

# **Modulations of Light: Umayyad Grilles from the National Museum in Damascus**

**by Saïd Nuseibeh**

SFO Terminal 2, D-5 Central S Connect  
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*“They are the fulcrums about which I measure the seminal influence of the Umayyad aesthetic endeavors. The grilles concentrate diverse influences into a small package that have great cultural and visual resonance—dynamically modifying how we see the world outside while structurally changing how the rest of the world looks inside. Developing these images gives me the opportunity to again experience the excitement and transformational power of light.”*

-Saïd Nuseibeh

In 2005, a Fulbright Scholarship enabled photographer Saïd Nuseibeh the opportunity to create new photographs of historic Arab and Islamic architecture. Nuseibeh’s project was to document and illuminate the Umayyad aesthetic legacy in the Levant. The Umayyads were the first Muslim dynasty to succeed The Righteous Caliphs, governing from 661–750 CE. From their seat in Damascus, the Umayyads ruled an empire that extended from the Atlantic Ocean to China.

The Umayyads bridged Persian or Sassanian traditions into the existing Byzantine (i.e., Hellenic) architectural landscape. This fusion of Arab, Byzantine, and Sassanian traditions was a hallmark of the nascent Islamic civilization. They inaugurated a novel aesthetic program, which included the design and construction of the *Qubbat al-Sakhra* (Dome of the Rock) in Jerusalem.

The grilles in Nuseibeh’s photographs originally decorated the *Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi*, an Umayyad palace found in the Syrian desert. Built in 727 CE on the road between Damascus and Palmyra, the palace was a country abode for the Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik. The grilles were rescued from the ruins of the Umayyad palace in 1939 and installed in the National Museum in Damascus.

Photography is not permitted.

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**1 Introjection 2005**

Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.001

**2 Confabulation 2005**

Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.002

**3 Conjection 2005**

Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.003

**4 Rotation 2005**

Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.004

**5 Palpitation 2005**

Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.005

**6 Suggestion 2005**

Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.006

7     **Isolation** 2005  
Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.007

8     **Rotation** 2005  
Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.008

9     **Integration** 2005  
Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.009

10    **Projection** 2005  
Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.010

11    **Reflexion** 2005  
Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.011

12    **Admission** 2005  
Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957)  
San Francisco born, Palestinian-American  
gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of the Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco  
L2007.3101.012