

Art306

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Nadia Waheed, *Nirvana*, 2019, Arsenal Contemporary Art New York

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/nadia-waheed-nirvana-1>

According to her artist statement, Nadia Waheed is an Austin, Texas based Pakistani artist who utilizes her work to illustrate the many facets of womanhood. In her most recent works she explores how spiritual ideas and icons may represent some challenging themes of womanhood. In her 2019 painting, “Nirvana”(pictured above), Waheed continues to dissect the nature of womanhood through using the perspective of Buddhist and Islamic culture. Similar to the Islamic and Buddhist works we looked at in class, specifically “Book of Kings” and “The Blue Qur’an, the aniconic elements of this painting hold similar spiritual significance through the use of color and ornamentation. While I’m unsure of the significance of some elements of the painting, in particular the orange branch, some elements

are commonly recognized as being significant in eastern religions. For example, the henna covered hands represent the Indian and Middle eastern tradition of wishing good fortune and luck typically before marriage. While that element may be obvious, the use of colors may be less symbolically recognized. According to eastern culture, the colors of the figure's veil and skin imply that she may have a divine nature or imply that she has balance and harmony according to Buddhist culture. Another element of this painting that resembles most of the aniconic Islamic art we examined in lecture is the use of script to represent spiritual significance or deities. In this painting the word "aisha" meaning " she who lives" is written over her veil. As we've seen in class, Islamic artists used script to represent Allah or Muhammed, however in this piece of art I believe the script is used more as a decorative ornamentation than an aniconic element representing a deity. While this work continues to emphasize the religious motifs and elements of ancient Eastern religious art, it also emphasizes more modern western artistic elements such as the realistic portrait and overall composition by using the rule of thirds.