



## A communication protocol

Motivated by curiosity, we have made the search for the other perspective of phenomena and events into the style of the CCCB. This is the reason why we wanted to see the West from the Islamic East and show how we Westerners –and Europeans in particular– have been seen, and continue to be seen, from these cultural spheres which the predominant power and ideology seem to want to make into our otherness. Or, worse still, into “the other” against whom we have to reconstruct an “us” which some find too fragile.

The initial conclusion drawn from this exercise was that we are of little importance to them; that, historically, they have taken less notice of the Europeans than the Europeans have of them. While Orientalism is a cultural tradition in the West, and –as we showed in the exhibition *Fantasies of the Harem and the New Scheherazades*– museums have an overabundance of works –replete with exoticism and fascination– about the Arab world and the Islamic world in general, the West is a rare object in the creativity of these cultures. This is why one of the things we did in the preparative stages of this exhibition, was to invite a number of artists from these countries to try to do what, traditionally, they have not done: to give their view of the West. And I do not know if the resulting works will herald a new tradition, but, in any case, they are an important part of this exhibition, works that cannot be avoided if we really want to know something more about them, and about ourselves too.

The exhibition brings us to a question: Why has a subject been of such great importance to the West but of such little importance to the East? Of course, we can find many explanations of a sociological nature and in political psychology. Colonial cultures have a desire to possess –without letting themselves be contaminated– the occupied cultures. Nevertheless, the witnesses that there are, the exercises in the Eastern gaze onto the West that exist, allow us to ascertain that there is a complex relationship made up of love and hate, of fascination and irritation, of emulation and rejection, which is what we have endeavoured to express in the exhibition. And we must not let ourselves be confused by the great noise triggered by the war of images in the world of the contemporary media. We often cannot see the woods for the trees. And this is one such case: the traces of humiliation are great and have sparked off terrible responses, but there is a common branch that, to a certain extent, never becomes fully detached. And, in the exhibition, there are many signals, many milestones in this proximity that often goes unnoticed, beneath major confrontations.

It was no easy task to find a discourse that would give a structure and meaning to this set of images in which epochs often become blurred and themes recur. This is why we turned to one of the researchers who has studied in greatest depth the cultural relationships between the West and the Arab world: the professor of comparative literature Abdelwahab Meddeb, who views things from the perspective of his origins and, at the same time, a knowledge of the Western world acquired through his professional experience. His work has made it possible to tie up the loose ends between past and present, making the story into a true fabric over which it is possible to think and rethink cultural and imaginary relationships between cultural universes which, once again, encounter one another in a



Prologues by Josep Ramoneda to the CCCB's catalogues

peaceful way on European soil and in an atmosphere of tension in the conflict zone of the Near East. If the exhibition manages to achieve the abandonment of some doctrinaire certainties, those which make it impossible to look the other in the face, we can feel satisfied. In any case, *The West Seen from the East* only seeks to be a communication protocol which will help outline shared territories in which it is possible to agree on the meaning of words and things. Namely, to talk to one another.