

SYNOPSIS OF THE CAT VANDAL
(a comic drama in one act; ninety minutes)

TIME: the present

PLACE: New York City: A stylized set represents a storeroom, courtroom, art gallery, infirmary, and various offices, apartments, and conference rooms.

CHARACTERS: (an ensemble of two men and six women)

DOCTOR MIRANDA BIRMAN, a behavioral neurologist; early thirties

OMAR FAISAL AL-FAHD, a Syrian born archaeologist; late twenties

JUDGE LENORE STERLING, a federal court justice; forties

VICTOR MINSKIN, Omar's defense attorney; mid-thirties

CONSTANCE CORNISH, the prosecuting attorney; late thirties

YVONNE CHARTREUX, a French born gallerist; forties

YVETTE CHARTREUX, Yvonne's sister, an artist; thirties

DOCTOR STEPHEN SELKIRK, a pediatrician; late-thirties

ALYSSA ANN GEOFFROY, a graduate art student; mid-twenties

ALBINE, a feline phantom with a cat's head and woman's body

ALBERTINE, a feline phantom with a cat's head and woman's body

COURT CLERK, PARAMEDICS, NURSES

PLOT SYNOPSIS:

Before losing everything that matters in her life, Doctor Miranda Birman is called to testify for the prosecution at the trial of Omar al-Fahd, a Syrian born jihadist who has slashed and hammered priceless works of art. He is apprehended in New York at Le Chat Noir Gallery which specialized in paintings and sculptures of cats. Omar, a devout fundamentalist Sunni, believes it is blasphemous to create art resembling humans or animals since artists are usurping the powers of Allah, capturing their subjects' souls while condemning their own to perdition. Omar's attorney has entered a plea of insanity since Omar believes he is possessed by the spirit of a cat that once dwelled inside a statue he destroyed. Witnessing the trial, Miranda's curiosity is roused, so she visits Le Chat Noir Gallery which is owned by two French sisters who worship the Egyptian cat goddess, Bastet. Miranda and her fiancé, Stephen, are both nonreligious physicians, but as Miranda leaves the gallery, she is followed by two cat spirits that conspire to jeopardize their relationship as well as Miranda's career, her reputation, and sanity. After Omar is sentenced and confined, he questions his radicalism and becomes an artist himself, while Miranda checks into Bellevue Hospital desperately hoping to expunge the spirits and regain her former stability.

THEMES: *The Cat Vandal* tells a story of conflicting cultures, science versus religion, but is also a metaphysical mystery. The play was inspired by the Taliban's destruction of the giant Buddha statues in Afghanistan, and the metaphysical assumptions of a hadith of the Quran that reads: "Beware the Day of Resurrection: the most tormented sinners will be the painters of pictures of living creatures. Souls that were breathed into every picture shall be freed, and the painters punished in the fires of hell."

