In the twenty-first century, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have used oil wealth to fund the construction of an array of museums designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects to house global collections of art. This denotes a marked shift in the Gulf’s urban development that focuses on arts infrastructure and coincides with national rebranding efforts. While superficially similar, the museological endeavors in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are driven by distinct motivations. An analysis of the architectural vocabularies and urban characteristics of the museological development in Doha and Abu Dhabi reveal significant differences in the two ventures, challenging the traditional narrative that sees both nations following identical trajectories.

CURRENT APPROACHES
Critics and journalists commenting on the museological endeavors in Doha and Abu Dhabi largely fixate on the confluence of Western professionals and Gulf petrodollars. The result is an Orientalist approach that tends to portray the Gulf as a region devoid of material heritage and dismisses the museums as superficial products of Arab wealth, constructed for global show. Public and academic discourse conflates the cultural projects of the Gulf, neglecting the distinctive qualities of Doha and Abu Dhabi’s initiatives.

Proposed Corrective
In an effort to challenge scholarship that positions museological developments in Qatar and Abu Dhabi as identical exploitations of petrodollars and cultural commodities, my research exposes the cultural projects of both Gulf States are revealed as markedly different. For Abu Dhabi, the museums on Saadiyat Island reveal a practice directed at tourist outreach. These close-readings, which employ the skills I have developed as a History of Art major, allow for a discussion that reaches beyond the focus on the superficiality of oil-supported museums and galleries to enliven urban spaces throughout Doha. And yet, these practices are as identical exploitations of petrodollars and cultural commodities, my research exposes the shared interest in engaging landscapes, the place-making endeavors of both Gulf States are revealed as markedly different.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODS
My research takes seriously the cultural claims of Doha and Abu Dhabi’s museums by investigating and comparing the architecture, urban topography, and publications of both. I aim to understand both shared and more distinctive aspects of each city’s cultural development in the twenty-first century. I explore the extent to which Qatari and Emirati cultural institutions engage with their immediate settings and their proximity to the city center. I compiled maps of both cities to visualize this data. I analyzed the language, presentation, and target audience of outreach efforts by analyzing publications released by Gulf museums and considered them in relationship to the social media activities of each institution. I sought historical and cross-cultural comparisons for Doha and Abu Dhabi’s projects.

FUTURE RESEARCH
Gulf museums are still in development. Thus, it is difficult to characterize the nature of each project in its entirety at this stage, or to claim that the tendencies observed will continue through to the completion of Qatari and Emirati museums. A component that is absent from my research is an investigation into the collecting and display practices of each institution. Through this analysis, I will seek to understand the extent to which museums in Doha and Abu Dhabi reveal a practice directed at tourist outreach. These characteristics suggest a shared interest in engaging landscapes, the place-making endeavors of both Gulf States are revealed as markedly different.

RETHINKING GULF MUSEOLOGY
IDENTITY AND MUSEUMS IN DOHA AND ABU DHABI
John Durvsik, History of Art and Museums & Society | Advisor: Dr. Jennifer P. Kingsley, Program in Museums & Society

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ABSTRACT
In the twenty-first century, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have used oil wealth to fund the construction of an array of museums designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects to house global collections of art. This denotes a marked shift in the Gulf’s urban development that focuses on arts infrastructure and coincides with national rebranding efforts. While superficially similar, the museological endeavors in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are driven by distinct motivations. An analysis of the architectural vocabularies and urban characteristics of the museological development in Doha and Abu Dhabi reveal significant differences in the two ventures, challenging the traditional narrative that sees both nations following identical trajectories.

CASE STUDY ONE | ARCHITECTURE
I began my research with an exploration of the architectural vocabularies of the major museums in the Gulf—the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) and the National Museum of Qatar (MNQ) in Doha and the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Sheikh Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi. These explorations revealed many similarities between the projects in Doha and Abu Dhabi—the commissioning of Western Pritzker Prize-winning architects and the construction of buildings that house a universalist, modern vocabulary with identifiably Arab tropes. These characteristics suggest a shared interest in engaging with a global audience through the construction of monumental architectural structures. And yet, a subsequent analysis of the exhibition and working spaces of Qatar Museums challenges this reading. For example, Jean Nouvel’s references the desert rose—crystalline clusters found throughout the Gulf—through the disc-like planes of the National Museum. And yet, this modernist structure encases the twentieth century palace of the Al Thani family, denoting a museological practice that balances new construction with the presentation of the city’s architectural heritage. In the UAE, the current state of Saadiyat Island denotes an antithetical response. Museums are built in new, undeveloped zones, creating museological monuments that exist outside of Abu Dhabi’s architectural history.

CASE STUDY TWO | MAPPING
The analysis of architectural parterns and practices led me to the hypothesis that Qatar has an inward cultural focus, integrating existing structures and areas with new arts institutions, while the United Arab Emirates’ agenda is more internationally directed, overlaying vacant spaces with new museums that bear little relationship to the existing city. To confirm this, I investigated how the placement and development of each city’s museums relate to Doha and Abu Dhabi’s urban topography. I created a map of the cultural institutions within the two cities. In Doha, museums, galleries, and arts’ residences are positioned throughout the city, creating an urban fabric in which cultural institutions are woven among difference spaces and audiences. In Abu Dhabi, museums and galleries are concentrated in Saadiyat Island’s Cultural District—an entertainment hub, removed from the city’s lived-in zones, which principally accommodates the needs of visitors to the UAE. Mapping thus strengthens the inferences that emerged from the architectural analysis, positioning Qatar as more locally focused while the United Arab Emirates targets a more international audience.

CONCLUSION
Through the architectural and topographical analysis of Doha and Abu Dhabi’s museological landscapes, the contrasting endeavors of both Gulf States are revealed as markedly different. Contrary to scholarship that positions the museums of Doha and Saadiyat Island as identical exploitations of petrodollars and cultural commodities, my research exposes the architecturally distinctive practice of each region.

FUTURE RESEARCH
Gulf museums are still in development. Thus, it is difficult to characterize the nature of each project in its entirety at this stage, or to claim that the tendencies observed will continue through to the completion of Qatari and Emirati museums. A component that is absent from my research is an investigation into the collecting and display practices of each institution. Once the museums in Doha and Abu Dhabi are complete, it will be of interest to see how objects are displayed and what narratives are presented and obscured. Furthermore, I have relied heavily upon architectural mock-ups and models for my visual analysis. Due to recent political and economic events, Gulf States have significantly decreased oil revenues. It will be pertinent to note whether these changes affect the form of museums, the number of realizations and the shape of collections.