of linear perspective. The world cannot be viewed from a single point. "We see with two eyes, not one, that is, from two points of view at once, not one as perspective projection requires. . . . Real sight comprises two contradictory but equally necessary points of view."³⁶ The icon, like Scripture, had to offer more, to bring the participant to an experience of layers of verbal complexity and visual *polycenteredness*: the icon's

composition is constructed as if the eye were looking at different parts of it, while changing its position. So, for example, some parts of buildings are drawn more or less in line with the demands of ordinary linear perspective, but each one from its own particular point of view, with its own particular perspectival center; and sometimes also with its own particular horizon, while the other parts are, in addition, shown using reverse perspective.³⁷

The icon painter works in reverse perspective to re-present several aspects of an object or figure simultaneously.³⁸ By doing this, he makes present in the experience of sight what is potential, rather than a fixed singularity of a single viewer. In “Reverse Perspective” Florensky moves from poly-centeredness to synthesis, when he describes the plight of the viewer before the illusion of linear perspective:

He is an observer who brings nothing of his own into the world, who cannot even synthesize his own fragmentary impressions; who since he does not enter into a living interaction with the world and does not live in it, is not aware of his own reality either.³⁹

The icon is a tool for the viewer to synthesize his own “fragmentary impressions” through entering into and through the multiple planes to the resurrected unity of reality. What is striking are the affinities between Florensky’s expectations, the spatial arrangement of the Vologdan interiors, the internally organized spaces of the icon, and Boullata’s descriptions of depth and transparency in his paintings. One cannot resist recalling Boullata’s comment quoted above about the interdependent “way one’s sight relies upon two eyes to discern the full scope of the same object.” Boullata’s geometries are about the act of abstraction in order to show interrelatedness, not in order to separate out. They are *concrete* abstractions, as Kandinsky would insist about his own work to those who saw it as purely intellectualized. In this way, Boullata’s geometries act like an icon and provoke the viewer to a plural vision that looks inward in order to see the whole in the shifting parts.

The contribution of Islamic aesthetics to Boullata’s work is complementary to the Orthodox. The kinship of these two traditions of viewing is perhaps nowhere more apparent today than in Kamal Boullata’s work. To underline this, one can do no better than again to quote Gülru Necipoğlu:

The union of naturalistic representation and optics in one-point perspective entailed the fused point of view of an observer, a bipolar separation between subject and object that, in Islamic art, remained relatively fluid. While the immobile perspective gaze produced static images, the kinetic gaze allowed for the entry of the body, the senses, and desire into the fractured unity of visual spaces in Islamic art and architecture.⁴⁰

The “kinetic gaze” participates in the contemplative work of visual anagogy an expectation of the material/immaterial reciprocity that would appear natural in the writings of Florensky and Kandinsky, and that helps us to understand the salvific movement across Boullata’s work.

Redemptive Discontinuity

Like Florensky’s writings on the icon’s power as a tool of the future and Kandinsky’s studies on the nonobjective, Boullata’s painting is didactic, showing the viewer how to engage with discontinuous parts that make up the whole experience of reality. Florensky declared that “the iconostasis ‘breaks windows’ in the visible world to the ultimate reality of the saints.”⁴¹ In a letter to the German art historian and modern art advocate Will Grohmann, dated July 16, 1927, Kandinsky uses concepts strikingly akin to Florensky’s in “Reverse Perspective”:

It’s not about whether we can and should get by in painting without real objects, but about a total, inner reorientation away from a rationalist viewpoint, away from a rationalist outlook to a spiritual, intellectual, irrational one, though rationalism is not completely thrown overboard but is allocated a modest role appropriate to it. In other words, synthesis. No “either—or,” but “and.” This is where the absolutely vital reorientation lies that still remains unknown to today’s (and particularly “modern”) man.⁴²

Neither Kandinsky nor Florensky was advocating an early twenty-first century multicultural relativism, nor is Boullata today. On the contrary, with their emphasis on poly-centered perspective they draw our attention to the unknowable and to the limits of reason, to the power of the imagination, and to the necessity of the “and” within a capacious philosophical Orthodoxy of the early twentieth century, so that both the rationally knowable and that which relies on faith and experience could be accommodated. What Orthodoxy offers the artist is a

way of emphasizing the necessity of the shift between perspectives. Kandinsky advocates the “and” of synthesis, the “inwardly logical, outwardly organic, inevitable further growth of art.”⁴³ Boullata’s work experiments in paratactic sequences that represent not “either/or” but distinct joinings in pairs, triads, quartets that keep the eyes moving. Boullata’s open-ended synthesis shows its Islamic inheritance in the exuberant repetitions of geometric pattern and intricate calligraphy, also echoed in Orthodox interlacing of names, as in the Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God.

Kandinsky and Boullata each participate in a range of overlapping artistic and intellectual discourses. The work of both artists is therapeutic work in that its immediate and ultimate goal is the insistence on interrelationship and refusal of *stasis*, which is death. Light and color are essential tools of this message because the eye as the window of the soul is the tool capable both of penetrating focus and subtle movement that discerns the infinitesimal gradations of light that bring color and differentiation into being. Gradations cannot be static. Rather, they facilitate progression like the circumambulations of the pilgrim; the stages of Christ’s progress to Golgotha; the steps of the ladder of ascent, whether in Kandinsky’s work as a material symbol on its way to abstraction or in Boullata’s as a reiterated metaphor in his work over the past decade. The ladder is not a smooth slide; it is built from intersecting, disrupting spaces to lead upward, like a material symbol of anagogy, to new revelations of strange and unexpected junctures.

The Work of Discontinuity

One has to know technique, but one also needs to know art. An icon should be like a “painting,” like a prayer written with beautiful letters.

Sergei Simeonovich Sakharov (1896–1993), art student of Kandinsky’s in Moscow, later Fr. Sophrony, monk, monastic founder, and icon painter⁴⁴

At his greatest distance from Jerusalem, in Washington, DC, Boullata responded with silkscreen blocks of color formed into shifting words and meanings in Arabic Kufic script. The strong, solid colors were a language in themselves, even taken apart from their shaping into Arabic letters: the 1980s calligraphy communicated the persistent presence of a rooted and kaleidoscopic Arabic world in defiance of political changes that would narrow and truncate a complex, historically rooted culture. Verbal expression from spiritual sources both Christian and Muslim—St. John the Evangelist, Ibn ‘Arabi, al-Hallaj—fused historical

personalities to the strict geometry of these restlessly motionful works. [fig. 3 **Fi-l Bid' Kan-al-Kalima** ("In the Beginning was The Word," St. John) (1983)].

These early works speak not only to the intellect that must puzzle out their multiple meanings. The solid blocks of color are simultaneously the small colored tiles of the Arab craftsman who evokes from a multiplicity of pieces a whole, infinitely cohesive world of discontinuous pattern. This artistic empathy with the craftsman continues as Boullata moves from silkscreen to acrylic, culminating in the work created in 1994–95 in Morocco, where he lived with his wife, Lily, for four years in order to study the practice and theory of geometric design in the Islamic tradition while rooted in the place where masters still worked. With his shift to acrylic brushwork, Boullata also introduces the practice of working in pairings, using the idea of the series to conjure up gradations of difference while experimenting with geometric and color relations.

His exhibition *Symmetries*, in 1991, included three series: *Jerusalem Gates*, *Iconostasis*, and *Ascent*, whose titles show Boullata approaching his city in a new way, not through the ambiguities of Arabic words, but through material symbols that modulate across space and, in the case of *Ascent* [fig. 4 "**Al-Mi'raj**," *Ascent* series (1991)], across traditions, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Boullata's Moroccan work exhibited in 1994—*Duets*, *Quartet* and *a Triangle*—moves into implicitly liturgical groupings, a practice that has remained fundamental to his work, including in his most recent *Angelus* (2018) [fig. 5 **From Angelus series**]. In this series of three triptychs movement traverses the three distinct canvases in shafts of color reminiscent of the beam of colored light in Orthodox icons that crosses from the heavenly to the earthly sphere to reach Mary, making visible the paradoxical union and its Annunciation by the angel Gabriel.⁴⁵ The passage between spheres is marked by sharp lines of color, calling to mind the shift in tonal color when the Cherubic Hymn facilitates the passage between the two parts of the Orthodox liturgy.

A connective strand in Boullata's two-step move, in 1998, from Morocco via Paris to Menton on the northern Mediterranean coast, was his ongoing improvisation with light and color mediated through a growing acquaintance with the late tenth-/early eleventh-century thinker Ibn al-Haytham. The effect of the move back to Mediterranean light was to bring Boullata closer to the sacred conjunctures of his childhood neighborhood with the *Surrat al-Ard* series in 1997–98. The gradual process underway is communicated to the viewer

suddenly in this series, which invites the experience of entering space in a way foreseeable only in retrospect. These works are a return that embraces the unsettled as well as the transcendent, both essential components of all spiritual traditions. Brushstroke has emerged as the sign of the ephemeral artist's hand contrasted with the eternal geometry of the line and square. These works are not conceived as pairs or triptychs but as single points that constitute the whole city as a stage for concrete encounters with the immaterial. The titles alternate between Arabic, English, Latin, and Greek to evoke the variety of place in the holy city: *The Angel's Pool*, *Haram*, *Surrat al-Ard*, *Watad al-Sama*, *Ellipsis*, *Anastasis*, *Isra'*, *Sakhra*, *Hijab al-Anwar*, *Ascent*, *Sudarium*, and *Homage to Sophronius* [fig. 6 *Homage to Sophronius*, *Surrat al-Ard* series].

These are studies in displaced symmetries, multiple squares, overlapping, submerged, transported, truncated, evoking the “architectural expression of the convergence between the physical and metaphysical realms.”⁴⁶ In painting his own Moscow, Kandinsky wrote that what resonated was “the duality, the complexity, the extreme agitation, the conflict, and the confusion that mark its external appearance and in the end constitute a unified, individual countenance.”⁴⁷ He declared that “painting is like a thundering collision of different worlds that are destined in and through conflict to create that new world called the work.” For Boullata, the creative process generated by Jerusalem is differently complicated, for he knows that his are not utterly “different worlds” but subtly overlapping worlds under tremendous strain in collision. A starker view was espoused by Sophronius, who became Patriarch of Jerusalem in 634, just after the city's restoration to Byzantine control after the Persian invasion and Jewish uprising. After such a collision, Sophronius preached to his people the arduous work of recreation: “out with the old and in with the new.” “For we have been renewed, made new from old, and we have been ordered to sing a new song unto God who has renewed us.”⁴⁸ One wonders whether this manifesto of reworking the new from the old helped Sophronius steady his philosophical nerve when faced only three years later with a new “new”: the takeover of his city by the Muslim caliph Umar, just sixty-six years after the birth of the new prophet Muhammad.

The use of history by later generations brings fresh meanings often quite different from those grasped by contemporaries. This makes the “work” of creating new worlds distinctive to its time and place. Sophronius's time, what we now call late antiquity, was a time of improvisation with allusions from the Biblical past that also witnessed the emergence

and evolution of Islam, in the seventh to tenth centuries, whose new followers gave new creative responses to older texts, images, and practices often at a deliberately oblique angle to what had gone before, a disjunctive continuity that the art historian Finbarr Barry Flood has called “self-reflexive parataxis.”⁴⁹ The urgent desire in Boullata’s work to create from familiar symbols and gestures a new language to express evolving conjunctures reflects a kinship with this period of experimentation. It is a kinship both subliminal and explicit, never more so than in his return to honor Patriarch Sophronius.

Boullata’s choice of the historical moment of collision when Umar received the city’s surrender from Sophronius allowed him to grapple visually with a man whose life spanned tremendous change. At the same time, Boullata’s choice forged a personal link with the Jerusalem icon painter Nicola Saig and his figural painting *Caliph ‘Umar at Jerusalem Gate* (ca. 1920). It is worth quoting from what is perhaps Boullata’s most groundbreaking study:

The horizon across which Saig conducted his shuttling between religious and secular painting linking distant memories in time could not but be broadened to include more than the single vanishing point decreed by the conventional rules of linear perspective. One wonders whether the overlapping of two perspectives in his space accompanied by bringing together two moments in time actually echo how [Rashid] Khalidi characterizes Saig’s generation as having “overlapping senses of identity” and as preserving a “multifocal identity.”⁵⁰

Half a century after his separation from Jerusalem, Boullata’s series *Homage to Al-Hasan Ibn Al-Haytham* (2009) sets the straight line of the Kufic Arabic script in relation to light and color. Like all his experiments with interchange, Boullata does not create a hybrid but allows the related elements to find their own relationship while remaining distinct. In what may be his most complex series, culminating in the quadriptych *Nothing Is Seen Save Colors*⁵¹ [fig. 7 *La Yura illa l-Alwan (Nothing Is Seen Save Colors)* (2009)], Boullata makes duality visible simultaneously, while insisting at the same time on the palpability of the visible by his rendering of depth through color that invites the viewer in, as if to both honor and challenge the great theoretician of optics.

It is in *Homage to Al-Hasan Ibn Al-Haytham* and *Bilqis* [fig. 8 “*Bilqis I*” and “*Bilqis 4*” (2013)], which was to follow three years later, that we see most profoundly the impact of

the “kinetic gaze” provoked by composition designed to induce contemplative vision.⁵² Boullata explains that the four triptychs he dedicated to the Quranic Bilqis, known in the Bible as the Queen of Sheba, operate on the story of the transparent crystal floor of Solomon’s palace and Bilqis’s responsive wonder after she mistakes the floor for water. Her wonder is metabolic; it turns her to believe in the One God. In the context of Boullata’s lifelong interest in ambiguity between pairs, his choice to name the series after only one of the two complementary figures involved is striking. Bilqis *implies* her counterpart, Solomon. She represents the viewer puzzling out the visible, while Solomon, the creator of the crystal floor, is hidden but implicit. By giving Bilqis the title role, Boullata allows his visual practice to mirror the long-lived Arabic poetic practice in which women and feminine beauty offer the artist his archetypes and anagogic metaphors, expressed through chromatic contrasts.⁵³

From Biblical times to the present day, Solomon and Bilqis have acted in a potent marriage of complementarities and contrasts, endlessly reworked in successive generations to express their political, cultural, and spiritual needs. Both are transformational figures who elide boundaries, whether Jewish, Christian, and Islamic, or pre-Christian/Christian and pre-Islamic/Islamic ones.⁵⁴ The pair is a gift to the allegorically-minded. The third-century Alexandrian master of allegory, Origen, made the Biblical Queen of Sheba into a proto-image of the gentile Church and Solomon, who prefigures the incarnate Logos, into the embodiment of the wisdom she sought.⁵⁵ Much more commonly, Bilqis appears with Solomon in association with architectural wonder. In the minds of Muslim writers and local people, the names “Palace of Solomon” or “Throne of Bilqis” helped situate any ancient building encountered, whether of pagan, Christian, Zoroastrian, or any other origin. Solomon and Bilqis together possessed the power of incorporation and transformation and were never monopolized by a single tradition. Contradictory versions of their activities simply accumulate to demonstrate the couple’s capacious grandeur.

Boullata reworks the Bilqis legend as incarnational painting to enter into, the movement of transparent planes welcoming the viewer to touch the surface as if it is water, so as to recreate the moment of wonder and the conversion to belief. The painter explains that “as soon as they dry, colors should feel as fresh as spring water and as clear as glass. Once I begin to sense that I could almost plunge through the painting’s surface as in a pool or a mirror, I realize that the work is finished.”⁵⁶ Vision is conceived of as an extension of touch. This is the incarnate, anagogic quality of the visual experience to which Boullata aspires: to

recreate Bilqis's wonder and ours, the viewers'. But Bilqis is a complex figure, capable of absorbing a multitude of encounters with the One God. To capture the experience of the shifting planes of *Bilqis*, we might return to Pavel Florensky and his insight that "the closer one is to God, the more distinct are the contradictions."⁵⁷

Because of his value as a scientist, Pavel Florensky was allowed to remain in the Soviet Union when Kandinsky and other intellectuals left or were expelled. In 1933 Florensky was finally arrested, spending the next five years exiled in Siberia at the Skovorodino Experimental Permafrost Station and at the Solovetsy Monastery that had been turned into a prison camp. He was executed in 1937, a fact his family did not learn of until 1989. While imprisoned, Florensky continued to write, especially letters to his family, and conduct scientific research on permafrost, continuing to experiment and think visually about the austere landscape into which his life had been inserted.⁵⁸ His comments on ice crystal illuminate with surprising clarity the intersecting transparencies of the crystal floor, Boullata's metaphor for faith in the One God in *Bilqis*. As early as 1904, Florensky had used ice crystal as a metaphor for total unity, in which "every particle occupies its definite, intrinsic place in the tissue of the whole, in the organization of the marvellous structure." In *Bilqis* the edges of the crystalline geometries that flow across the canvases could be likened to the folds of garments in medieval icons which Florensky describes as possessing a "mineral quality, like the edges and facets of crystallized masses," they show forth "spiritual energy, a fullness of efficient force" and an organization in which all life is interconnected.

Conclusion

We live—if one follows the biblical sequence of events—after the Fall. In any case, we live in a world of suffering in which evil is rampant, a world whose events do not confirm our Being, a world that has to be resisted. It is in this situation that the aesthetic moment offers hope. That we find a crystal or a poppy beautiful means that we are less alone, that we are more deeply inserted into existence than the course of a single life would lead us to believe.

John Berger, "The White Bird"⁵⁹

By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that the didactic and evocative nature of Boullata's work might also help to respond to the crisis of the icon silently underway today. The emergence of the photographic icon is instigating another revolution, one perhaps even

as powerful as the rediscovery of the medieval icon in the early twentieth century. The invention of photography played its role in triggering the turn away from the fixity of linear perspective, and now, with a delicious, or diabolical, irony, the invention of the photographic icon in which photographs of men and women who have been canonized are used as “icons” is now turning the viewer back toward the fixity of a single person, a single view, that the reverse perspective of the traditional Orthodox icon served to withstand. In these new icons, the artist either paints a naturalistic representation of a saint by imitating a photograph or, as is increasingly common, the photograph is reproduced, and then in both cases a “Byzantine style” frame with reverse perspective attributes and traditional calligraphy is painted around the photographic image in order to suggest to the viewer the “look” of an Orthodox icon.

The question is how can the comfortable familiarity of a particular person in a photographic reproduction, the holy man or woman one might even have known, have the power and jarring juxtaposition of a transfigured person as represented in an icon? As resistance to these faces fixed in particularity, might Boullata’s incarnate geometry serve as a better tool to provoke the viewer to “break the window” of the iconostasis through to the “trans-subjective reality of being”?—what Florensky so passionately argued a true icon must do. The idea is not that Boullata’s work might act as a substitute for an Orthodox icon. It is the transformative power of looking, the “beholding that ascends,” at the core of the icon that is destroyed in the photographic icon, but nurtured and developed in Boullata’s work, as it was also in Kandinsky’s. What Boullata’s work has the power to do is to reawaken that facility for connecting disparate planes and to cultivate an associative mentality that resists the singularity embodied in the fixed linear perspective, and the photograph.

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¹ In John Berger, *About Looking* [1980], reprinted in *John Berger: Selected Essays*, ed. Geoff Dyer (London: Vintage International, 2001), p. 308.

² Jean Fisher, review of Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present* (London: Saqi, 2009), *Third Text* 24 (2010), pp. 483–84.

³ Born in Kiev in 1896, André Grabar studied in St. Petersburg and left Russia in 1920, to resettle in Sofia and later Paris. Boullata 2010 (see note 2), p. 111 refers to André Grabar, *Les origines de l’esthétique médiévale*, a posthumous republication in 1992 of three articles, one of which, “Plotin et les origines de l’esthétique

médiévale” [1945], explores the simultaneous appearance of multiple perspectives in medieval, mainly Eastern Mediterranean, art. On Ainalov and the term, see Charles Lock, “What is Reverse Perspective? and Who was Oskar Wulff?,” *Sobornost* 33 (2011), pp. 60–89.

⁴ Kamal Boullata, “Classical Arab Art and Modern European Painting: A Study in Affinities,” *The Muslim World* 63 (1973), pp. 1–14. Reprinted in Finbarr Barry Flood, ed., *There Where You Are Not: Selected Writings of Kamal Boullata* (Munich: Hirmer, 2019), pp. ###–##.

⁵ Wassily Kandinsky, “Reminiscences” [1913]; English trans. in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (London: DaCapo, 1982), p. 382.

⁶ I thank Kamal Boullata for telling me the story, also recorded in Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar, eds., *The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904–1948*, trans. Nada Elzeer (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2014), pp. 88–89.

⁷ Nina Kandinsky, *Kandinsky und Ich* (Munich: Kindler, 1976), p. 233: “Kandinsky erzählte seinem Freund Rupf in einem Brief davon und verschwie ihm auch nicht seine stille Sehnsucht nach dem Moskauer Osterfest: ‘Morgen werden wir uns geistig in das alte Moskau versetzen, wo seinerzeit die Ostertage so wunderbar schön und direkt rührend gefeiert wurden.’” See also Lilia Sokolova, *Sacred Image in a New Form: Eastern Orthodoxy at the Core of Wassily Kandinsky’s Art and Theory*, MA thesis (Savannah College of Art and Design, 2015), esp. pp. 2 and 25.

⁸ Boullata 2010 (see note 2), p. 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 326–29.

¹² Kamal Boullata, “Reading the Arabesque,” lecture, given at Silsila: Centre for Material Studies, New York University, April 23–26, 2018; repr. in this volume.

¹³ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons*, trans. Arthur Knodel and Ingolf Dahl (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 185.

¹⁴ Kandinsky 1913 (see note 5), p. 360.

¹⁵ Gülru Necipoğlu, “The Scrutinizing Gaze in the Aesthetics of Islamic Visual Cultures: Sight, Insight, and Desire,” *Muqarnas* 32 (2015), p. 33. Necipoğlu’s scintillating article can be read as a hermeneutic to the context and meaning of Boullata’s work.

¹⁶ See Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Christmas in the Qur’ān: The Qur’ānic Account of Jesus’ Nativity and Palestinian Local Tradition,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003), pp. 11–39.

¹⁷ From Sura 4:171; English trans. of the inscription in *Classical Islam: A Source Book of Religious Literature*, ed. Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, rev. 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 136.

¹⁸ Rina Avner, “The Dome of the Rock in the Light of the Development of Concentric Martyria in Jerusalem: Architecture and Architectural Iconography,” *Muqarnas* 27 (2010), pp. 31–49.

¹⁹ Boullata 2010 (see note 2), pp. 313–14.

²⁰ Kandinsky 1913 (see note 5), p. 363.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

²² Edouard Roditi, *Dialogues: Conversations with European Artists at Mid-Century* (London: Lund Humphries, 1990), p. 117. In the interview, Roditi vainly attempts to elicit from Münster’s memory links between Kandinsky, Bakst, and Russian interest in the canvas as stage setting, themes that link up, especially through the person of Diaghilev, with my focus here on contemporary Russian interest in the icon and the “Gesamtkunstwerk.”

²³ On Kandinsky’s supposed “Islamophilia,” see Roger Benjamin with Christina Maria Ashjian, *Kandinsky and Klee in Tunisia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), pp. 42–47. Kandinsky made seven intricate drawings of the “Belvedere Midah,” on which note Ashjian’s observation: “ironically [Kandinsky’s] subjects were actually follies, structures removed from their original contexts and the reconstructed in the Belvedere Park by French urban planners.” *Kandinsky and Klee in Tunisia* presents a stimulating juxtaposition of photographs, postcards, drawings, and paintings to illustrate the places where Kandinsky worked during his travels in Tunisia with Gabriele Münster.

²⁴ Kandinsky, “Letter from Munich V,” in *Apollon* (October–November 1910), English trans. in Lindsay and Vergo 1982 (see note 5), pp. 73–76.

²⁵ Peg Weis, *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 1–32, note especially fig. 11, Kandinsky’s watercolor and graphite sketch, *The Blessing of the Bread*, depicting a domestic icon corner with a lamp, and also fig. 15, an icon of St. George from Kandinsky’s private collection. On Kandinsky’s icons, see Sokolova 2015 (see note 7), pp. 46–47.

²⁶ Kandinsky 1913 (see note 5), pp. 365, 368–39.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 369.

²⁸ Wassily Kandinsky, “Art Today,” in *Cahiers d’Art* (1935), English trans. in Lindsay and Vergo (1982), p. 766.

- ²⁹ Wassily Kandinsky, "On Understanding Art" (1912), English trans. *ibid.*, p. 290. On Kandinsky and the Orthodox intellectual milieu of early twentieth-century Russia, see Noemi Smolik, "Modernism's Prophet or Its Adversary?: Kandinsky's Journey from the Russian Provinces to the Bavarian Art Metropolis," in *Vasily Kandinsky*, ed. Helmet Friedel and Annegret Hoberg (2008; English trans. Munich, 2016), pp. 30–53; and Sokolova 2015 (see note 7).
- ³⁰ Anne Baldassari, "Gauguin: The Great Iconostasis," in *Icons of Modern Art: The Shchukin Collection*, ed. Anne Baldassari, exh. cat. Fondation Louis Vuitton (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2016), p. 219.
- ³¹ "Travel Diary of Sergei Ivanovich Shchukin in the Sinai (excerpts) October–November 1907," English trans. J. Lee, in exh. cat. Paris 2016 (see note 30), p. 103.
- ³² In *Rannieie Utro* [Early morning], October 26, 1911; English trans. Andrew Bromfield in the chapter "The Russian Press on Matisse's Visit," in Albert Kostenevich and Natalja Semyonova, *Collecting Matisse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), p. 47.
- ³³ In *Protiv Tsecheniya* [Against the current], November 1–18, 1911; English trans. in Bromfield 1993 (see note 33), p. 52. Dominique Fourcade and Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, eds., *Henri Matisse 1904–1917* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1993) is a well-illustrated exposition of his life and work in this vital period of interest in icons and Islamic work.
- ³⁴ Sokolova 2015 (see note 7), pp. 40–41. The Kandinsky-Florensky proximity was paralleled with Klee, who was Kandinsky's neighbor as well as colleague in three cities—Munich, Weimar, and Dessau: Kandinsky, "Tribute to Klee" [1931], English trans. in Lindsay and Vergo 1982 (see note 5), pp. 752–54. Interactions between the art world and the Russian Religious Renaissance is a vibrant area of research, particularly concerning the influence of Vladimir Solovyov on Kandinsky, Florensky, and Bulgakov, see esp. Smolik 2016 (see note 29), pp. 30–53; Douglas M. Greenfield, "Florensky and the Binocular Body," in *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity*, ed. Jefferson J. A. Gatrall and Douglas M. Greenfield (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2010), pp. 191–209; and the works cited in the following note.
- ³⁵ Florensky's work was challenging and controversial, and in many cases published long after publicly expounded. My brief comments are much indebted to Nicoletta Misler's introductory chapters to her collection of Florensky's writings on art, *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art* (London: Reaction, 2002), pp. 13–99; as well as Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (London: SPCK, 2015), pp. 27–41; Sokolova 2015 (see note 7); Lock 2011 (see note 3); Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius* (New York: Continuum, 2010); and Greenfield 2010 (see note 34).
- ³⁶ Greenfield 2010 (see note 34), p. 195.
- ³⁷ Florensky, "Reverse Perspective," in Florensky 2002 (see note 35), p. 204 (Florensky's typographic emphases). Note that on the published page, both Florensky and Kandinsky emphasize certain words and phrases typographically, such as by underlining or using italics. See the comments in Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, "Preface and Acknowledgments," in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art 2*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (London, 1982); and the "Translator's Note" to Florensky 2002 (see note 35).
- ³⁸ Oleg Tarassov, "Russian Icons and the Avant-Garde: Tradition and Change," in *The Art of Holy Russia: Icons from Moscow 1400–1660*, ed. Robin Cormack and Delia Gaze, exh. cat. Royal Academy of Arts; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1998), p. 93.
- ³⁹ Florensky, "Reverse Perspective," in Florensky 2002 (see note 35), p. 264.
- ⁴⁰ Necipoğlu 2015 (see note 15), esp. pp. 36–40.
- ⁴¹ Greenfield 2010 (see note 34), p. 195.
- ⁴² Kandinsky letter quoted in Smolik 2016 (see note 29), p. 30.
- ⁴³ Kandinsky 1913 (see note 5), p. 379.
- ⁴⁴ Sister Gabriela, *Seeking Perfection in the World of Art: The Artistic Path of Father Sophrony* (Essex: Tolleshunt Knights, 2014), p. 169.
- ⁴⁵ José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought: From Pre-Islamic Arabia through al-Andalus*, trans. Consuelo López-Morillas (Leiden: Boston Brill, 2017), pp. 820–21 on the mediating role of the archangel Gabriel in both Christianity and Islam could stand in as an illuminating commentary on *Angelus*.
- ⁴⁶ Boullata 2009 (see note 2), p. 329.
- ⁴⁷ Kandinsky 1913 (see note 5), p. 382.
- ⁴⁸ Cited and discussed in Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson, "Introduction," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010), pp. 15–16.
- ⁴⁹ Finbarr Barry Flood, "Flaw in the Carpet: Disjunctive Continuities and Riegl's Arabesque," in *Histories of Ornament: From Global to Local*, ed. Gülru Necipoğlu and Alina Payne (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), esp. pp. 84–86.
- ⁵⁰ Boullata 2009 (see note 2), p. 120; on *Caliph 'Umar at Jerusalem Gate*, see pp. 113–116.
- ⁵¹ See José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, "Chromatic Geometries of Light," [repr. in this volume](#), on Boullata's engagement with Ibn al-Haytham's aesthetic theories; and now Vilchez 2017 (see note 45), pp. 701–37, esp. p. 721 on the aesthetic concepts of similarity and dissimilarity, and pp. 730–31 on transparency.

⁵² Necipoğlu 2015 (see note 15), p. 40.

⁵³ Puerta Vilchez 2017 (see note 45), pp. 35–44.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 34–35, 45–46, 79–81.

⁵⁵ See the commentary on the Song of Songs 1.2.14–15, in Origen, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des cantiques*, vol. 1, *Texte de la version latine de Rufin, Sources Chrétiennes* 375, introd., trans., and annotated by Luc Brésard and Henri Crouzel (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991), pp. 198–201.

⁵⁶ Boullata 2009 (see note 2), p. 334.

⁵⁷ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (Moscow: Put', 1914), p. 117; see the discussion of Florensky's thought by Louth 2015 (see note 35), pp. 27–41.

⁵⁸ Greenfield 2010 (see note 36), p. 206 quotes from Florensky's 1904 essay; see his discussion on pp. 204–07.

⁵⁹ John Berger, "The White Bird," in *The White Bird: Writings* [1985], reprinted in Berger 2001 (see note 1), p. 364.