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Review of the Opening of an Exhibition of Works by Nadia Issa, Entitled *Ruah*

Warsaw Islamic Centre,
20th July, 2016

In the second half of July 2016, the capital celebrated a kind of artistic holiday at the crossroads of civilisations and cultures, a ceremony involving art, philosophy, and a distinctive religious context, interlaced with beautiful sensual ornamentation, which took place during the opening of an exhibition by Nadia Issa, a Polish artist of the younger generation.

Issa, a well-known artist in Warsaw, works in the field of the art of light and photography. Her work is distinguished by feminine, sensual aesthetics, discretion and elusiveness, which we perceive, for example, in her photographic work, and at the same time by a surprisingly profound exploration of the issue of the existence of hermetic and orthodox cultures, an example of which is her work on the borderline between sculpture and the art of light.

The artist deals with the relationship between cultures, but she does so in a particular way. Issa indeed poses the question of the potential for dialogue between Islam, Judaism and Christianity – she does this directly in the catalogue of her work – but, in contrast to the current reigning trend, she does not offer an unequivocally positive answer to this question. Rather, in Nadia Issa's works we see a growing cultural context, successive layers

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of differences. However, these works do not rely on a comparison of these cultures; that is left to the viewer. Instead, Issa shows the Religions of the Holy Book as separated worlds, closed languages and systems of meanings and identities. The artist asks not about our need for dialogue (which, after all, consists of opening oneself to another person), but about the potential for discussion (which is subject to the principles of understanding and strives for the truth).¹ This, among other reasons, is why I define the art of Nadia Issa as philosophical, not religious, art. The artist explores the ontology of identity, in other words, the construction of identity, that which it is created from, and that which is contained in its essence: symbols, meaning, language, values...

As viewers of this exhibition, we can discuss the components and aesthetic values of Issa's works – which are without doubt beautiful, artistic, and meticulous. This, however, is not the essence of her art. Let us go further, then, and speak of an individual – no part of the shallow and nondescript masses, but a true believer. Such an individual recognises the meaning and symbolism of these works of art. Thus we ask: do we really understand each other when we talk about Islamic incense (*Bakhoor*)? What do we see and understand when looking at *Dreidel*? And finally – although this may seem obvious – what symbolic content is evoked by *Klepsydra*, presented in a Christian context?

The exhibition was presented with the help of the Director of the Warsaw Islamic Centre, Jabbar Koubaisy. The promoter of the exhibition, Professor Włodzimierz Szymański, took part as a speaker, as did the promoter of the annex to the work, Dr hab. Mariusz Wideryński.

¹ This distinction derives from: J. Krupiński, *Lekcja z podstaw prowadzenia sporów intelektualnych* [A lesson on the basics of the conduct of intellectual disputes], "Wiadomości ASP" 2016, nr 74, pp. 49–59.



Fig. 1. N. Issa, *Dreidel*, 2015, spatial object



Fig. 2. N. Issa, *Aneks [Annex]*, 2016, cinematograph (rabbi)



Fig. 3. N. Issa, *Bakhoor*, 2016, spatial object



Fig. 4. N. Issa, *Aneks [Annex]*, 2016, cinematograph (imam)



Fig. 5. N. Issa, *Klepsydra* [Hourglass], 2016, spatial object



Fig. 6. N. Issa, *Aneks* [Annex], 2016, cinematograph (archimandrite)

