Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists
Recent Titles in
Artists of the American Mosaic

Encyclopedia of Jewish American Artists
_Samantha Baskind_

Encyclopedia of Asian American Artists
_Kara Kelley Hallmark_
I dedicate this book to my dear Mother and Father, Rahija and Saleh Oweis, with love and appreciation for all that they gave us...

I also dedicate this book to all Arab American artists; I have learned a great deal from you and grown from your wisdom and contributions.

Fayeq S. Oweis
San Francisco, California
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Introduction

I believe in you, and I believe in your destiny.
I believe that you are contributors to this new civilization.
I believe that you have inherited from your forefathers an ancient dream, a song, a prophecy, which you can proudly lay as a gift of gratitude upon the lap of America.

These are the words of Arab American poet, philosopher, and visual artist, Gibran Khalil (Kahlil) Gibran, which he wrote to early Arab immigrants about a century ago (Gibran, “I Believe”). These words reflect what Arab American artists, including those profiled in this book, have used as a guiding force in their contribution to the American art scene and how their connection to a rich culture and heritage played a major role in such contributions.

This book, Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists, presents an overview of the lives and works of about 100 Arab American visual artists. Organized alphabetically, the entries provide information on the lives of the artists, their education, their artwork, bibliographical data for further reading, and information on places where one can see their artwork. Each one of these artists has made, and most of them are still making, significant and substantial contributions to the art scene in the United States and internationally. The majority of the artists have exhibited their work in major museums and galleries around the world, many of them have won awards, and some of them did not have the opportunity to exhibit their work.

The intention of the book is to provide basic information about each artist and to inspire readers to seek more information. My hope is that this book will provide a window into the lives of Arab Americans in general and the lives and contributions of Arab American visual artists in particular, with the aim of educating the readers about issues and challenges facing people of Arab heritage. I also hope that this book will encourage further studies of Arab American visual artists and the contributions they have made to the world, including the American art scene. While this book focuses on visual artists, there are numerous artists of Arab descent working in performing arts, media arts, and literary arts.
Due to the lack of scholarship on Arab American artists, most of the research for this book came from a limited number of books. The majority of the information came from exhibition catalogues, reviews, newspaper articles, and directly from personal communications with the artists themselves. The Internet and artists’ Web sites provided valuable information. Additionally, a number of monographs of few artists’ work were published recently. Over the past two years, and since I started working on this book, I had the chance to attend several exhibitions and to view the work of many artists. I also visited a few artists in their studios and had the chance to interview them in person. Many organizations and individuals helped me in identifying artists and encouraged me to include artists whom I did not know about.

Arab immigration to the United States started in the late 1800s, and aside from Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931), there are very few records of artists among early Arab immigrants (Ameri, 235). Estimated at about 6 million people, the Arab American community is one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States. The community is a diverse group made up of many ethnicities and religious affiliations. The artists profiled in this book come from diverse backgrounds and sometimes vary on how they identify themselves. These artists trace their heritage to one or more of the 22 Arab countries that make up the Arab League. The Arab world is very diverse in regard to race and religion, but is united in its culture, language, and heritage. Most of the artists in this book prefer to identify themselves as Arab Americans, but sometimes they also identify themselves by their individual heritage or country of ancestry, combined with “American”; such as Lebanese Americans, Palestinian Americans, Egyptian Americans, Iraqi Americans, and so on. Some of the artists may also identify themselves by only their individual heritage or country of ancestry. Several artists cross identity borders and may identify themselves with people of color such as African Americans, Latinos; others identify themselves based on faith and spirituality. Non-Arab ethnic groups such as Chaldeans, Assyrians, Kurds, Berbers, and Armenians may also identify themselves with Arab culture. It was not until 1989 that the United States government started to officially recognize the contributions of the Arab American community. In proclaiming October 25, 1989, as a National Arab American Day, President George Bush (41st president: 1988-1992) stated that “The works of many talented Arab American artists and writers grace our museums and libraries throughout the United States” (Woolley, online).

Arab American artists belong to two categories. The first one includes artists who are first, second, or third generation Americans of Arab descent and received their art training mostly in the United States. The second category includes artists who immigrated to the United States with some artistic training from the Arab world. With this diversity, the artists share a common heritage and a culture presented in the contents and the form of their artwork. These artists draw their inspirations from a wide range of artistic schools and styles. They draw on Western schools, art and history of ancient cultures and civilizations, and on Islamic art and architecture. Due to the problematic labeling and identity, the art produced by Arab American artists can fit into a category called “Art of Arab Diaspora.” Salwa Mikdadi lists a number of
problematic and misleading categorizations used by others when describing the work of Arab American artists. She writes:

Descriptions of contemporary Arab American artistic production often employ such affiliate categories as “Muslim” art or “Arab” art, or geographic categories such as “Middle Eastern” art, “Near Eastern” art, or art of “Western Asia.” These groupings are misleading in their generality. (In/Visible, 13)

The profiles in this book are not just biographical; they also highlight the many issues that influenced, inspired, and informed the artists’ work. These include politics, language, culture, identity, economics, and many other issues. The profiles also give an accurate picture of the artists’ culture and heritage and provide a portal into the rich culture of the Arab world. Descriptions of important works by the artists are included in the profiles to help the reader visualize the work and the issues behind them. I have also included quotations by the artists themselves, and have described their styles, techniques, and their specialties. A photo essay that includes a diverse selection of the work of several artists is also included in the book to give the reader a visual presentation of the work produced by Arab American artists. When artists who are the subject of an entry are mentioned in other profiles, their names are listed in bold print.

Arab American artists are exploring political, social, and cultural issues. When asked about the major issues that Arab American artists are dealing with, Anan Ameri, Director of the Arab American National Museum, offered this response:

An important issue for many Arab American artists is the issue of identity, discrimination, and stereotyping of Arab Americans especially after 9/11. Then there is the issue of belonging to two worlds that seem to be in conflict. (Miller, fpif.org)

On the political front, Arab American artists explore many issues, including wars and conflicts in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and Sudan. When Palestine is the subject of the artist, more challenges arise in displaying the work or finding a mainstream venue. A number of exhibits were cancelled or denied because of this issue. Arab American artists also explore social justice issues, including immigration, displacement, diaspora, exile, freedom of expression, human rights, women’s issues, racism, and discrimination. The theme of exile is common in the work of many artists. Some of the artists’ work and contributions are reflections of what Edward Said once wrote: “Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, emigres, refugees” (173). The exploration of the hybrid identity of Arab American Artists as shown in their art is also a reflection of what Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish wrote bidding farewell to Edward Said: “I am from there, I am from here” (“Edward”).

In this book, I have attempted to represent a cross-section of Arab American artists from varying backgrounds and artistic styles and mediums. I have also attempted to work toward a balance in gender, geographical area, and even sexual orientation. Some of the artists are natives and some are immigrants.
Over 50 percent of artists profiled are female, which is a realistic percentage of Arab Americans in the arts, but does not necessarily represent the female role in the art scene in the Arab world, where the majority of artists are male. I have also included a number of artists who are openly homosexual to add diversity to my selections of artists. Cultural links to some Arab countries, such as the Gulf States, are not represented in the book, and that is due to the makeup of the population and heritage of the Arab American community and is not due to the lack of artists in those countries.

The attachment to the homeland, the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, and the cultural, artistic, and social links to the Arab world, have shaped the identity of many Arab American artists. Amaney Jamal of Princeton University offers additional dimension that continues to shape this identity:

The long history of political conflicts in the Arab world has played an equally significant role in structuring Arab American identity. The politically contentious realities of the Middle East—from multiple US involvements in the region, the Arab-Israeli conflict, to the newly constructed War on Terror—are all at the heart of Arab and Arab American identity. (2)

Arabs and Arab Americans have been the subject of negative stereotyping for decades, especially in the American media. Since the tragic events of 9/11, Arab Americans have become the target of hate crimes, illegal detention, deportation, and discrimination. In his award-winning book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Interlink Publishing, 2001), Jack Shaheen offered a description and documentation of over 900 Western films that presented offensive stereotypes of Arabs. The work of many Arab American artists challenges such negative stereotyping and offers alternatives by focusing on the rich Arab culture and heritage, including memories of parents and ancestors, folk stories, and reflections on their visits to the ancestors’ homeland.

The majority of artists in this book are contemporary and living artists who forged their own unique vision and style. The styles of the artists range from the traditional arts of painting, sculpture, and calligraphy, to the modern art forms of digital, conceptual, installation, and media art. Some of the artists are professional, renowned, and well-known artists, while some are students, emerging artists, or have not been recognized or given the opportunity to display their work in major venues. On the factors that contributed to the misunderstanding and unrecognizing the arts of many Arab American artists, Neery Melkonian wrote:

... the arts of thousands of Middle Easterners, who during the past several decades have had to relocate to various parts of the world, remain largely unrecognized or misunderstood. Factors such as reductivist perceptions of multi-culturalism, as well as overt and covert discrimination which Middle Easterners experience throughout Europe and the United States, have contributed to marginalization and the silencing of their voices (*Al Jadid*).
The establishment of many organizations (see “Resources”) that support Arab American artists and promote Arab culture in the United States in the past two decades is very encouraging and promising. In the past decade, more museums, galleries, and exhibitions have focused on Arab American artists. The Arab American National Museum (AANM), which was founded in 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, provides a space for Arab American artists and has been organizing DIWAN: A Forum for the Arts, a symposium that generates dialogue among Arab American artists and documents the contributions of Arab Americans in performing, visual, and media arts. The proceedings of the first DIWAN are included in a new publication edited by Anan Ameri and Holly Arida, *Etching Our Own Image: Voices from Within the Arab American Art Movement* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007). The Jerusalem Fund Gallery in Washington, D.C., has also been very active in presenting the work of Arab American artists. The study of Arab Americans as an ethnic group has also been the focus of establishing the Center for Arab American Studies at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, which was inaugurated with a national art exhibit curated by Hashim Al-Tawil in 2003. The College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University has recently established the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative, directed by Rabab Abdulhadi, to provide a place for scholarship focusing on Arab and Muslim Americans.

Writing about Arab American artists has been a pleasurable and a rewarding experience. As an Arab American artist myself, I see this book as an attempt at writing our own histories and creating our own narratives. The artists profiled in this book speak to us in a universal language that hopefully provides an educational opportunity for all of us to understand the way we look at the world in general and at Arab culture in particular. While the works represented in this book are rooted, in part, in Arab American culture, they also speak to audiences around the world about universal issues that are enlightening and educational.

**Resources**


Introduction

An internationally acclaimed poet, essayist, and painter, Etel Adnan was born in Beirut, Lebanon, to a Muslim Syrian father, a top officer in the Ottoman Empire, and a Greek mother from Smyrna. Adnan received her early education at private French Catholic schools in Beirut. She grew up speaking Greek, Turkish, and then French. As for Arabic, Adnan tried learning it from her father, but, as she said, “living in a school where Arabic was forbidden made me feel very alone and want to give it up” (Adnan, “To Write”). During World War II, she worked for the French Press Bureau in Beirut starting at the age of 16. In 1949, Adnan went to Paris to study philosophy at the Sorbonne. She came to the United States in 1955 and studied at the University of California in Berkeley, then went to Harvard University. She taught the history of philosophy and philosophy of art at Dominican College of San Rafael, California.

Adnan is the author of more than ten books of poetry and literature. Her novel on the Lebanese civil war, Sitt Marie Rose, published originally in French in 1978, has been translated into over ten languages. The novel is considered a classic of Middle Eastern literature. The English translation was published in 1982 and is continually used by academic institutions in courses dealing with literature, Middle East studies, and postcolonial literature.

During the Algerian revolution against French colonial rule, Adnan protested against the war by refusing to write in French (Mikdadi, 36). Expressing the conflict she faced in expressing herself in French, Adnan wrote: “I realized that I couldn’t write freely in a language that faced me with a deep conflict. I was disturbed in one fundamental realm of my life: the domain of meaningful self-expression.” (Adnan, “To Write”). Meeting and chatting with Ann O’Hanlon, the head of the Art Department at Dominican College, changed the course in which Adnan expressed herself in both poetry and visual arts. Adnan recalled the conversation and how it affected her:

…when I told her that one of the courses I was teaching was Philosophy of Art, she asked me if I was painting, and when I said “no,” she wondered how one dealt with the philosophy of a subject one did not practice, and my answer was, I remember clearly, that my mother had told me I was clumsy. She said: “And did you believe her?!” (Adnan, “To Write”).
Adnan also mentioned that the conversation with O’Hanlon instantaneously freed her hands and directed her attention and energies toward a new art form, which meant a new universe of interests. Adnan started painting and realized that painting was “a new language and a solution to my dilemma: I didn’t need to write in French anymore, I was going to paint in Arabic” (Adnan “To Write”).

In her artwork, Adnan combines calligraphy with modern visual languages in a diversity of media such as oil, ceramics, and tapestries. She is one of the first artists to use not classical Arab calligraphy but her own handwriting in writing and painting Arabic poems on Japanese-made accordion-like books (Mikdadi, 17). She brings together poetry and paintings done in pastels and ink to create a combined visual language of expression. On using “un-folding books” as a medium for her poetry writing and art, Adnan explains:

This experience transforms those visual, written words, and the paintings of which they are a part, into a kind of musical score that each person, including their maker, translates into his/her inner language, or languages, into that which we call the understanding. (“Notes”)

After starting with abstract art, Adnan turned her attention to painting a series of canvases inspired by Mount Tamalpais in Marin County, California. She painted the mountain from different perspectives, with different settings and colors. The paintings and drawings, in addition to her prose writings about her connection to the mountain, were published in a book Journey to Mount Tamalpais (1986). As Simone Fattal explains, the mountain was for Adnan “the ever-revealing mystery, the on-going manifestation” (95). Fattal also described the book as a meditation on the links between nature and art (95). In Journey to Mount Tamalpais, Adnan used poetry, philosophy, and visual art to bring to the foreground the linkage of different genres (Majaj, 19). Adnan wrote at the end of Journey:
In this unending universe Tamalpais is a miraculous thing, the miracle of matter itself: something we can single out, the pyramid of our own identity. We are, because it is stable and it is ever changing. Our identity is the series of the mountain’s becomings, our peace is its stubborn existence. (*Journey*, 63)

In another book, *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989), Adnan wrote a series of 59 poems in which she inserted hieroglyphic-like “signs” into the text, suggesting that “the words have become inadequate to express her intended meanings” (Seymour-Jorn, 37). The poems criticize colonial and neocolonial violence by using the sun as a basic metaphor. The opening poem starts with a series of short pronouncements evoking the sun: “A yellow sun—A green sun—A yellow sun—A red sun—A blue sun” (Adnan, “Arab,” 17). By inserting in the free verses little drawings or “signs,” Adnan confirms her philosophical view that art is another means of expression.


Adnan resigned from her teaching position at Dominican College in 1972 and devoted herself to art and writing. Having become a major Arab American writer, Adnan served as President of RAWI, (Radius of Arab American Writers), from 1996 to 2005. She has received many international awards for her art and poetry including the Lannan Distinguished Reader at Georgetown University (2004-2005). Adnan currently divides her time between Sausalito, California and Paris, France.

**Resources**


Web Sites and Places to See Adnan’s Work


Darat al Funun, Khalid Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan.


Galerie Claude Leman, Paris.

National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan.

The National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.


Yasser Aggour (b. 1972), Photographer and Digital Artist

Born in Newark, New Jersey, to Egyptian parents, Yasser Aggour is a photographer, digital media artist, art professor, and critic. He received two B.A. degrees, one in political theory (1994), and another one in fine arts (1995), both from the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 1997, Aggour obtained a Masters of Science degree in government and history from London School of Economics. Two years later, he obtained an MFA degree in sculpture from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Aggour’s diverse art, using photography and digital media, is playful and thought provoking. His work reflects his wide-ranging interests and background in economics and history. Aggour explores issues of identity, and the legacies of performance and conceptual art. Through combining western and eastern cultural references, Aggour’s work offers “direct critiques of globalization and societal taboos” (“In a Gesture”). As Momenta Art describes Aggour’s photographs and paintings, they provide a way of communicating an awareness of economic, cultural, and social transformation on a global scale, and undermining traditional representations of masculinity, race, sexuality, and cultural purity. (“Yasser”). Aggour describes his own work as having “a decidedly democratic and legible caste” (“Biography”). He also explains his intention for creating such work as having a “range of emotional seasons—pathos and pathology, humor and sobriety, anger and vulnerability” (“Biography”).
In addition to digitally and manually manipulating photography, Aggour also creates performance work that he later photographs as a single piece. He calls much of his performance work “misconformist.” In these performances, Aggour invents a range of characters that “desperately seek acceptance into the mainstream of society but due to physical gaucheness or social miscalculations are unable to assimilate” (Aggour, “Biography”). After he creates the shape of how that person will look, Aggour then lives or performs as that individual for a certain period of time. In one of these “misconformist” photographs, 48 Hour Bickle (2000), Aggour became Travis Bickle of the 1970s movie Taxi Driver. He lived this character for two days (Aggour “Biography”).

Aggour’s work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally, including at the following venues: Yale University Art Gallery (1999); the Brussels Video Forum in Belgium (1999); Centro Municipal de Exposiciones in Montevideo, Uruguay (1999); Andrew Kreps Gallery in New York (2000); Midway Initiative Gallery in St. Paul, Minnesota (2002); Cite des Arts in Paris (Residency projects, 2003); Art-in-General in New York (2004); and at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin (2005). Aggour was awarded a number of residencies, and he was one of three New York-based visual artists to be selected in 2002 out of 125 artists to participate in a special residency program in Paris to help mitigate the effects of the events of September 11 on New York’s artistic community. The program was initiated by the City of Paris, in collaboration with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and with the support of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York (“In a Gesture”).

In a series of photographs of his family, Aggour depicts himself and other members of the family in a distorted way, exploring the issues of identity, ethnicity, and sexuality. For example, in Tea Party: Family Portrait (1999/2002), Aggour addressed the issue of ethnic stereotypes in a photograph that shows his family laughing at the kitchen table, while wearing black stockings over their heads as if they were “terrorists” or “airplane hijackers.” On this photograph, Aggour asks the following question: “Is it intimating a celebration of recent nefarious events or simply laughing at one another in a moment of burlesque?” (“Visual” 27).

For the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Aggour participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. Aggour’s work for the exhibit, “Ligature Series: Nehru, John Wayne, Mao & Nasser” (2005), consisted of four Inkjet prints, 40” x 30” each, of painted billboards of the four figures mentioned in the title. The images were digitally manipulated photographs of paintings by self-taught Egyptian artists in a “billboard style” (In/Visible, 20). The idea of this series, as Aggour mentioned in his artist’s statement, was “simply utilizing the logic of capitalism to outsource image-making to cheaper labor markets” (In/Visible, 30). Aggour also stated that the “portraits suggest historical paintings in the romantic European tradition leavened with a pop art sensibility” (In/Visible, 30).

In conjunction with the exhibition “In/Visible,” the Arab American National Museum organized the first symposium on the creative expressions of Arab Americans. The two-day symposium, “Exploring New Forms and Meanings:
the Intersection of Audience, Ideas, and Art,” explored “modes of representation and reception of visual and musical art forms within the context of transnationalism and globalization” (“Exploring”). Aggour was an active participant in a panel titled “History and Contemporary Experiences in Conceptual Art.” The panel, which also included artists Rhéim Alkadhi and Joe Namy, discussed employing humor, irony, and metaphor in examining current events through a wider lens of history.

As an art educator, Aggour has taught at Barnard College and Parsons School of Art and Design in New York, and at the Corcoran College of Art in Washington, D.C. Currently, Aggour is an Assistant Professor in Media Arts at Syracuse University, where he teaches the history of art, performance, and digital photography courses.

Resources


“In a Gesture of Solidarity with New York City in the Wake of September 11, the City of Paris has Awarded a Six-Month Residency in Paris to Three New York Artists.” Press Release. Lower Manhattan Culture Council, June 21, 2002.


Web Sites and Places to see Aggour’s Work

Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota: http://www.midwaycontemporaryart.org.


Jocelyn M. Ajami (b. 1950), Interdisciplinary Artist, Painter, and Filmmaker

Jocelyn M. Ajami was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, but is of Lebanese heritage. She was raised in a family that always valued the beauty and the challenge of art objects: paintings, oriental rugs, decorative pieces, poetry, and music (Ajami, Personal). Ajami came to the United States in 1961 and attended Manhattanville College, New York, where she received a B.A. in French language and literature and a B.F.A. in studio art in 1972. She also received her M.A. in painting (1973) and another M.A. in art history (1974) from Rosary College, Villa Schifanoia, in Florence, Italy. In 1996, Ajami received a 12-month Leadership Foundation Fellowship, offered yearly to only 12 candidates
throughout the United States in conjunction with the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, for outstanding achievement, by the International Women’s Forum, Washington, D.C. (Ajami, Personal).

Ajami was an abstract painter for over 20 years before she turned to producing and writing documentary films and experimental videos in 1991. In 1976, she founded Studio 36, a studio gallery in Boston, where she exhibited some of her work. Her abstract and geometric work was also exhibited at a number of galleries and museums including at Chapel Gallery, Clark Gallery, Mercury Gallery, and at Brockton and Fitchburg museums. In her abstract geometric work, Ajami used angles and curves, creating shapes that were delicate, intricate, and symbolic (Temin, “Art”). She was drawn to geometry because “it is a simplification of nature.” In one of her artist’s statements, Ajami stated her connection to geometry:

...It lends order and harmony to the disconnected fragments that intrude on life. Geometry is also the ultimate mediator between the angle and the curve. There is a power, a boldness, a straightforwardness about geometry which spells survival. Geometry has no history or politics. It is an archetypal language. It can express collective will or shape the individual destiny of a single artist. It crosses all cultural borders. Like the sunset Geometry has survived many mutations. It has the possibility of universality while retaining an element of unpredictability. (“Artist’s”)

The themes of Ajami’s work, both her art and later videos, explore conflicts and coexistence. Art has the potential to embrace religion, science, and history, as she stated (Ajami, “Artist’s”). In one of her large (120” x 60”) geometric abstraction pieces using color pencil on paper, Eros-Thanatos (1987), Ajami combined a number of shapes and symbols such as diamonds, squares, and
triangles. Her work was colorful with vivid tones and shades. Color to her is a link between passion and the intellect, temperature and thought (Ajami, “Artist’s”). The cross can also be seen in Ajami’s work, not as a religious symbol, but as an abstract object of “time and space.” Ajami was raised as a Roman Catholic, and she had an interest in inquiring about Islam. Her studies, research, and interest in Islamic art and architecture of Spain were also evident in her work.

Ajami’s decision to turn to video in the early 1990s was an effort to reach a wider audience with socially conscious work (Ajami, Web site). Her first experimental video, *The Tiger and the Cube*, was exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. After the first Gulf war in 1991, Ajami created *Jihad*, a short informational video on the Qur’anic meaning of the term, which won her an Honorable Mention at the American Film and Video Festival in 1992. In this video, Ajami conveyed the true meaning of “Jihad,” which is the struggle to be a good human being, and not “Holy War” as it gets interpreted in Western media (Temin, “Art”). Ajami’s interest in showing the opposites and that they can coexist with each other led her to another video project called *Oasis of Peace*. This is a documentary on a village in Israel where Jews and Palestinians live together in harmony. It was premiered at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1995), and it won the Merit Finalist Award from the Houston International Film Festival.

Another video produced by Ajami is *Gypsy Heart* (1998), which explored “the passion, mystery and struggle of the Flamenco way of life featuring exceptional dance sequences by Omayra Amaya and her legendary great aunt, Carmen Amaya” (Ajami, Web site). *Gypsy Heart* premiered at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1998). Ajami’s interests in flamenco dancing led her to produce *Queen of the Gypsies* (2002), the first American film about the legendary Gypsy dancer, Carmen Amaya (1913-1963). This film is a feature documentary that records in a moving and personal manner the life and art of Carmen Amaya (Ajami, Web site). The film was the winner of a number of major awards, including Best Documentary, North America, at the Latino Film Festival in San Francisco (2003); Best Documentary at the Arts in Film, Wine Country Filmfest (2003); and the Second Place Audience Circle Award at the International Film Festival, Washington, D.C. (2004).

Ajami has also received a “People of the Year” award from the *Boston TAB* because she was “uniquely qualified” for promoting understanding in Boston (Dineen, The Boston TAB). She also serves on the advisory boards of the PeaceAmerica foundation and has published a number of articles for *Aramco World* Magazine and Cune Press. Ajami currently lives and works in Boston, and she continues to give public lectures and presentations on art, leadership in the arts, flamenco, and the issue of “crossing borders.”

**Resources**

Abe Ajay

Abe Ajay (1919-1998), Painter, Sculptor, and Assemblage Artist

Known to most Americans as Abe Ajay, Ibrahim Mahfoud Ajay was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania, to Syrian parents. Noted for his constructions and collages, Ajay is considered one of the twentieth century’s most inventive assemblage sculptors (Metzger, “Abe Ajay”). He was referred to by Arts Magazine as a master engineer, an architect, a carpenter, and a poet, all rolled into one. His interest in art, symmetry, and geometrical shapes was developed at a younger age. In his third grade class, he painted a picture of Taj Mahal (Hall, 19). Ajay was also influenced by Syrian Orthodox icons when he served as an altar boy, at the age of 12 years old, at Altoona’s St. George Syrian Orthodox parish.

Ajay grew up as a son of an immigrant store owner. He had many encounters with bigotry that enforced his feeling of being different. In remembering his early childhood, Ajay tells the following story:

One evening, when I was about eight or nine years old, I recall a group of local toughs kicking open the front door of my father’s store, tossing in a dead rat and shouting, “You dirty Greek, you dirty Greek.” (Hall, 27)

Even though Ajay has never been in the Middle East—except for one short visit to Morocco in 1970—he felt that somewhere in his genes was an affinity with Islamic art and architecture. Symmetry and geometrical patterns are the
main elements in Islamic art. Regarding this connection to the traditional Islamic craftsmanship and Arab artisans, Ajay said, “I like to break down forms and reassemble” (Orfalea, “Arab Americans”).

After graduating from high school, he left his hometown of Altoona in 1937 and headed for New York City to become a professional artist, landing a scholarship with Art Student’s League and American Artists School. From 1939 to 1941, Ajay was a member of the Federal Art Project’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) as a printmaker, and then turned to graphic design. During those years, he also joined and was an active member of the Artists’ Union and Artist’s Congress (Hall, 20). A memoir of Ayay’s experience on the Federal Art Project was published in *Art in America* in 1972, where he wrote about the government’s patronage of the arts, how the project helped thousands of artists and art students, and the role of the Federal Arts project in American art. Of the cancellation of the Federal Art Project, Ajay wrote, “Thus ended the noblest experiment of them all” (Ajay, 75).

While in New York City, Ajay also worked as a graphic designer and a freelance illustrator for approximately 20 years, landing accounts with such leading corporations as General Electric, and such publications as the *New York Times*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Fortune* (Hall, 20).

In 1963, Ajay abandoned the commercial art world, retreated to rural Connecticut, and began experimenting with three-dimensional sculptural construction (Metzger, “Abe Ajay”). The artworks that he created were polychrome wood relief constructions (1964-1966) based on found objects that he picked up from flea markets or retrieved from dust heaps (Hall, 59). During a trip to the flea market, Ajay picked up some wooden cigar molds, took them to his studio, and then carved them in different directions. He then combined them with other found objects, creating his first series of relief constructions.

His first solo exhibit came in 1964 at the Rose Fried Gallery in New York. After a few years of working with found objects, Ajay turned to Plexiglas to create new constructions based on predictable forms and shapes that he cut himself. From 1970 until 1979, Ajay turned to relief paintings, using a combination of cast forms with color painted canvas panels (Hall, 62-63).

After his relief paintings series (1970-1979), Ajay turned to colored collage constructions until 1984. During the first two years of the 1980s, Ajay worked on the “Portal Series,” exploring symmetry and geometrical elements. In his own words, the “Portal Series” was a “major watershed in my evolution as an artist” (Hall, 117). Ajay also describes this series as:

> disciplined, motionless, silent, and devoid of anecdote, metaphor, or surrealist mystique. The imagery is strictly architectonic, free of sentimental reference or autobiographical chit-chat. It toes no line, promotes no cause, purveys no gossip, and dispenses no information. (Hall 117)

After a serious illness rendered the production of three-dimensional work impossible, Ajay revisited the medium of collage in the early 1990s,
and it became his exclusive means of expression for the remainder of his career.

During his artistic life of over four decades, Ajay held over 20 solo exhibits at various locations throughout the United States, including one at the Tweed Museum of Art and another one at the Neuberger Museum. In 1990 Ajay had a 25-year retrospective at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut. He also participated in over 25 group exhibits at various galleries and museums. His artwork is in the collections of major museums in the United States.

Ajay died in 1998 in Bethel, Pennsylvania. A retrospective exhibition of Ajay’s four decades of work was held at the Reading Public Museum in April 2001. The exhibition, “Abe Ajay: Constructions and Collages,” was organized by the Palmer Museum of Art and Pennsylvania State University.

The Blair County Arts Hall of Fame, which includes the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, Blair County Arts Foundation, and the Allegheny Ridge Corporation, selected Abe Ajay as an inductee for the “Visual Arts” category. In their press release statement, they wrote:

Ajay created a body of work that revealed a multi-faceted personality and multi-faceted talents. His personal crusade to comprehend the essence of composition left behind a legacy and a portfolio spanning more than 50 years. (“Blair County”)

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Ajay’s Work

Allentown Art Museum, Allentown, Pennsylvania.
Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University Art Collection, New York, New York.
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, Connecticut.
McKnight Art Center/Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Massachusetts.
Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, College at Purchase, New York.
Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Duluth, Minnesota.

Sabah Al-Daher (b. 1967), Sculptor and Painter

Sabah Al-Daher was born in Nasriyah, southern Iraq. He was trained in classical art at the Institute of Fine Arts in Basra, Iraq, when he was only 15 years old. He graduated with honors in 1989. After the first Gulf War in 1991, Al-Daher was involved in the uprising against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. He was imprisoned and tortured, and he had to flee Iraq fearing additional prosecution. He fled toward the Saudi Arabian border, was arrested by American troops, and was detained as a prisoner of war. After convincing the American troops that he would be prosecuted if he went back to Iraq, his status was changed to refugee (Hill, “Iraq-born”). After spending over two years in the refugee camp in the desert of Saudi Arabia, he came to the United States as a political refugee in 1993.

Al-Daher is a sculptor and a painter. He works with a variety of materials, including bronze, marble, granite, basalt, clay, and bluestone. Most of his sculptural work is life-size human figures, figurative portraits, and abstract forms. He draws inspiration from both Greek mythology and the sculptors of the Italian Renaissance. To Al-Daher, art is survival, as he stated in an interview with Steve Hill:

To me, art, first, is a survival thing. It keeps my soul clean and my spirit alive. You know, when you go through a difficult life, being in prison, being almost executed, being tortured, it’s easy for your soul to be destroyed, for your spirit to be destroyed. You have to have something,
some hope that will keep you going. I think art did that for me, does that for me. It has kept me thinking in a positive way. (Hill, “Iraq-born”)

One of Al-Dhaher’s large pieces is Middle East Peace (2003), an eight-foot-tall marble and basalt sculpture in the shape of a candle with the word “peace” written in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. The project was part of a cooperative Arab-Jewish children’s project. The sculpture is permanently installed in the Peace Garden at Seattle Center, Washington. The cooperative project was directed by Amineh Ayyad, Palestinian-American activist, and Al-Dhaher, along with a number of Arab and Jewish children from the Seattle area. The project was inspired by the children from the Arab Center of Washington, the Middle East Peace Camp (an Arab and Jewish children’s summer camp), Kadima (a progressive Jewish community), and the Iraqi Community Center. When the sculpture was unveiled, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels declared October 23, 2003, as “Children’s Peace Day” and issued a proclamation encouraging “all citizens to join our children in their inspirational efforts to promote peace and harmony in the world” (Lawrence, “Children’s”).

For over four years, Al-Dhaher worked on a sculpture made of five figures: one male and four females, including a small girl. Having lived through war most of his life, this sculpture, Holding On (2002-2006), carved in marble, depicts how he feels about war, and the suffering of women as the main casualty of war. Al-Dhaher wanted to portray death and lost through the survivors; as Al-Dhaher states, the females are the ones who have to deal with grief after losing members of their family (Al-Dhaher, “Artist’s Statements”).

Al-Dhaher is also a painter who depicts cityscapes, portraits, and figures. He uses various mediums, such as coffee, ink, oil, watercolor, and acrylic. His use of coffee in painting is a tradition that is sometimes used in calligraphy in Iraq and other parts of the Arab world. He combines coffee with colored ink to produce paintings that look “aged,” adding a new dimension to the
painting such as grief and sadness. He used this technique to create a series of large paintings, *Fragments of War* (2006), which included a portrait of an Iraqi woman. He described one 5’ x 3’ painting, *Iraqi Widow*, as a tribute to his sister, who at age 24 lost her husband when a car bomb exploded near the bus he was riding to visit his brother in Baghdad in July 2004 (*Fragments*). This series, along with a number of sculptures, were displayed in a solo exhibit at the University of Washington in September 2006. One of the sculptures, *Ascent* (2005), shows a man rising up while a woman is trying to hold onto him and preventing him from leaving. Al-Dhaher says that “the man’s soul seems serene as he rises up from the shell of his body below, while the woman, weak with grief, attempts in vain to prevent his departure.” Al-Dhaher also described these war fragments as “individual experiences that form a mosaic of loss, despair, and endurance” (*Fragments*).

Since 1997, Al-Dhaher’s work has been exhibited throughout the state of Washington. He has had solo exhibits and has participated in a number of group exhibits at different galleries, including Odegaard Library at the University of Washington (2001, 2006); Christoff Gallery, Georgetown, Seattle (2005); Phinney Art Gallery, Seattle (2002); Pratt Fine Arts Center, Seattle (1999, 2002); Carillon Point Outdoor Sculpture Show, Washington (2000-2001); Kirsten Gallery, Seattle (2001); Allied Arts Gallery, Bellingham, Washington (2000); and at Parklane Gallery, Kirkland, Washington (1997). He also displays his work in public places such as the Westcott Bay Sculpture Park in Friday Harbor, Washington.

A short documentary about Al-Dhaher’s life and artwork was produced and directed by Sarna Lapine, and it was the winner of “Best Short Film” at the North West Film Forum in 2005. The documentary *My Saraab* (2005), which means “mirage” in Arabic, focused on how Al-Dhaher uses his sculptures and artwork as a way to revive the lost hope and the bad experiences of war.

After the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime, Al-Dhaher was able to return to Iraq in 2003 after 12 years that he did not see his family. According to him, the experience of going to Iraq during the war and seeing all the destruction made him “a little more depressed and worried about where it’s going to lead” (Davila, “Refugees”). Al-Dhaher currently lives and works in Seattle. He also teaches stone carving at Pratt Art Institute, in his studio, and other symposiums such as Camp Brotherhood in Mt. Vernon, Washington (an annual international stone sculpture symposium).

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Al-Dhaher’s Work**


Peace Garden in the Seattle Center, Seattle, Washington.


Westcott Bay Sculpture Park, Friday Harbor, Washington.

**Andrea Ali (b. 1978), Ceramic Sculptor and Mixed-Media Artist**

Born in Berkeley, California, to an Iraqi father and a Czech mother, Andrea Ali uses her art as an educational tool and as a political statement. Ali graduated from San Francisco State University with a B.A. in ceramics in 2004. The majority of her work is figurative ceramic sculptures that reflect her cultures and how she relates to them. She describes her ceramic sculptures as being layered in meaning, and says that they include “historical references, personal narratives, traditional cultural elements, and most importantly the manifestation of spirit” (Oweis, 20).

Ali’s work is inspired by the mixture of her cultural background (Czech/Iraqi/American), including the traditional decorative painting of the Czech and the geometric precision of Islamic art and architecture. She also tries to explore this dual identity within her work. As she explains in her statement, the concept of homeland is an underlying thread that runs through all of her artwork (Ali, “Artist’s”).

When the U.S. invasion of Iraq began in 2003, Ali—with a family connection in Iraq—wanted to use her art as a political statement against the war. She sculpted ten veiled women to be used as bowling pins for a bowling ball covered with stars and stripes. The installation featured veiled women in traditional dresses, standing helpless and waiting to be run over by a giant bowling ball (Sajid, 22).

While she was a student at San Francisco State University, she enrolled in the Arabic language courses and was exposed to the art of Arabic writing and calligraphy. This exposure has helped her in incorporating Arabic calligraphy
into some of her ceramic sculptures. In her sculpture *Three Sisters* (2004), the bodies of the women are covered with prayers from the Qur’an, in Arabic calligraphic style. The prayers invoke the name of Allah for peace and protection. Ali sees using calligraphy on the bodies of women as a way of empowering women to challenge some aspects of Islam.

Ali was also an active student with different ethnic groups, including African Americans, Latinos, and of course the Arab American student organizations. In commemorating Black History Month (2004), Ali, along with another student, organized and curated an art exhibit called “Black=Afrika: Visions of the Diaspora” at the Cesar Chavez Student Center Art Gallery. The exhibit featured a number of artists from Oakland, California. Their works explored the black experience in North America as it related to African ideologies and legacies (SFSU News Web site).

In a short period of time, Ali had participated in over ten group exhibits around the San Francisco Bay Area and Northern California, including two annual Stillwell student shows at San Francisco State University. Ali was also a featured artist at the launching event of Zawaya (November 2003), a San Francisco-based non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Arab arts and culture (Oweis, 20). In her statement for that event, Ali mentioned that as an Arab American artist, she tries to explore her identity through the arts.

During an annual event of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee in San Francisco, Ali was the only featured artist who was invited to display some of her ceramic sculptures. She displayed a sculpture called *Homeland*, (2004) featuring a woman with house keys coming out of her dress. For this ceramic sculpture (40” x 18” x 13”), Ali was inspired by the poems of Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet who uses women as metaphors for the landscape of Palestine. The traditionally dressed woman had images of towns and villages
painted on her chest, a symbolic representation to the Palestinian villages that had been destroyed in 1948. As for the keys, Ali says:

The keys in the piece come from the stories that I keep hearing from the elders in the Palestinian community. They talk about how they are still holding on to the keys of their homes and farms, even though they had been long destroyed. It is a symbol of the right to return home and a symbol of the fight for freedom. (Ali, “Personal”)

Ali also adapted the symbol of the key in her work that deals with the war on Iraq. As an Iraqi-American, she sees the key as a representation of “homeland,” relevant to the Iraqi people’s struggle for a free and independent homeland. Ali’s ceramic sculpture *Homeland*, was also featured in the art exhibit “Prologue and Epilogue: Arab Feminism Past and Present” (2006), which was curated by Sunbula: Arab Feminists for Change in San Francisco.

One of the major exhibits that she participated in was “Trouble Man: 14 Artists Interpreting the Life and Legacy of Marvin Gaye” (2005) at the African American Museum and Library in Oakland, California. The exhibit was put together by a collaborative of 14 artists from both the Bay Area and Southern California, known as Soul Salon 10 as a homage to rhythm and blues legend Marvin Gaye, whose life ended tragically in 1984. Ali’s work in this exhibit represented “a touching yet warm soulful embrace of Gaye’s personal life and his universal concerns and desires which are expressed in many of his notable songs during the early 1970’s” (Melton, 10). Ali’s art was inspired by the music of Marvin Gaye, and her message was a “desire for freedom in terms of homeland, justice, imagination, and color” (Melton, 10).

At the “Trouble Man” exhibit, Ali had three pieces on display. The first one was a synthetic birthday cake installation called *Happy Birthday Marvin* and another was called *Sanctified*, which was a ceramic sculpture of a woman on her knees surrounded by small jars of water. The third piece, called *What's Going On?*, consisted of army-issued fatigue shirts folded and placed neatly next to one another with the labels: “Vietnam,” “Desert Storm,” and “Iraq” (Chow, 22).

Ali now resides in Berkeley, California, and has established her own ceramic studio. She also teaches art classes at the University Village Community Center, at the University of California, Berkeley. She also participates in the KPFA—a progressive radio station—annual arts and crafts fair. Motivated by the words of Mumia Abu Jamal, an award-winning journalist on death row since 1982, in “A Call to Action,” Ali’s goal is to use her art as a call for action:

The choice, as every choice, is yours:
To fight for freedom or be fettered,
To struggle for liberty or be satisfied with slavery,
To side with life or death.
Spread the word of life far and wide.
Talk to your friends, read, and open your eyes—
Even to doorways of perception you feared
to look into yesterday.
Hold your heart open to the truth. (Ali, “Artist’s”)

**Resources**


**Web Site and Places to See Ali’s Work**

College of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California.
KPFA Radio Station, Berkeley, California.
Leslie’s Ceramics, Berkeley, California.

**Rheim Alkadhi (b. 1973), Conceptual, Digital, Sculpture, Installation Artist**

Rheim Alkadhi was born in Buffalo, New York, to an Iraqi father and an American mother. The family lived in Iraq throughout the 1970s and moved back to the United States at the start of the Iran-Iraq war in the early 1980s. While growing up in Iraq, Alkadhi was given a camera by her mother, which she used to capture a number of images of her neighborhood in Iraq. These photographs became part of her ongoing project documenting her relationship to Iraq. A childhood friend named Magda became the subject of some of these photographs. About this experience, Alkadhi wrote:

I captured a handful of images, at child’s scale and handling, of course; a street perspective looking to the right from our house, the apparent health of a rose bush in our garden, and a portrait of Magda on the outer wall of a construction site. The violence of these images is in the child’s abrupt appropriation of the Iraqi landscape, the startling loss of simple youth, the eventual negotiation of a bi-cultural identity, which carries a supreme burden of addressing the imbalance within the contemporary context of war in Iraq. (Alkadhi, “Magda and Me”)

Alkadhi studied art at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, and received her B.F.A. in 1994. She then attended the University of California Irvine, where she received her M.F.A. in 1999. She has been awarded
grants from sources such as the University of California Irvine (1999); Music-Fest (1990-1994); and the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts (1990).

An interdisciplinary artist, Alkadhi works in found objects, digital media, and conceptual installations, often incorporating fabric and thread. Some of her work deals with political issues related to the Arab world, including those dealing with the war in Iraq. Alkadhi has held a number of solo exhibitions and participated in many group exhibitions throughout the United States and internationally. Among her solo exhibitions are: “Personal Effects” at Deep River Gallery in Los Angeles, California (2002); “Body of Conjoined Movements” at the Brewery Annex in Los Angeles (2002); “Iraqi Girls School” and “National Gallery,” both at the University Art Gallery in Irvine, California (1999); and “Denaturalizing Citizenship” at the Squatter’s Gallery in Irvine, California (1998). She has participated in a large number of group exhibitions, including: “In/Visible” at the Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan (2005); “Art in the Age of New Technologies” at the Center for Contemporary Art in Yervan Armenia (2005); “Identities and Visual Codes: Violence of Images/Images of Violence” at Meta Cultural Center in Bucharest, Romania (2004); “Somewhere/Elsewhere” at the University of California Berkeley Worth Ryder Gallery (2004); “Charm Offensive” at the Korean Cultural Center in Los Angeles (2000); “For a Stranger” at Articultural Gallery in Santa Monica (2004); as well as “Middle East Cinema” at the Blinding Light in Canada (2003) and “Singular Identities” at the Habitat Center in India (2004).

When Alkadhi participated in “Somewhere/Elsewhere” (2004), she displayed and performed a sculpture installation called Demonstration: strangulation of the linguistic impulse / performability of the resistant character, which was made of fabric and thread, chicken skin, egg timer, picket sign, transparent display, and video. The installation and video performance were a protest of the mistreatment of Arabs and Muslims by McDonald’s franchises. The performance video is an “experimental work that integrates sculpture and
The performance and installation include
an exotic chicken being strangled
by some golden arches, and its
chest bearing the embroidered
words “No thank you, I’ve had
enough,” in a reference to an
Arab employee who was fired
by McDonald’s for speaking Ara-
bic. As she states in an artist’s
statement:

This text is to examine the
language-based construc-
tion of an emotionally
to-scale model of what is
not a mere incident, but a
contemporary condition.
Specifically referenced is
the case of the multinational
fast food chain, McDonald’s,
which fired its Employ-
nee of the Month, Abeer
Zinaty, for speaking in her
native tongue. The Arabic
language is repeatedly mistaken for a bomb. (“Rheim Alkadhi: Artist’s
Statement”)

For the May 2005 inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in
Dearborn, Michigan, Alkadhi participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” con-
temporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. She
was also a panelist in first symposium on the creative expressions of Arab
Americans: Exploring New Forms and Meanings: the Intersection of Audience, Ideas,
and Art, which was held at the museum in celebration of “In/Visible.” A sculp-
tural installation of digitally manipulated photographs was part of In/Visible.
The Pictography in 9 Volumes (2005) series represents a personal archive “linking
two historical periods, the early 1970s and the current events in Iraq” (In/Visible,
18). In one of her pieces, Young Transnational Perched on the Divide (2005),
a young female figure, with no face showing, is sitting on a wall or a fence at a
distance from the viewer. Alkadhi offers this explanation of the image:

Like the interpretation of dreams, pictographic interpretation mirrors the
interpreter, though this faceless identity defies the mirror. There on top
of the separation wall, the young transnational is poised for proclamation.
Here, the divide is a gulf that separates the image from viewer like the dead from the living. (*In/Visible*, 32)

In the series *Pictography in 9 Volumes*, Alkadhi also included photographs that make a comparison between the Iraq of the 1970s and the current war-torn Iraq. Images include those resulting from abrupt camera movements or delays, a rose growing in the desert, a car with an Iraqi license plate, and water pipes and electrical boxes. She interprets, “in a war time ecology, these elements battle a burden of the sooner extinction” (*In/Visible* 32).

Alkadhi currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California. She was a Visiting Lecturer at Scripps College and Pomona College in California in 2004. Since 2001, Alkadhi has been involved with Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Alkadhi’s Work**


Rheim Alkadhi in 312 Online Gallery: http://www.312.ca.


**Hend Al-Mansour (b. 1956), Painter and Multi-Media Installation Artist**

A medical doctor who turned into a rebellious artist, Hend Al-Mansour was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. After graduating from the medical college of the University of Cairo, Egypt, in 1980, she practiced medicine in
Saudi Arabia until she came to the United States in 1997 seeking “another home to escape Saudi oppression of women” (Al-Mansour, “Artist’s”). While in Saudi Arabia, she never received any formal art training, but art was her favorite hobby and activity. She had a desire to embrace her love for art, and she returned to it many years later. Becoming a medical doctor was a family expectation that she successfully fulfilled (Qaiser-Raza, “A Passion”).

In the United States, Al-Mansour realized her dream of being an artist and obtained an M.F.A. degree from Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 2002. The majority of her work centers on her identity as an Arab/Muslim woman. In her artist’s statement, she describes her artwork as “enclosed spaces that symbolize women’s private dreams and desires” (Al-Mansour, “Artist’s”). She continues to comment on her art and what she tries to explore:

I explore what is unjust in my tradition. I explore religious and social order, and deconstruct and reconstruct the traditions seeking to create a positive self-image for myself as an Arab woman. (Al-Mansour “Artist’s”)

Despite the censorship that she had to go through while she was in Saudi Arabia, she managed to paint and was able to hold three exhibits. In one of her watercolor paintings, Secret Wishes (1996), from the series of Arabian Women, she describes a veiled woman with these words: “Desires, hopes, and dreams can always be revealed no matter how much you try to hide them.” In another painting of the same series, Restraints (1996), Al-Mansour offers this description “Tied by her own hair, Arabian woman’s fight for survival is more painful, and letting self free means losing part of herself” (“Hend”).

The freedom of artistic expression in the United States made her decide to stay. This freedom has been translated in the type of images that she has been able to show, which would not have been possible in Saudi Arabia due to the strict censorship (Al-Mansour, “Artist’s”). She has had a number of solo exhibits and had participated in, curated, and organized many group
exhibits in the Midwest. Al-Mansour’s artwork was featured in *Mizna* magazine, a journal that features prose, poetry, and visual art exploring Arab America.

One of Al-Mansour’s major exhibits was “Sheherazade: Risking the Passage,” in El Collegio Gallery in Minneapolis, which was held in 2003. Sheherazade is a female character of Middle Eastern mythology who by risking her own life saved the lives of many other women by telling stories to distract her husband, a malicious ruler. The exhibit was sponsored by Women’s Art Registry of Minnesota and the Women’s Art Institute of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. The objective of the women artists was “to balance what they see among many Americans as narrow, negative views of Islamic culture, particularly since September 11, 2001” (Peiken, E1). Al-Mansour also wanted her exhibit to open the minds of conservative Muslim men:

The people I most wish would see this are the ones who don’t want this. They don’t have to believe what I’m saying but just acknowledge me—that what I’m saying is real to me. (Peiken, E1)

Al-Mansour sees her art as a way to promote social change, justice, and freedom of expression. The influence of Islamic traditions, and a rebellion on some of its practices, is evident in her art. Elements such as the Qur’an, Arabic calligraphy, garments, cosmetics, henna, and Arabian houses, have influenced her art. “Everything I do comes from there. I try to make peace between my loyalty to my tradition and my disapproval of some of its practices” (Al-Mansour, “Personal”). An un-veiled Saudi woman, she is a rebellious artist who tries to give voices to Saudi women and make them visible.

In some of her artwork and installations, she uses the holy Qur’an as a metaphor. Qur’anic verses in painted calligraphy or a Qur’anic recitation in a soundtrack are common elements in some of her work (Qaiser-Raza, “A Passion”). Two of her remarkable installations, *Autobiography of a Human Body* (2000), and *Autobiography Overture* (2002) consist of giant book format (about five by seven feet), one containing 12 pages and the other 19 pages. The book contains images of veiled women behind bars and verses of the Qur’an that deal with women’s issues.

Generally, the work of Al-Mansour conveys a positive message about her identity and about Arab culture in general. She wrote: “My art allows me to express and achieve my dual desires - to seek freedom from the bonds of tradition while keeping the bonds of belonging” (Qaiser-Raza, “A Passion”). In addition to painting, silk screen printing, and art installations, she was commissioned to do a number of theater installations with Jawahir Dance Company. In most of her installations, Al-Mansour interactively makes dialogues with her audiences. In a peace dialogue event between Arabs and Jews in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, Al-Mansour presented a performance-art piece inspired by the situation of Arab women in Saudi Arabia where she repeated questions such as “Can you see me?” “Can you hear me?” and, “Can you touch me?” (Kumar, 6A).
Al-Mansour received a number of grants, individually and with other artists, including the Minnesota State Art Board’s Art Initiative Grant 2005. She was also a Finalist of the Bush Artists Fellows program for 2004.

In 2005, Al-Mansour curated and participated in an art exhibit titled “Haneen: Between Home and Homeland.” In Arabic, Haneen means longing for the homeland. Other artists who participated in the exhibit include Heba Amin, Jumana Al Hashal, and Sarah Ahmad. The theme of the exhibit was the struggle to reconcile American culture with the Arabic culture that the artists came from. In the exhibit, Al-Mansour created installations that enclosed the viewers in a small, private space with walls of images that are often considered taboo in the Arab world, like homosexuality, next to traditional Islamic teachings, like verses from the Qur’an (Westhoff, “Home”).

Al-Mansour has no regrets about giving up being a medical doctor. “I don’t miss medicine at all. Art was always a part of me, and despite the demands of work as a cardiologist, I always found time to enjoy painting” (Qaiser-Raza, “A Passion”). Living in St. Paul, Minnesota, Al-Mansour is now fighting with breast cancer in addition to her fights for human rights and religious attitudes towards women. She is a founding member of a Muslim Women Group and Arab Artists in the Twin Cities, and also serves as an Associate Director at the Center for Independent Artists, Minneapolis. She is an active member of the community and lectures about art, women, and Islam.
Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Al-Mansour’s Work

Al-Mansour Studio, St. Paul, Minnesota.

College of St. Catherine, Minneapolis, Minnesota.


MCAD Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Mohammed Al-Sadoun (b. 1958), Painter and Conceptual Artist

Mohammed Al-Sadoun was born in Baghdad, Iraq. In 1979, he received a B.F.A. from the University of Baghdad, Iraq. After coming to the United States, Al-Sadoun attended the University of Hartford, West Hartford, Connecticut, where he received an M.A. in art education in 1985. He returned to Iraq and taught art classes at the University of Kufa and the University of Baghdad from 1986 to 1989. Al-Sadoun then went to Japan, where he spent three years exhibiting his work. (Farhat, Dar Al-Hayat). In 1992, he came back to the United States and earned his Ph.D. in Art Education from Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, in 1999.

Al-Sadoun is a painter, a conceptual artist, a researcher, and a historian. He is one of the leading contributors to the contemporary Arab art movement.
His work involves using unconventional materials and concepts including found doors, fuel, latex, wall paint, acrylic, glues and fire; in a provocative way that calls attention to the complexity of the modern Middle East (Farhat, Dar Al-Hayat). Al-Sadoun’s current work is based on objects such as burning books, doors, and furniture. His choice of such objects is “both testimony and silent protest against aggression in all its forms, including global dominance” (Al Sadoun, “Artist’s”). Al-Sadoun sees his role in the complex situation of the Middle East:

As a witness to extreme and harsh political and social changes accompanied by complex social, economic, cultural and religious crises which led to wars, defeats, confusion, corruption and radical political and demographic changes, I have gradually become more aware of my role and responsibility as an artist in this new reality. But also I have found myself frustrated by such dynamic change and uncertainty. My style, techniques and vision have changed as reality itself has changed. How is it possible to deal artistically with problems and events such as those in Palestine and Iraq, or to confront the events of September 11 using only modernist techniques and ideas? I have become aware of the limitations of modernist traditions and of the absolute, the so-called unquestioned truths and universals of art. (Al Sadoun, “Artist’s”)

One of Al-Sadoun’s conceptual art processes is burning old doors in front of a live audience. This concept is his protest to the destruction of homes in the time of war. Witnessing the destruction of old and beautiful doors of Baghdad during the Iraq-Iran war has left an impact on his art. One of the burnt doors that he worked on in Baghdad was part of the first Baghdad International Festival of Art in 1986. The door was also shown in the Iraqi Contemporary exhibition held at the Arab Institute in Paris, France, in 1989. (Farhat, Dar Al-Hayat).
In another unconventional concept, and to protest censorship and the lack of freedom of expression and human rights in the Middle East; Al-Sadoun takes a stack of books, ties them with a rope to a chair, then paints them with acrylic paint. Maymanah Farhat, an art historian and a specialist in modern and contemporary Arab art who profiled the conceptual work of Al-Sadoun, describes one of these concepts, *Untitled #1* (2005):

Notions of education are insinuated through the use of a chair and books while the application of rope and paint join the found objects as one uniform body, constricted to the scrutiny of the viewer’s glance. The body of the piece is unwieldy; the curious tying of books intended to instill a sense of discomfort in the viewer so as to communicate the severity of his message. (Dar Al-Hayat)

As a researcher and a historian of modern Arab art, Al-Sadoun has given numerous lectures and presentations about the subject at academic institutions and cultural centers, including those at Al-Hewar Center in the Washington metropolitan area. One of the research projects that Al-Sadoun was doing involved contemporary Iraqi art. During his research in Baghdad, he documented a series of interviews with many Iraqi artists, including Madiha Umar, Diya al-Azzawi, Shakir Hasan al-Said, and Jawad Salim. He also researched the work of Laila al-Attar, who was the director of the Iraqi National Art Museum and a powerful voice in promoting women artists in Iraq and throughout the Arab world. Al-Attar was killed during a United States air strike in 2003. Al-Sadoun, having personally known and worked with Al-Attar, expressed his feeling about the loss of a great artist, a leader, and a contributor to the art scene in Iraq and the Arab World:

It was really tragic and a big loss for those close to the art community. . . . I remember all the sweet time we spent together, visiting her every day at the museum and her house. We had meetings; we had a lot of things. (Bernstein, *Bay Guardian*)

Al-Sadoun has held a number of solo exhibitions and performances and participated in many group exhibitions throughout the United States and internationally. Among his solo exhibitions are: “The Work of Mohammed Al-Sadoun,” curated by Fayeq Oweis of ZAWAYA at the Arab Cultural and Community Center, San Francisco, California (2007); Burning Doors, Watsonville, California (2004); Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio (1996); the Ohio Art Council, Art Space, Lima, Ohio (1993); Silk Lab Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (1990); AKI-EX Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (1991); Iraqi Artists Association, Baghdad, Iraq (1996-1988); and at the University of Hartford, Hartford, Connecticut (1985). He has participated in a large number of group exhibitions in the United States, Japan, France, and the former Soviet Union.

On the use of found objects in Al-Sadoun’s work and his paintings in general, Maymanah Farhat provided this summary of his work:
Al-Sadoun’s conceptual pieces and paintings are bold and commanding, causing viewers to be drawn into the emotionally charged subject matters that dominate his work. His work often includes found objects in an attempt to add a sense of veracity and symbolism to his creative expression. His use of found objects stems from an academic and artistic conviction that upholds art in the postmodern era as a means through which to explore concepts involving reality therefore bringing art closer to life and the masses (*Dar Al-Hayat*).

Al-Sadoun currently lives and works in Monterey, California.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Al-Sadoun’s Work**

Images in an Article Published in Al-Hayat Newspaper by Maymanah Farhat: http://www.arabworldbooks.com/Articles/article70.htm.

**Sama Alshaibi (b. 1973), Photography and Multi-Media Artist**

Sama Alshaibi was born in Basra, Iraq, to a Palestinian mother and Iraqi father. The family immigrated to the United States in 1985 when she was in high school. Alshaibi attended Columbia College in Chicago and received her B.A. in photography in 1999. She also holds an M.F.A. in photography and media arts from the University of Colorado at Boulder (2005). Alshaibi is a photography artist and works with installations, metal, and performance and collaborative interactive media projects. Her artworks focus on the themes of diaspora, hybrid identity, memories, exile, and displacement. In her artist’s statement, Alshaibi writes about what impacted her artwork, such as the wars that affected her family, the displacement of her mother and her family from Palestine in 1948, and the displacement of her father and his family from Iraq (Alshaibi, “Artist’s”).
After gaining her American passport, Alshaibi was allowed to travel to Israel and occupied Palestine, where she experienced the suffering of the Palestinian people “confined to a single city and cut off from the world by massive walls,” which became the subject of many of her projects (Alshaibi, “Memory,” 39). The concept of the Right to Return became the focus of some of these projects. Among her projects are In This Garden (2006-2007), photographs and narratives on the story of her grandfather who died before his wishes to return to Palestine were fulfilled; My Apartheid Vacation (2006), a photography and multimedia project that focused on her journey to the Holy Land and witnessing the living conditions of the Palestinian people in refugee camps and on military checkpoints; Heirloom (2005-2006), a photography project that “explores taboo subjects of Middle Eastern and Muslim female identity”; Birthright (2004-2005), a series of self portraits of images of “the pregnant Palestinian mother stands as a symbol to the future of a people under occupation or in exile”; and Zaman: I Remember (2002-2004), a series of photo montages that stresses the intersections of her Iraqi/Palestinian, Arab/American, and Islamic/Christian cultures.

In her Birthright series, Alshaibi created a number of portraits in which she used traditional Palestinian costumes, including a wedding headdress that brides used to receive as part of the dowry. The headdress was usually made of gold or silver coins, but Alshaibi substituted the no longer minted Palestinian currency with coins embossed with visas, passport stamps, and pictures suggesting “an intellectual dowry rather than a monetary or economic one” (Alshaibi, “Memory,” 43). Her reason for using the headdress was to reflect her mother’s memories and her desire to inherit the headdress of her grandmother.

Another piece from the Birthright series is Return II (2005), which was part of the international exhibit “Re-interpreting the Middle East Beyond the Historical Stereotype,” curated by May Hariri Aboutaam. The exhibit was featured in 2005 at Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Corcoran College of Art and Design, Washington D.C.; Sisson Gallery, Henry Ford College, Dearborn, Michigan; Orfali Gallery, Amman, Jordan; and West Virginia Tech.
University, Blacksburg, West Virginia. The exhibit also traveled to Bethlehem (2006), and is planned to be shown in Doha, Qatar; Beirut, Lebanon; and Cairo, Egypt. Alshaibi’s image was of a pregnant Palestinian mother with graffiti written on her belly standing “as a symbol to contrast hope for a better future with the realities of the present” (Re-interpreting). On the name of this piece and on utilizing graffiti, Alshaibi also wrote in her artist’s statement:

Utilizing the loose graffiti writing style over the pregnant belly, the work eludes to the walls inside the West Bank, where a dialogue of written protest takes place. “Return,” in both English and Arabic, demands notice to the conditions of both the internally and externally displaced Palestinians. An excerpt from Palestinian poet Fadwa Taqan’s Enough For Me, scrawled on the skin, connects the human surface to the surface of land referred to in the poem (Re-interpreting).

Since 1999, Alshaibi’s work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally. Her solo exhibitions include: “In This Garden,” La Fabrica Arte Contemporaneo, Guatemala City, Guatemala (2007); “My Apartheid Vacation,” Zero Station (The Project Room), Portland, Maine (2006); “Women, War, and Peace; Feminist Interventions in a Time of Conflict,” St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana (2005); “Where Do the Birds Fly After the Last Sky?” at El Centro de Formación de la Cooperación Española, Antigua, Guatemala, and at La Fabrica Arte Contemporaneo, Guatemala City (2004); and “Zaman: I Remember,” La Fabrica Arte Contemporaneo, Guatemala City, Guatemala (2004). She had also participated in numerous two-person, group, juried, and invitational exhibitions in the United States, Central America, and the Middle East, including an exhibition at the newly established Palestinian Art Court in Jerusalem called Al Hoash. Her video installations were screened at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, Maine (2006); Mizna Third Annual Arab Film Festival, Minneapolis, Minnesota (2005); and Multiplex Film Festival, The Soap Factory, Minneapolis, Minnesota (2005).

Alshaibi has also participated as a panelist and exhibitor in a number of conferences and workshops throughout the United States and internationally, including Narratives of Land, People and Identities: Shaping Communities in Times of Crisis at the International Center of Bethlehem, Palestine; Gender and Identity in the Middle East and Latin America, Center for Middle East Studies, University of Arizona (2007); Middle East Studies Association Annual Conference, Boston, Massachusetts (2006); Mapping Arab Diasporas Conference, Center for Arab American Studies, University of Michigan, Dearborn (2006); International Indigenous Photographers Conference & Exhibition, University of California, Davis (2006); AUESTA Conference, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa (2006); and Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Washington, D.C. (2005). She was also a visiting artist at Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond (2006), and Darat Al Funun in Amman, Jordan (2007), and Wheat Ridge, Colorado. (2005).

Alshaibi participated in a summer fellowship at The Photography Institute, Columbia University, New York (2004); and a one-year academic appointment
at the Center for Humanities and Arts, University of Colorado, Boulder (2003). She has received a number of grants and awards for her artwork and teaching. Alshaibi currently lives in Tucson, where she works as an Assistant Professor of Art in the school of art, University of Arizona. She is a member and a co-founder of 6+: A Women’s Art Collective. She is represented by La Fabrica Arte Contemporaneo in Guatemala City.

Resources

Web Sites and Places to See Alshaibi’s Work
The Corcoran College of Art & Design, Washington, D.C.
La Fabrica, Guatemala City, Guatemala.
The Gorman Museum, Davis, CA.
The International Center of Bethlehem, Bethlehem, Palestine.
Orfali Gallery, Amman, Jordan.
The Photography Institute Archive at the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA.
The University of Colorado Art Museum, Boulder, CO.

Hashim Al-Tawil (b. 1952), Painter, Printmaker, Mixed Media Artist, and Art Historian

Born in Iraq, Hashim Al-Tawil is an accomplished artist, educator, and art historian specializing in Arabic and Islamic art and culture. Al-Tawil has been influenced by his upbringing in Karbala, one of the most holy cities in Islam,
with its beautiful shrines and mosques. Concerning this influence in his childhood years in Karbala, Al-Tawil talks about the rituals surrounding the shrine of Al-Hussein, the grandson of Islam’s prophet Muhammad and the third Imam. During the annual celebrations of Ashoura, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Al-Hussein in 680 AD, the city becomes festive with celebrations, Qur’anic recitations, and colorful murals, which had an impact on the artistic development of Al-Tawil (“Maw’id,” Al-Jazeera TV).

In 1973, Al-Tawil received his B.F.A. from the Academy of Fine Arts at the University of Baghdad, Iraq. After immigrating to the United States, Al-Tawil earned a Master’s degree in graphics and painting from the University of Hartford, Connecticut in 1978, and in 1993, he received a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Iowa. His dissertation is entitled *Early Arab Icons: Literary and Archaeological Evidence for the Cult of Religious Images in Pre-Islamic Arabia.*

As he writes in his statement, Al-Tawil’s primary resource for his artistic production has been the culture of the Middle East. He writes:

I draw continuing inspiration from its many expressions: the antiquities of ancient Iraq, the Semitic tradition of the region, the ruins of early Christian-Byzantine churches, the monuments of Aramaic Nabataeans, the splendour of Pre-Islamic literature, and the Arabic-Islamic civilization. Along with other contemporary artists similarly influenced, I have discovered that these cultural riches can contribute much to the great scene of modern American art. (*Diversity*, 4).

Back in Iraq, Al-Tawil served on the faculty of the College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad, Iraq, and was chair of the graphic design department in the late 1970s to mid 1980s and was active in the Iraqi visual art and cultural scene.

Al-Tawil participated in over 50 exhibitions throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. He has won numerous awards, including an Art and Art History scholarship from the University of Iowa (1991), the First Prize Award in Printmaking at the First Asian/European Art Biennial in
Ankara, Turkey (1986); an Honorary Award at the Cairo Biennial, Egypt (1985); and an Honorary Award from Baghdad International Art Festival, Baghdad, Iraq (1983). Al-Tawil has been recently awarded a Fulbright senior research grant for 2006-2007 to conduct field study on aspects of Islamic-Arabic culture during the twelfth century Norman reign in Palermo, Sicily, Italy. The research will investigate the Arabic calligraphy of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo and other related buildings in Sicily. It involves field study in the various Arabic texts, interpretation, and analysis of the iconographical meaning and symbolism of pictorial images associated with these writings that are found in major architectural Norman monuments in Sicily.

As a member of the Advisory Committee for the Center for Arab American Studies (CAAS) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, and a lecturer in Islamic Art and Architecture, Al-Tawil curated an inaugural art exhibit called “Diversity in Harmony” (2003) at the Alfred Berkowitz Gallery. CAAS is the first academic center to focus on the experiences of people from the Arab world who live in the United States. The national exhibit, which included the work of 17 artists with cultural and artistic links to the Arab World, was organized to promote cultural understanding and make a rich contribution to the mosaic of contemporary American art (Al-Tawil, “Bridging,” 3).

In addition to curating and organizing “Diversity in Harmony,” Al-Tawil participated in the exhibit with a number of artworks, including Baghdad (36” x 60” oil on canvas), Cairo (48” x 60” oil and mixed media on board), and Seville (48” x 50” acrylic and mixed media on board). These three pieces were named after three major centers known for masterpieces and monuments in Islamic art and architecture. The pieces featured traditional Islamic art elements, including Arabic script and calligraphy. On the use of Arabic calligraphy in his artwork, Al-Tawil says he tries to reconstruct mystical and spiritual feelings and presents them in a new environment and medium. He writes:

One of the most fascinating forms of artistic expression in the Arabic-Islamic culture is the art of calligraphy. The written word—with all its potential for meaning, symbolism, and transformation—engages my attention and presents both a challenge and source of inspiration. (Diversity, 4)

Choosing an academic setting for the exhibit was a result of Al-Tawil’s frustration “by the lack of professional settings available for contemporary Arab Artists in the United States” (Rogers, 45). Al-Tawil’s goal for curating the exhibit was also to demonstrate the range of the artists’ works as well as the importance of Arab-American artists in the contemporary American art world. The theme of the exhibit was a “commitment to freedom of artistic and political expression and respect for dignity of all human beings” (Diversity, 3).

One of Al-Tawil’s major public art projects was Sister Water (60” x 24” x 24”), a colorful ceramic sculpture pillar at Father Sulanos Casey Center, Detroit, Michigan. The sculpture depicts the four rivers of Paradise in glazed ceramic tiles, and incorporates Arabic calligraphy of verses from the Holy Qur’an that reference “water” as an essential creation of God and the source and cause for maintaining and conditioning life (“Local”).
From 1999 to 2005, Al-Tawil conducted many fieldwork and research projects in Syria, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, focusing on the areas of Islamic art and architecture and early Christian churches. He has written a number of articles and lectured about his research throughout the United States.

Al-Tawil also participated in “Re-Interpreting the Middle East: Beyond the Historical Stereotype,” an international print exchange portfolio of the work of 23 international artists. The portfolio commenced as a call for a thematic print exchange by Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Washington, D.C. (March 2005). Al-Tawil’s work for the print exchange exhibit was entitled *Iraqi Landscape*, a 16” x 20” print that combined etching, digital imaging, collage, and hand coloring. The piece was a presentation of the U.S. war in Iraq and its impact on the culture and the society of that country (*Re-Interpreting*) Al-Tawil has been working on *Restoring Iraqi Culture*, a project aimed at documenting the scope of loss and destruction inflicted on modern Iraqi art and the looted Iraqi culture after the U.S. invasion in 2003. He has written many articles on this topic and has given numerous lectures and presentations in the United States, Europe, and Jordan. On this topic he participated in “The Iraqi Equation,” an international symposium organized in Berlin in 2006. He won a Henry Ford Community College 2005-2006 Faculty Lectureship Award on this topic.

Al-Tawil has been accepted to participate in the National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar, which will be held at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, in the summer of 2007. The seminar is titled “Jews and Arabs in the Middle Ages: Interpretations and History.” In 2006, he wrote two articles for the traveling Iraqi Art exhibit “Dafater” at the University of North Texas. One of the articles was titled “Invasion, War, and Destruction of Cultural Memory: the Case of Modern Iraqi Public Monuments.” He also participated in the Second World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES-2) in 2006 in Amman, Jordan, presenting two papers.

Al-Tawil lives and works in Farmington Hills, Michigan, where he is a professor and chair of art history at Henry Ford Community College, and a lecturer of Islamic art and architecture at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Al-Tawil is the Associate Director of “The Pluralism Project” and director of education at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, an affiliate of the parent project at Harvard University since 1999.

He is also a member of the board of directors of the Asian and Islamic Art Forum at the Detroit Institute of Arts. He also serves as cultural consultant to many academic and community organizations. He has also established Hira Art Center in Detroit, Michigan, which houses his artwork and research projects.

**Resources**

Rogers, Sarah. “Arab Art: Beyond Dichotomies.” *Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts* 9, no. 45 (Fall 2003).

**Web Site and Places to See Al-Tawil’s Work**

Al-Rashid Hotel, Baghdad, Iraq.
Baghdad International Airport, Baghdad, Iraq.
Copenhagen Museum of Graphic Arts, Copenhagen, Netherlands.
Father Sulanos Casey Center, Detroit, Michigan.
“Hashim Al-Tawil” at Hira Art Center: http://www.hiraartcenter.com/.
Iraqi Fashion House, Baghdad, Iraq.
The Iraqi Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad, Iraq.
Jedda Museum, Jedda, Saudi Arabia.
McNamara Terminal, Detroit International Airport, Michigan.
Ministry of Information, Baghdad, Iraq.
Orfali Gallery, Amman, Jordan.
The Royal Collections, Amman, Jordan.
University of Michigan-Dearborn.

**Abderrahim Ambari** (b. 1971), Painter and Muralist

Abderrahim (Rahim) Ambari was born and raised in Sale, Morocco. Ambari began painting as a child, and after finishing his secondary education at Dar El Hikma Institute in Rabat, Morocco, he took some classes at a local art school where a teacher told him “just go out and start sketching and see the world” (Ambari, Personal Communications). He later studied under Moroccan painter F’tah Karman in Rabat, Morocco, for four years and was influenced by his work and the work of other Moroccan artists. Ambari also worked as a graphic artist for the Maghreb Presse Agency.

Ambari moved to the United States in 1998 after winning the “Green Card” lottery and settled in Seattle, Washington, after spending a few years in Washington, D.C. With no formal education in the arts, Ambari took art classes at North Seattle Community College and at the Seattle Academy of Fine Art in 2004. He is a self-taught painter and utilizes watercolor, oil, acrylic, and

Airbrush techniques. He paints landscapes and portraits of his homeland and its people, capturing the vibrant and colorful scenes of Morocco’s architecture and the life in the city’s market, the courtyards, and the sea.

A number of paintings in Ambari’s series of Moroccan landscape scenes depict doorways and portals, which are highly decorated with geometric patterns and motifs that are also found in Islamic architecture of North Africa and Spain. Ambari captures these motifs and patterns in many of his watercolor paintings, such as *Spanish Door* (2000), *Blue and Orange Door* (2005), and *Green Tile Door* (2005). Morocco is well-known for the traditional mosaic tile cutting technique called *ziliij*, which utilizes color tiles cut in different shapes to form stars and other colorful geometric patterns. Ambari captures this technique in some of his paintings, such as *The Inner Courtyard* (2005), and *Moroccan Motif Still Life* (2005).

Ambari has also painted landscape scenes of his new country. In a large oil painting (40” x 56”) named *Rabat/Seattle* (2005), he merged the landscapes of the city of Rabat, Morocco, with the reflection of Seattle, Washington, and the
landmarks of the city of New York. The sky of the painting shows a romantic scene of a man and a woman. About this painting, Ambari says:

This painting shows three port cities that are very important to me. The first one shows the main view of Rabat’s fortified old city, known as Les Oudayas, which I saw every day, across the bay from my hometown. While painting this from memory, I saw the reflection my new hometown, Seattle, in the water, and I painted it. Then in the distance, I painted the Statue of Liberty and the New York skyline. New York was my entry to the U.S., and I remember how excited I was to see it for the first time from the airplane. The figures in the sky of the painting are for a mother and a father who are watching us. The mother is more concerned for her children on Earth, but I think the father is more detached and worries only about her. (Ambari, Personal)

Ambari’s work has been exhibited in the United States and Morocco. His solo exhibitions include these venues: Hotel Du Park, Settat, Morocco, 1997; benefit for ImprovetheWorld.org, Alexandria, Virginia, 2000; Marx Cafe, Washington, D.C., 2001; and the Ballard Art Walk, Mr. Spots Chai House, Seattle, Washington, 2004. Ambari has also participated in a number of group exhibitions in Seattle, Washington, including: Ballard Art Walk, Dragon Fly Gallery, 2003; Shoreline Community College, 2003; Ballard Art Walk, Ballard Family Center, 2003; Art Not Terminal Gallery, 2005; and the Arab Festival, Seattle Center House, 2005.

Using airbrush and other techniques, Ambari created a number of public murals in the Seattle area. One of his murals depicts historic pictures of Native Americans going through Oroville’s Main Street to the powwow grounds at Lake Osoyoos on the Canadian border, located on Main Street Oroville, Washington. He also painted a number of murals in restaurants such as the Marx Café, Washington, D.C., Taki’s Mad Greek Restaurant in Seattle, Washington, the exterior for The Kasbah, a Moroccan restaurant in Seattle, Washington, and interior wall designs at The Ballroom, a bar and club in Seattle, Washington.

Ambari currently lives and works in Seattle, Washington.

Resources
Ambari, Abderrahim. Personal communications with Fayeq Oweis, December 2006.
“Arts Plastiques: Abderrahim Ambari Expose A Settat.” Al Bayan, June 1996

Web Sites and Places to See Ambari’s Work
Ghada Amer (b. 1963), Painter and Installation Artist

Ghada Amer was born in Cairo, Egypt, and spent most of her childhood and formative years in Libya, Morocco, and Algeria. At age 11, her family moved to France. Amer studied art at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Nice, France, receiving her Bachelor’s degree in 1986. In 1991, Amer received her Master’s from the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques in Paris, France. She also received additional training at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1987. She moved permanently to the United States in 1996, and she was artist-in-residence at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Amer was also artist-in-residence at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999.

Amer has exhibited her work extensively throughout the world, including the Kansas City Art Institute (2005); Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills, California (2004); Modern Art Institute, Valencia, Spain (2004); Whitney Biennial, New York (2000); P.S.1, New York (2000); Biennale de Lyon (2000); Kwangju Biennial, South Korea (2000); Venice Biennale (1999); Deitch Projects, New York (1999); and Johannesburg Biennial, South Africa (1997). She was also one of the first Arab artists to receive a one person exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel (2000). Amer is also a recipient of many awards and fellowships, including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant in New York (1997) and the UNESCO Award at the 48th edition of the Venice Biennial (1999). In 2004, she served on the master jury for the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the largest award of its kind in the world.

Amer is one of the most internationally recognized contemporary artists working with embroidered paintings. She works with embroidered canvases, textile installations, and sculptures. With her distinctive style of painting, in which she incorporates embroidered figures directly onto canvas, Amer addresses a number of issues, including feminism and the situation of women in both eastern and western cultures. She also explores gender stereotypes and historical and political issues including the relationship between East and West. In her “embroidered paintings,” Amer traces women from pornographic magazines and embroiders the figures in repetitive patterns onto painted canvases. Valerie Cassel, who curated Amer’s first solo exhibition in the United States at the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston (2000) wrote in a New York Times article:

Amer uses the language of painting—particularly of Abstract Expressionism, which was such a male-dominated movement—and subdues it, overpowers it, by sewing on top of it. She takes the nude female image performing in porn magazines and re-presents it, removing the coldness. When we see those images in her paintings, we feel as if we’ve accidentally walked into a woman’s boudoir, where she’s pleasing herself rather than looking at something primarily designed and distributed for a male eye. (Quoted in Sheets. “Stitch by Stitch”)
In 2000, Amer visited her native Egypt and came across a twelfth century book titled *Encyclopedia of Pleasure*, which talks about sexuality. She chose verses of the book that speak of women’s pleasure and created a large sculptural installation that incorporates painting and literary work. In the installation, which was shown at Deitch Projects in New York (2001), Amer took passages from the book and translated them into English and French and then embroidered them on canvases that covered 57 boxes that were displayed “stacked and scattered around the gallery like moving crates—summoning the idea of leaving an old home for a new one” (Sheets, “Stitch by Stitch”). On her selection of this book as a source for her artwork, Amer wrote:

I was interested in this book because it was written by a Muslim centuries ago, and is forbidden today, according to Muslim law. This shows how open-minded literature was at that time and how centuries later, we are living in a much more conservative time….This remarkable book was written by a man, and I was fascinated to read of women’s intimate pleasure from the perspective and analysis of a man….I have chosen to illustrate passages from this forbidden book as a protest against the loss of great freedom. (Frankel, “Ghada”)

In earlier installation work, Amer also combined text from the Qur’an with figures in an embroidered sculpture installation that was shown in Madrid, Spain (1998), and later at the Deitch Projects, New York. In her work, *Private Rooms* (1998), she embroidered French translations of verses of the Qur’an that speak about women onto a set of satin garment bags. Because of the sacred nature of the language of the Qur’an, Amer chose to use the French translation, not the original Arabic “to avoid any possible misunderstanding—her aim is not to breach anyone else’s code of conduct, but to translate across what are, at times, impossible boundaries” (Garnett, “Into Africa).

Despite her respect for the sacred nature of Qur’anic writing in Arabic, Amer is considered a controversial artist in Islamic tradition. Her work that included nude figures and sexual activities was criticized within Muslim communities. In an article in *Islam Online* magazine, Ali Dilshad comments on Amer’s work: “Much of her work is offensive to Muslims…Amer’s ideas are clouded by her Western education…The suggestive content of most of Amer’s work goes against the very nature of proper Islamic art…” (“Ghada Amer”).

In addition to Amer’s abstract canvases embroidered with erotic motifs, she is a multi-talented artist working with drawings, sculptures, installations, and garden designs. She participated in “Down the Garden Path: The Artist’s Garden After Modernism” at the Queens Museum of Art, Queens, New York (2005) with a garden design called *Happily Ever After* (2005). The wedding garden design, approximately five feet high, standing together in a 30-foot-diameter circle with a circular armature covered in flowers, and spelling out “Happily Ever After,” was later commissioned and installed at Sudeley Castle in England.
Amer currently lives and works in Harlem, New York. She is represented by Deitch Projects, New York, and Gagosian Galleries in England and the United States.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Amer’s Work

Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley, Massachusetts.

Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles, California.

Gagosian Gallery, New York.


Ghada Amer’s Web site: http://membres.lycos.fr/amerghada/.

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Minnesota.

Queens Museum of Art, Queens, New York.

The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky.

Heba Amin (b. 1980), Painter and Mixed Media Artist

Heba Amin is an oil-painter and a mixed media artist. She was born and raised in Cairo, Egypt, where she attended a private American high school. The “Americanized” upbringing that she received in Cairo came at the “expense of alienating her from the society she grew up in” (Dede, ASMA). In an interview about her early education in an American school, Amin explained:

My attending this school, however, put me in a unique situation of feeling distant from the Egyptian society and not being able to relate to the youth of Egypt. It made me feel as though I was an outsider in my own country;
I was very “Americanized.” After graduating from high school, I came to the US on my own to attend college (something that is unthinkable for most Egyptian girls) (Dede, ASMA).

Amin came to the United States in 1998 to attend college and study painting. In 2002, she received her B.A. in studio art with emphasis in oil painting from Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota. In 2005, Amin also enrolled in a one-year post-baccalaureate program at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. Amin’s work addresses her identity as a contemporary Arab and Muslim woman living in the United States and explores different aspects of Egyptian culture. She feels that her art and the urge to portray the beauty of Arab culture is a way to combat the media’s negative stereotypes of Arabs. As she explains, living in the United States has allowed her “to take the role of the outside observer” and has opened her eyes to elements of the rich Arab and Egyptian culture which she had “previously overlooked or taken for granted” (Amin, “Biography”).

The work of Amin using oil on canvas mostly depicts Bedouin and veiled women with decorative and colorful attire. Her themes center on the issues of identity, women in Egyptian society, modernization, and issues of western influence. In her work, Amin addresses problematic issues from both the Arab and Western standpoint. These issues include Western political involvement in the Middle East, the oppressive Arab regimes, and economic and social problems. Her purpose is to have a “dialogue to explore issues of conflict and misunderstanding to open a conversation about culture and progression of society” (Amin, “Artist’s”).

The bright colors that she uses in her paintings play a major role as a “tactic to instigate positive impressions about Arab culture” (Amin, “Biography”). This approach of showing portraits of veiled women in colorful attire invites the viewer to see them as beautiful as opposed to oppressed. One of her large (50” x 32”) oil and mixed media on canvas paintings, Bedouin Girl (2002), from a series of portraits depicting Bedouin women, shows a young girl dressed in traditional clothing that is very bright and colorful. In reviewing the art exhibit...
Heba Amin’s five paintings focus on Bedouin women from nomadic tribes in the Syrian, Arabian, Nubian and Sahara deserts. She combines contemporary aspects of life in the United States with others from Egyptian culture. Her subjects are painted in traditional clothing against geometric backgrounds or blurry Middle Eastern cityscapes. The women’s flowing robes create a stark contrast to the sharp angles of the background shapes, but the viewer gets no feeling of animosity from the urbanity that encroaches on the boundaries of the classic garb. 

(Minnesota Daily)

Amin’s recent work with veiled women who are juxtaposed with architectural, industrial, and geometric landscapes, started to morph and is taking on a different form and meaning that is not so recognizable or stereotypical to the Western eye. As she wrote, “they have lost their uniqueness and are presented as masses of forms crowded together, void of identity as they are being consumed by the city” (Amin, “Artist’s”). Another aspect of Arab and Egyptian culture that Amin depicts in her paintings is the Whirling Dervishes, the spinning rituals of Sufi dancers in Arabic and Islamic traditions. Bright colors also play a major role in these paintings. Her attraction to the Whirling Dervishes comes “from their meditative energy” (Dede, ASMA).

Amin has participated in a number of exhibitions, including a solo exhibit at Artwood Gallery, St. Cloud State University, Minnesota (2005), and in the following group exhibitions: “Prism of Longing” (2006) at the Phipps Center for the Arts, Hudson, Wisconsin; “Mideast-Midwest: A Tessellation of Artists” (2004) at Mira Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota; “Revealing Truths: Muslim Women Artists” (2003) at the Anne C. Fisher Gallery, Washington, D.C., and at Aramona Studio, New York; and “Arab Eye” (2002) at Babylon Art & Cultural Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The goal of the “Revealing Truths: Muslim
Women Artists’ exhibition was to “increase awareness of the work of contemporary women artists while challenging stereotypes of Muslim women as represented in the media” (Revealing). Amin is an active member and participant in Mizna and its events and exhibitions. Mizna is an organization in Minnesota that is dedicated to bringing Arab American arts to life, supporting the vision of Arab American artists, and reflecting a “depth, breadth and humanity of Arabs everywhere” (“About,” Mizna Web site). Mizna also publishes a journal that features prose, poetry, and visual art by Arab Americans.

In 2005, Amin also participated in “Haneen: Between Home and Homeland,” an art exhibit curated by Hend Al-Mansour. In Arabic, Haneen means “longing for the homeland.” The work of Amin is an educational tool that she uses to educate others about the culture of the Arab world. When asked about whether she classifies her paintings as Islamic art, she responded:

I want viewers to consider me as an Arab prior to associating me with a religion. Religion is a very personal thing, and people practice it in different ways. Not only that, but we tend to forget that many Arabs aren’t in fact Muslim, and I want my work to include these people as part of the Arab experience as well. Living in the U.S. has made me feel obligated to educate people about my culture. I do think it is important as an Arab/Muslim/Woman to voice my opinion and give my perspective. I also think I have a unique perspective that is quite different from the average Egyptian. (Dede, ASMA)

Amin currently lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and she continues to participate in events and art exhibitions that promote Arab culture and contemporary Arab women. She is also working on her MFA in Interactive Design at the University of Minnesota.

Resources
George Halim Awde was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to Lebanese-American parents. He grew up in a tight-knit Lebanese-American community and spent many years “struggling with issues of self identity” (Awde “Artist’s”). Awde attended the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston where he received a Bachelor’s of Fine Arts in painting in 2004. Awde is also the winner of three scholastic awards from the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, including the Gold Key Award (1997-1999). He was selected by faculty judges at the Massachusetts College of Art to display his work during two of their prestigious annual “Best Of” shows. In 2003, he traveled to Sanaa, Yemen, where he taught English as a second language at the Modern American Language Institute (MALI). While in Yemen, he also studied the classical Arabic language and the art of Arabic calligraphy. Through a series of trips to the Middle East, Awde was able to reconnect with his roots, because in his view he had previously “abandoned so much of my Arab identity” (Awde “Artist’s”).

Through his teenage years living in Boston, Awde was in conflict with his Lebanese heritage, which, according to him, clashed with his artist’s lifestyle. This issue of identity was a major factor in Awde’s turning to art to explore his roots as he began to identify with Arab culture. The events of September 11, 2001, made an impact on Awde: “It took a terrorist attack, verbal harassment, and a thought-provoking art assignment for Lebanese-American artist George Awde to decide to explore his Arab roots” (“An Artist,” AUB). In his artist’s statement, Awde wrote regarding this issue:

It wasn’t until the events of September 11, 2001, that I began to re-identify with a Lebanese and Arab identity. Our allegiance to the USA, as Arab-Americans, as well as our American identity, was being questioned because of the color of our skin, religion, or ethnic background. The first time I felt this was the day after the terrorist attacks when an older man accosted me on the street and yelled, “Go back to Iraq.” Being labeled as a non-American by my fellow Americans who now saw me as “foreign” made me feel angry and scared. I began to tackle these feelings of resentment and isolation through painting, which permitted me to reconnect to my roots and defy the idea that I had to be either American or Arab (Awde, “Artist’s”).
After his first trip to the Middle East, Awde held his first solo exhibit in 2004 at Deluxe Gallery in Boston, Massachusetts. The exhibit consisted of Awde’s work that explored the cultures and people of Yemen. When he returned to Lebanon, Awde held another solo exhibit at the UNESCO Palace in Beirut (2005), sponsored by the Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES) of the American University of Beirut (AUB). The exhibit, “Six Months in Sana’a: Questions of Identity, the Journey of an Arab-American,” included ten paintings using collages, oils, and ink on canvas. Half of the paintings explored the art of Arabic calligraphy, while the other half consisted of abstract paintings and mixed-media collages that were inspired by the people he met in Yemen (“An Artist,” AUB). The exhibit also included 18 photographs that focused on daily life in Sanaa. Awde’s work in this exhibit is a part of his journey throughout the Arab world with the focus on his time in Sanaa, Yemen. (Wilson-Goldie, *Daily Star*).

In addition to creating *Six Months in Sanaa* (2003-2004), a series of photographs and paintings, Awde also had an opportunity to experience the Arab world through dialogues with people he met in Yemen and elsewhere. He became aware that he was viewed as an American-Arab, as opposed to what he used to be labeled in the States, an Arab-American. Awde also created another body of work while in Lebanon, *Beirut Damascus Highway* (2004-2005). This work focused on chronicling his journey back and forth from Lebanon to Syria, in a time when the relationship between the two countries was in constant flux after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The theme of the series focuses on the struggle between the constantly changing societal norms in the region in contrast to valued traditions and customs.

Awde currently splits his time between Boston and Beirut. He continues his journey in exploring Arab culture and hopes that through his art he can reveal the human side of the Middle East to balance what is being presented in the American media, which focuses on the region’s wars, death, and politics. He is currently working on a number of projects including a series of photographs that explore the diversity of Beirut as a postmodern city. The project, administered at the Center for Behavioral Research at the American University of Beirut, is funded by the European Commission. He is also working on a
personal project that explores the male culture of Beirut beaches, focusing on
the “masculinities and the relationships between men” (Awde, “Personal”).
In another project, he is working on a series of portraits of Lebanese and
Persian-American families in the United States, and expanding the project to
focus on how these families return to their “other country” on vacation, busi-
ness, or to live. As Kaelen Wilson-Goldie wrote describing Awde’s feeling:
“George felt that he had been experiencing America as an Arab-American
but now he needed to experience the Arab world as an American” (Daily Star).

Resources

“An Artist Explores His Arab Roots.” AUB Bulletin Today 6, no. 6 (May 2005).
Awde, George. “Artist’s Statement.” Personal communications with Fayeq Oweis,
December 2005.
Awde, George. Personal communications with Fayeq Oweis, April 2006.
“Awde Art Show.” The Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies at the Ameri-
Artist George Awde Portrays Yemen’s Human Side.” Daily Star, April 6,
2005.

Web Sites and Places to See Awde’s Work


Halla Ayla (b. 1957), Mixed Media and Photography Artist

Halla Ayla was born in Baghdad, Iraq. In 1975, she left Lebanon, where she
grew up, and moved to Europe, where she lived for 15 years before moving
to the United States in 1991. Ayla was educated at the Sorbonne in Paris, the
American College in London, and Webster University, Geneva. While in
Europe, Ayla pursued her interest in art, fashion, design, and architecture.
With degrees in marketing and business, Ayla is a self-taught photographer.
She studied art with a variety of transfer artists such as Kathleen Carr and
Madeline de Joly. As a child growing up in Baghdad and Beirut, Ayla was
greatly influenced by the history, traditions, and cultures of the Arab world,
as well as the “local landscape dotted with dozens of ornate dome-shaped
mosques and minarets that shone and glimmered from near and far.” (Ayla,
“Biography”). A trip to the Middle East after an 18 year absence sparked a
deep desire in Ayla to share the “unique beauty and enchantment” of that land
with her fellow Americans.

Ayla’s work is a combination of photography, painting, and collage. She uses
a unique image transfer technique to combine multiple photographs and hand
paintings to create layered images that reveal the multiple textures of the
region and its ancient and fascinating history. As she describes in one of her
statements:
...my artwork begins as photographs which I take during my travels throughout the Arab world. I then apply a variety of techniques including Polaroid image transfers, wax, paints, pastels and collage to create layered images that represent the many layers of ancient history that influence the region, its culture and people. ("Land of Enchantment")

Ayla often works in series. Her Arab World Unveiled (2004-2007) is a seven-part series based on photographs from her journeys to Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as other parts of the Arab world. The first of these series is entitled The Magic of Morocco (2004), in which she captures images from daily life that depict traditional markets and street life, architecture, and the lives of ordinary people. The second part of the series is The Mysteries of Egypt (2005), based on photographs she took while in Egypt. This series includes images of mosques, pyramids, and other Pharoanic temples and unique architectural elements such as arches and portals, as well as images of the animals of the region: the camel, and the Arabian horse.

Ayla is greatly inspired by the fine art of Arabic calligraphy, and she takes photographs of ancient manuscripts or religious text such as the Qur’an and uses them as backgrounds for other photographs or paintings. For example, in one of her pieces, The Dreamer (2005), a hand painted image transfer photograph, Ayla juxtaposes an image of a veiled woman on an image of an ancient manuscript. In another image, Merlin in Egypt (2005), a white Arabian horse is juxtaposed with Arabic script in traditional calligraphic style. The use of manuscripts and text is purely aesthetic and may not necessarily have a connection with the meaning of the image.

Ayla’s work has been exhibited in the United States and Europe. In 1991 she showed her earlier abstract paintings at the Oasis Gallery in Savannah, Georgia. From 2004 to 2007, Ayla exhibited her Arab World Unveiled series at many venues in the San Francisco Bay Area, including: San Anselmo Inn, San Anselmo, California (2004-2006); Lehrer Gallery, Larkspur, California (2005);
In her art exhibit "Land of Enchantment" at the Arab Cultural and Community Center in San Francisco, Ayla presented work that focused on the history of the Arab world and its people as a way to combat stereotyping. In her statement for the exhibit, she wrote:

I have since returned to my Arab roots compelled by a desire to reconnect with my heritage and discover anew the land and culture that has formed me as a person and an artist. My work focuses on presenting images that are unique to the Arab world, its history, and its people. My interest lies in unveiling the distinct allure, color and beauty of the region’s fascinating and visually vibrant life and culture. As a carrier of images from east to west I hope that my works act as bridges, illuminating the richness and complexity of the Arab world, its ancient history and traditions, and revealing the more enchanting aspects of a much misunderstood region. ("Land of Enchantment")

Ayla is also an activist, championing the rights of women around the world, as well as a staunch advocate for peace and understanding between Arabs and Americans. She has worked in areas of women’s empowerment with a non-profit organization based in Washington called Women for Women International, whose work helps women in war-torn countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and others. In 2003, she co-produced an event called “Building Bridges of Compassion: A Bay Area Benefit for Women in Iraq,” and she has produced several other fundraisers for 9/11 victims, Afghans, and Palestinians. She has appeared on numerous occasions on radio and television to shed greater light on the Arab world. She appeared on ABC’s Good Morning America to talk about her work with Women for Women International. Ayla currently lives and works in Northern
California, where she is continuing to work on the *Arab World Unveiled* series as well as a book on her travels to the Arab world.

**Resources**


“From the Bay Area to Baghdad: Building Bridges of Compassion.” *Outreach* 11, no. 4 (January 2005).


**Web Sites and Places to See Ayla’s Work**


Nahda Alsalah Balaa was born in Beirut, Lebanon. Before coming to the United States in 1981, Balaa studied Fine Art at Fleming College in Florence, Italy, from 1976 to 1978. She has done extensive traveling in Europe and the Middle East and moved to the United States in 1981. Then in 1990, she settled with her husband in San Jose, California. Balaa’s background includes publishing a number of books under her maiden name, Nahda Salah, printed through her father’s publishing house IPA in Altamonte Springs, Florida. These books include Costumes and Customs from the Arab World (1979), which featured Balaa’s great-grandmother on the cover, and another book, One Thousand and One Delights Cookbook (1975), in both English and Arabic, which contains recipes of the Middle East.

Drawn to the work of Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, and Paul Cezanne, Balaa says she doesn’t go to the masters for inspiration, but she breathes through her art (Ernst). Inspired by the landscape and architecture of France, Italy, Spain, and California, Balaa creates vibrant watercolor paintings on silk and on canvas. After moving to the United States, Balaa started painting on silk, producing the same vibrant colors that she painted on paper. Vibrant colors are seen in every painting that Balaa does. As she writes: “colors are the reflection of my soul. My art is a result of inspiration escorting a brush saturated with a rainbow of colors” (Balaa, “Biography”).

Often works in series, Balaa’s watercolor paintings include gardens of California, cafes and sidewalks of France, views of Greece, Mediterranean villages and street scenes of Italy, Spanish homes and gardens of Mexico, and the arches of Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. In her Alhambra series (1999), Balaa captured the fine details of the geometric patterns and Arabesque that adorn the walls and arches of Alhambra Palace, one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture in the world.

In her series Old Doors with Calligraphy (2001), Balaa painted old doors inspired by Arabic and Islamic art and architecture. Each watercolor painting (18 x 24”) included an inscription of a prayer or a Qur’anic verse in beautiful Arabic calligraphy style, placed above each door. One painting, for example, included a common verse from the Qur’an that inspires people to seek knowledge. The placement of the verse “God increase my knowledge” above a
closed door suggests the desire to open the door of knowledge. In another painting, Balaa used another inscription, “You who open the doors for us,” which is a common prayer that is used in Arab culture asking God for guidance and inspiration.

Balaa has developed her own silk techniques, working directly on a plain piece of silk with silk dyes using a brush and a blow dryer. This technique has been a challenge: “Taming the silk, while maintaining its vibrancy is a challenge that has paid well in invigorating spectacles” (Balaa, “Biography”). Her silk designs include scenes of places that she has visited and also include “feminine-looking flowers in bright, stained glass colors” (Luter, Northeast Suburban).

Balaa has had a number of solo and group exhibits throughout California, Europe, and the Middle East. Her work has received great acclaim in the United States and internationally. She has been participating in the Almaden Valley art show in San Jose, California, for a number of years. She has received many awards for her art, including the Blue Ribbon for best artist at the Almaden Valley art shows (1997, 1999, 2003, and 2005). Balaa has also participated in many events at local colleges and universities as part of Middle Eastern Heritage and cultural celebrations. A significant number of her art pieces have been commissioned by hotel decorators, and a number of her paintings are among the collections of several Royal palaces in Saudi Arabia.

In January 2004, Balaa was diagnosed with breast cancer and has “embraced her battle with gentility, humor and grace” (Ernst). This battle with cancer has not stopped Balaa from painting or changed the vibrant colors that she uses in her paintings. She completed two series of paintings: Fountains From Around the
Red represents life and happiness... Just as I spray the roses every year, I had to get chemotherapy. The body needs care and maintenance, just as flowers do... A common perception of art produced during such times is that the subject matter becomes melancholic, and the colors become muted and muddy. My art was not affected by suffering. The colors became more alive; the art had more texture and more red and more happiness. Painting in such a way allows me to educate others about cancer. I’ll talk about it anywhere; this journey never ends.
The two series that Balaa completed after she was diagnosed with breast cancer were released at the Saratoga Rotary Art Show, Saratoga, California. These series were dedicated to the Breast Cancer Research foundation. As Balaa explains, each piece has a story to tell about the “Beautiful Colors of Breast Cancer” (Balaa, “Personal”). In one painting, *Une Femme (A woman)*, a female character named Sabietta emerges from a bouquet of roses and surrounded with Jasmine, the symbol of perfume. Balaa explains that as the minute Sabietta emerges out to life, “she takes a whiff of the Jasmine in front of her, and she comes to life, then her dress drops and hangs on her breast. Sabietta is alive and she will tell her story through art” (Balaa, “Personal”).

Balaa currently resides in San Jose, California, where she continues to paint and participate in events that promote the understanding of Arab culture. She has also opened her home and hosted many events promoting art, music, and culture, especially those organized by Zawaya, a local organization dedicated to promoting Arab culture and arts.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Balaa’s Work**


Studio Forty Two Gallery, Los Gatos, California.

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**Lily Bandak** *(b. 1950), Photography Artist*

Lily Bandak was born in Amman, Jordan, to a family from Bethlehem. Bandak points out that her late father was born in Bethlehem on December 25, that his name was Jesus—*Eesa* in Arabic—that he was a carpenter, and that his
mother’s name was Mary—**Miriam** in Arabic (Orfalea). Bandak is a world renowned photographer. She received an education at the Academie De La Grande Chaunier in Paris, France. In 1960, she moved to the United States and received a fine arts degree in photography from the Philadelphia College of Art. Bandak has also received training at the University of Delaware and the Antonelli College of Photography in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Bandak was invited in 1978 by the government of Egypt to document Egyptian culture by photographing its people and monuments. After completing the project, Bandak exhibited her photographs in Egypt and all over the United States. The photographs included the major monuments of Egypt, including the pyramids, and the Islamic architecture of Cairo, such as **Ibn Touloun Mosque** and **El-Quala’a Mosque**. Bandak’s photographs were later compiled into a book called *Images of Egypt*. One of the exhibits of Bandak’s photographs of Egypt was held at the Egyptian embassy in Washington, D.C. The White House director of photography saw the exhibit and invited her to present Mrs. Jimmy Carter with a picture. During the Carter administration, several of Bandak’s photos were accepted into the permanent collection at the White House.

In the early 1980s, Bandak’s career as a professional photographer was in full swing. She became the personal photographer of Mrs. Anwar Sadat, the former first lady of Egypt, whom she met during the Camp David peace talks between Egypt and Israel. Bandak was also the personal photographer of late King Hussein and Queen Noor of Jordan. During her visits to the Middle East, Bandak also photographed major public figures including the late Yasser Arafat of Palestine, Beirut, 1981; the famous Lebanese singer Sabah, Cairo, 1980; and the prominent Egyptian writer, newspaper editor, and political analyst Mohammed Hassanein Haikal, Cairo, 1980. In 1983 Bandak started the photojournalism department at Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, where she also taught for a year.

In 1984, Bandak was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and stopped working due to her physical disability. Through vocational rehabilitation, a federal program that helps persons with disabilities return to work, Bandak was able to receive a wheelchair camera mount and resume her career. Bandak was featured in a video documentary that showcased people with disabilities who have been able to return to the workforce through the help of assistive technology. As described in the promotional materials of the video:

> A decade later, she realized she could return to work with the aid of assistive technology. She acquired a specialized wheelchair and camera mount, and designed modifications to her camera that afforded her complete access to the tools of her trade. She is again producing photographic artistry both here and abroad and has also established the Bandak Foundation. (‘’Video’’)

The Bandak Foundation was established in 1994 to encourage people with disabilities to enter into the work force and integrate into society. Through the foundation, Bandak’s first project was exhibiting her photographs at the Capital Children’s Museum in Washington, D.C. In addition to Bandak’s new
photographs of the Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon, and Bahrain) that she took from her wheelchair-mounted camera in 1995, the exhibit also featured a collection of artifacts reflecting the art and culture of the region. Through her photographs that feature the people and their land, Bandak “hopes to introduce aspects of the Middle East that are little appreciated by many people in the United States” (“Biography”). The photographs of Bandak featuring the people and the land of the Arab world capture the daily life of simple and ordinary people. They feature women in traditional dresses of Jordan taken in front of Petra (1996), dresses of Bethlehem in the Shepherd’s field (1996), and dresses of Lebanon at Beit el Dein (1997).

Bandak’s work has been exhibited in many venues in the United States and the Arab world including those at the World Trade Center and the California Museum of Science and Industry. In 1996, Bandak participated in the “Very Special Arts and Cultural Paralympiad Exhibit” in Atlanta, Georgia, where she exhibited her photographs of the Arab world (Ameri, 242). Bandak has also held an exhibition under the patronage of Queen Noor of Jordan, and another exhibition in Lebanon under the patronage of the Hariri Foundation. In 1997, Bandak’s work was exhibited at the University of Delaware.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Bandak’s Work**


The Bandak Foundation: http://copland.udel.edu/~bandak/.


**Khalil Bendib (b. 1956), Sculptor, Ceramicist, and Cartoonist**

An internationally-renowned artist known for his large-scale sculptures, Khalil Bendib is also acknowledged as an award-winning cartoonist and the most visible Muslim/Arab artist working today in the United States. Bendib was born in Paris to war-refugee Algerian parents. His family fled Algeria during the revolution against French colonial rule. The family then moved to Morocco,
and when Bendib was 6 years old, the family returned to Algeria. Bendib comes from a long line of Andalusian-style painters, stretching back through generations of his family. He first learned to paint from his uncle, Mustapha Maiza, a well-known ceramic artist in Algeria. Eager to continue his studies, Bendib went on to attend the Beaux Arts school of Algiers, working under the acclaimed painter Mohammed Temmam, where he received his Bachelor’s degree in 1973.

Growing up in Morocco and Algeria had a major impact on Bendib’s art. When he was asked about how his upbringing influenced his art, he said:

Being from North Africa, I was influenced by all the fantastic art and architecture that was all around me, and it is the abundance of colors, flavors, aromas plus the scathing sense of humor that jaundiced eye that pervades our Maghrebi societies, that have always been the source and inspiration for everything I have ever done, whether it be cartoons, the sculpture or the ceramics that I continually produce (“Limelight,” 15)

In 1977, Bendib moved to the United States, where he continued his art education, earning a Master’s degree from the University of Southern California in 1982. After graduation, he proceeded to become both a political cartoonist and a professional sculptor/ceramicist. In 1987, he worked as an editorial cartoonist with the Gannett Newspapers, at the San Bernardino Sun, in Southern California. He later resigned this position to devote himself entirely to his career in the fine arts.

Bendib completed his first public monument in 1994, honoring the regional director of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Palestinian-American civil-rights leader Alex Odeh, who was assassinated in his Los Angeles office in 1985. The over-size bronze memorial statue depicts Odeh in a robe holding a book and a dove. The memorial is located at Orange County’s seat of government, outside the main library of Santa Ana, California. The statue has been the target of defacing, vandalism, and a number of hate crimes. In 1997, the statue was defaced by gallons of red paint (Pasquini, 55).

Among his other public artworks are Ode to Diamond Bar, a nine-foot leaping bronze cougar at the Summit Ridge public park in Diamond Bar, a suburb of
Los Angeles, and *Deir Yassin Remembered*, at the Hobart and Smith Colleges in Upstate New York, which consists of a bronze on granite memorial sculpture depicting an uprooted olive tree. About the Deir Yassin memorial, Daniel McGowan, a professor at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and the Executive Director of Deir Yassin memorial project, said: “‘We are dedicating the first memorial in the United States in remembrance of the victims of the massacre, which occurred on April 9, 1948, at Deir Yassin, a Palestinian village on the west side of Jerusalem” (“Dedication”).

Bendib’s other sculptures include *The Spirit of GAIA*, four 42” bronze wall sculptures for the GAIA building north facade, downtown Berkeley, and *The Edwin E. Lennette Memorial Bust* at the California Department of Health Services in Richmond, California, honoring famed microbiologist Edwin H. Lennette’s legacy.

In 2003, Bendib, with photographic artist Said Nuseibeh and Fayeq Oweis, designed, painted, and lead a community mural project for the Arab Cultural and Community Center in San Francisco. Measuring 54 feet wide by 30 feet high, the mural is located on a façade that faces Market Street in downtown San Francisco. The mural, the first of its kind in the United States that celebrates Arabic and Islamic culture, consists of a garden scene with mirroring irrigation pools, inspired by the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain, and arcades that included Arabic calligraphy, horseshoe arches, arabesque motifs, and geometric patterns (Oweis, 49).

He has created a number of sculptures that reflect his North African Muslim heritage. One particularly impressive piece depicts the seventh century Jewish Berber warrior Dihya al-Kahina, still a national heroine in Algeria today (Pasquini, 55). About the sculpture of this legendary Berber queen of Algeria, Bendib says:

> Queen Kahina was the leader of the Berbers, and she was Jewish. Her name comes from the same root as “Cohen,” meaning “priestess” in her case. The sculpture shows a side of history, the intersection of Jewishness and Arabness. (Vance)

Most of Bendib’s sculptures and ceramic work are privately collected. Among his recent work is an over-size sculpture of a traditional Algerian woman making couscous, a well-known North African dish. The majority of his artwork is political, but it is also intensely personal, with most of his paintings and non-commissioned sculptures and ceramic works focusing on his Middle Eastern culture.

Bendib was also artist-in-residence at the Legion of Honor Museum of Art in San Francisco, in the Rodin Gallery, in 2002. He held a number of solo exhibits around the country, including an exhibit titled “Dreams and Mirages” at the Persian Center in Berkeley (2001). He has also participated in a number of group exhibits including “Re-collections: Stories of the Middle-East,” at the Richmond Health Center (2003-2004), and “Somewhere Elsewhere,” at the Worth Ryder Gallery on the campus of the University of Berkeley, California (2004), among many others.
In the group exhibit “Somewhere Elsewhere,” Bendib displayed a four-foot tall sculpture he named Gas Christ showing a hooded Jesus Christ resembling the infamous photo of the Iraqi prisoner from the Abu Ghraib prison. In his statement for the exhibit, Bendib mentioned that the sculpture is a statement on the “ongoing re-conquest of Arab lands by a new wave of Western ‘civilizers’ coming—once again—to bring Democracy and Freedom into the heart of darkness” (Somewhere Elsewhere).

As previously mentioned, in addition to sculpting, painting, and ceramic work, Bendib is an accomplished cartoonist “who sold his first cartoon to an Algerian newspaper at age 15” (Pasquini, 55). He worked as a political cartoonist with the Gannett Newspaper chain for several years. Even though many U.S. publications will not carry his Middle East-related political cartoons, he was able to publish in as many as 1,400 small and mid-sized newspapers in the United States, as well as in The Black Commentator, among other ethnic publications and Web sites. In 2003, he published a collection of his political cartoons in a book titled It Became Necessary to Destroy the Planet in Order to Save It. In reviewing Bendib’s book, artist and writer Doris Bittar wrote:

The most refreshing thing about Khalil Bendib’s slightly over-burdened cartoons is his irreverent and unapologetic play with taboo subjects and icons that are rarely tackled in Western culture. (33)

Another book of his cartoons was also published in French, titled: Mieux Vaut Empire qu’en Pleurer, or “Better to Laugh about it than to Cry.” Bendib currently lives and works in Berkeley, California. He continues his community activism and his co-hosting of a program called “Voices of the Middle East and North Africa” at KPFA, a progressive Northern California radio station.

Resources


Haifa Bint-Kadi (b. 1958), Mosaic and Glass Artist

Haifa Bint-Kadi is a classically trained and nationally exhibited mosaic and glass artist. Born in Mt. Holly, New Jersey, and of Palestinian heritage, she spent most of her life in New York City and Philadelphia. She is a devoted Muslim Sufi who has been wearing the Hijab “veil” since her childhood. On her childhood experience as a veiled Muslim schoolgirl, she recalls:

Even though I was born in America, teachers generally knew that I was a first generation American, an Arab, and I was often cast as the “other,” so I became marginalized and withdrew into a world of my own making. I wrote poetry, made 8-mm films on a home movie camera and I painted. I did a lot of mixed-media collage to speak out and resist the oppression I found around me. (Browning)

Bint-Kadi holds a B.A. degree in film studies from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, and an M.F.A. in mosaic arts from Instituto d’Arte per il Mosaico di Ravenna (the Ravenna School of Art) in Italy. She combines contemporary, Islamic, and Byzantine styles in her mosaics and glass art. Her mosaic and glass artwork focus on the following themes: activism/social justice, peace/conflict resolution, race/ethnicity/cultural identity, history, and religion/spirituality. In her blog at the Association of Teaching Artists, Bint-Kadi describes her mosaic work as traditional in the sense that color, form, function, order, and durability are combined, but juxtaposed as the reflective, unique quality
of each individual tesserae against the assimilation of that small piece into the whole image (Bint-Kadi, “Teaching”).

One of the community projects that Bint-Kadi worked on was a Jewish/Muslim mosaic project in which Muslim and Jewish participants collaborated on a mosaic to “further dialogue, mutual respect for each other’s faiths and peace” (Bint-Kadi “Artist”). For this project, Bint-Kadi researched the model of coexistence in medieval Spain. In Andalusia, as Spain was called, Muslims and Jews maintained their cultural and religious traditions while sharing their knowledge and scholarship. Peaceful coexistence was based not just on mutual tolerance, but on actual celebration and appreciation for what each culture had to offer the other.

In 2004, Bint-Kadi organized and curated an exhibit of Palestinian arts and crafts in White Plains, New York, to raise funds to help bring the “Made in Palestine” exhibit from Houston to New York. New York Democratic Assemblyman Ryan Karben issued a press release calling for the cancellation of the exhibit, which was scheduled for a one-day display in a building owned by Westchester County, New York. His claim was that the exhibit “is anti-Israel and promotes terrorism and violence” (So Much, AAI Web Site). Bint-Kadi denied those accusations and was disappointed that Karben would “make something divisive out of this, when what we’re trying to do is get people to know one another rather than do harm to one another” (“So Much”). Despite all the negative media attention given to the exhibit, the event was very successful:

...it was a wonderful introduction to Palestinian culture for the local community. It was also the beginning of a very crucial dialogue that needs to happen between the Jewish Community and the Palestinian Community in Westchester County. (Khader)

Bint-Kadi also participated in a public art program by Westchester Arts Council in White Plains, New York, called Before & After: Imagining Public Art in Westchester. She also joined other artists from Palestine, the Arab world, Iran, and the United States in an exhibit called “Representation & Misrepresentation,” marking the 22nd anniversary of the massacre of Palestinian refugees in the camps of Sabra and Shatila in Lebanon in 1982.

Bint-Kadi’s public art commissions include an 11’ x 8’ mosaic mural fabrication of an ancient map of the Hudson River for the Peekskill Riverfront Green in the City of Peekskill, New York (2005). Another commission was Muletide Reflections, a public art installation in Allentown Courthouse, Pennsylvania (2003). She also created a September 11 Memorial for the City of Yonkers, New York. In September 2005, Bint-Kadi’s public art mosaics and mural at Cottage Gardens Public Housing in Yonkers, New York, were featured in the New York Times.

In the summer of 2005, Bint-Kadi worked as a public artist with Groundworks USA, a program that was initiated by the National Parks Service in 1996 to improve blighted urban areas and transform abandoned industrial sites into recreational areas. Bint-Kadi wrote about this experience:
My work as a public artist with Groundworks allows me to go into communities and really form relationships. We decide together what kind of public art is needed and often all ages are working together on the art piece. My overall theme is connections. I use public art to help people see how we are connected to each other and the environment and mosaic is a wonderful medium to do that. (Bint-Kadi “Teaching”)

As a community activist and a board member of the WESPAC Foundation, a peace and justice action network in Westchester County, Bint-Kadi continues to create artwork that promotes peace, justice, and tolerance. With artists such as Samia Halaby and others, Bint-Kadi worked hard to bring the “Made in Palestine” exhibit to New York. She is a teaching artist with the Westchester Arts Council, Cityloire, and the Hudson River Museum, where most of her residencies are in public schools. She also teaches art classes at Alwan, a non-profit organization that promotes the arts and culture of Iran and the Arab world.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Bint-Kadi’s Work**


Cottage Gardens Public Housing in Yonkers, New York.

Fifth and Hamilton Streets, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Map of the Hudson River at the Riverfront Green, City of Peekskill, New York.

Metro North Train Station, City of Peekskill, New York.

**Doris Bittar (b. 1959), Painter and Mixed Media Artist**

Doris Bittar was born in Baghdad, Iraq, to Lebanese/Palestinian parents. Before coming to the United States at the age of six years old, Bittar spent her
childhood in Beirut, Lebanon. Her memories of Lebanon were rich with colorful patterns, from Oriental rugs to her mother’s embroidery. These memories and her multiple identities have affected much of her artwork.

Bittar received her B.F.A. from State University of New York at Purchase in 1981. Her first solo exhibit at the Alternative Museum in New York came after she received her M.A. in fine arts in 1993 from the University of California at San Diego. In 1995, she won a yearlong fellowship at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. She has participated in group exhibitions throughout the United States, Europe, and Mexico. Bittar was also a recipient of the California Arts Council Fellowship.

Bittar’s work thematically explores Arab-Jewish relations, the legacy of colonialism, and the experience of immigration and exile. She had created a number of series dealing with such issues: Orientalism, People of the Book, The Wandering Ishmael, Lebanese Linen, Semites, and Stripes & Stars.

In her oil on canvas painting called Watching Jacob from the People of the Book series (1992-1998), Bittar takes the elements found in Jacob Wrestling with the Angels, a painting by French painter Eugene Delacroix (1798–1863), and reconstructs them in a way that the image of the Arab is a central part of the scene rather than being alienated or disinterested (Nashashibi, 176). The painting is superimposed with a verse from an Arabic poem: “he who denies his face shall be renounced by all the birds of paradise.” In her interview with Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, Bittar, who is married to a Jew, describes this work as being motivated by her own experience of “being part of a Jewish culture and at the same time excluded” (Nashashibi, 177). She wanted to express that the Jews should not deny their link to the Arabs.

Bittar’s Lebanese Linen series was inspired by the story of one of her aunts who brought ten yards of white linen with her when she emigrated from Lebanon to use for a marriage dress. The linen was given instead to Bittar to paint on. Bittar used this linen to create a series of paintings showing family life in Lebanon.

The People of the Book series continued and became the story of Ishmael in the second part of the series, the Wandering Ishmael (2000-2005). Ishmael is the son of Abraham, and the term Ishmaelite is sometimes used to describe the Arabs. The work in this series details the reality of forced migrations and
immigration of Arabs throughout Europe and the United States. The paintings use a moving panel which “signifies travel more than the muting of voice” (Bittar).

The *Wandering Ishmael* series, consisting of 27 oil paintings, was exhibited at the David Zapf Gallery in San Diego, California (2000). In reviewing the exhibit, Manal Swairjo writes:

> By combining the old phrase “The Wandering Jew” with Ishmael’s name, Bittar evokes the forced journeys and migrations of Arabs in recent history. The point is not to narrate a nation or people’s history, but to tell a personal history in a way that reaches beyond the artist and the events of her life. (Swairjo, 24)

In other reviews, the paintings were described as products of a thoughtful and searching sensibility that makes the autobiographical accessible.

Bittar’s work combines delicate patterns with narratives. Using pastel, charcoal, and oil, she works on linen, paper, and canvas. Often crossing through Arab and American culture, Bittar’s work beautifully expresses the diversity and similarities between cultures. The events of September 11, 2001, prompted Bittar to create the series *Stars and Stripes*, where she combines two icons—the American flag and Islamic patterns—to create “hybrid” images. The paintings are based on the interaction between symbolic, patterned, and non-figurative references that investigate culture, nationalism, and identity. Islamic geometric patterns, floral motifs, “Arabesque,” and Arabic calligraphic compositions were layered over the waving American flag. When Bittar participated in the exhibit “Somewhere Elsewhere” (2004), she wrote in her artist’s statement:

> Now three years later I find myself noting that I have mingled the most profusely and elaborately patterned flag in the world with the most profusely and elaborately patterned culture in the world. However, the continuity between these two cultures extends further than the glib visual pun just offered. Both cultures share a profound respect for ethno-diversity and a confidence that dynamic synergy results from an embrace of diversity. (Somewhere)

For her series *Semites*, Bittar collected narratives from American Jews, Israelis, Palestinian Americans, and Arab Americans. The life-size installations were created in two layers two feet apart. The narrative text on sheer fabric was hung two feet in front of portraits that were done in pastel and charcoal on paper. Some of the installations also provided dialogues. One of the narratives was of a girl named Manal. The portrait of Manal in jogging shorts is behind what she had narrated to Bittar:

> On a recent visit to Kuwait, my mother noticed that I had tan marks on my thighs. I told her that I went jogging every day during lunch time at a nearby park. Her brows wrinkled: “Aren’t you afraid that people will
see you?” I reassured her that no one was over there. “But God sees you. Aren’t you afraid of God?” She was intent on shaming me. I paused. “I am fully naked when I shower. God sees me there, too!” (Bittar)

For the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Bittar participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. In her series Kul Shay, or “All Things,” an ongoing project, Bittar takes photographs of her childhood, family members, and the ones she takes on her travels to the Middle East, and combines them in her paintings. In her artist’s statement, Bittar describes this series as an expression of “an unfolding catalogue of rich personal experiences that articulate my Arabic inheritance” (In/Visible, 34). In March 2007, Bittar held a solo exhibition at the Oceanside Museum of Art in San Diego, California. The exhibit, “Jasour wa Kasour: The Art of Doris Bittar, 1989-2007” (translated as “Bridges and Chasms”), included selected work from the past two decades.

Some of Bittar’s activities and endeavors include facilitating Jewish-Palestinian dialogue groups, serving as an education chair of the San Diego chapter of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and giving presentations about Arabic/Islamic art and culture. She currently lectures at the University of California at San Diego and San Diego State University, and frequently publishes her art work and essays in the Los Angeles based magazine, Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts

Resources


Web Site and Places to See Bittar’s Work

The California Center for the Arts, Escondido, California.
California Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.
David Zapf Gallery, San Diego, La Jolla, California.
San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego, California.

Kamal Boullata (b. 1942), Painter, Printmaker, and Calligraphy Artist

Kamal Boullata was born in Jerusalem, where he also grew up. During his childhood in Jerusalem, Boullata studied painting and drawing in the studio of Khalil Halaby, a well-known Palestinian artist in the old city of Jerusalem. In the late 1950s, Boullata was sent by the Jordanian government on an art scholarship to Europe. He studied at the Accademia di Belle Arte (Fine Arts Academy) in Rome, Italy. In the middle 1960s, Boullata and a few other young Palestinian artists exhibited their work in Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Amman. That period “marked a general art awareness” in Palestine and Jordan (Zaru, 238). After the 1967 war, Boullata and his family were forced to leave Jerusalem, and he immigrated to the United States, where he continued his art studies at the Corcoran Museum School of Art in Washington, D.C.

In 1982, Boullata was a program director for the Arab American Cultural Foundation in Washington, D.C., and a curator for the newly established Alif Gallery, the first gallery dedicated to contemporary Arab art in the United States. The gallery closed in 1992 due to lack of funding. While in Washington, D.C., Boullata taught courses on Arab art and culture at Georgetown University, and in 1993 he was awarded a Fulbright Senior Scholarship to conduct research on Islamic art in Morocco. After the two years of Fulbright-sponsored research in Islamic art and geometric patterns, Boullata held a major exhibit called “Duets, Quartets and a Triangle” (1994) at Darat al-Funun in Amman, Jordan.

Boullata is considered one of the pioneers of contemporary Arabic and Islamic art. His geometric abstraction is a link between Western and Islamic traditions. As he writes: “The neutral language of geometry becomes the bridge between the two visual sensibilities of my world” (Ajami). Boullata works mainly in silk screen, using calligraphic and geometric compositions that are based on the angular Arabic script called Kufi. Through the use of the Kufi style, Boullata creates geometric patterns based on the square, which is common in Islamic art and architecture. Boullata has his own theory on the roots of Arabic calligraphy and its relation to geometry and Islamic art. Boullata’s work “goes to the linguistic and symbolic root of calligraphy.” His theory is that geometric patterns and Arabesque found in Islamic art and architecture is a “geometric
development of Arabic letter forms; the structures of letters provide the basis for its vegetal and floral motifs” (Khatibi, 230).

The work of Boullata exhibits the main features of Islamic art, including symmetry, repetition, stylization, and the use of Arabic script. Boullata’s connection to Arabic and Islamic heritage through his geometric work can be summarized in his own words: “Arab culture has always been related to words. The word is the only portable tool of expression; nomadic people always express themselves best orally (Burnham). As Mirene Ghossein wrote, Boullata’s work also includes “the reference to religious symbols, the use of the word, instead of images, to convey information and ultimately, a new evaluation of the aesthetic qualities of the Arabic alphabet” (43). The geometric interpretation and compositions of Boullata are based on his memory of Jerusalem and its monuments, which he could not visit for 18 years. As he wrote:

...all my work seems to have been done with Jerusalem seen through the mind’s eye. Connections emerged between the presence of contemporary works I saw in the Western metropolis and the memory of the geometric art I have seen within the walls of Jerusalem. Centuries ago the same language of geometry was employed in my culture of origin. (Ajami)

The work of Boullata was featured in many books and publications, including a book by Israeli art historian Gannit Ankori (Palestinian Art, Reaktion Books, 2006), where she devoted an entire chapter to Boullata’s artwork. A statement issued by the League of Palestinian Artists in Ramallah, Palestine, accused Ankori of plagiarism, falsifications, and misrepresentation of sources, and claimed that her thesis was based on Boullata’s research and writings.

Boullata has had a number of solo and group exhibits throughout North America, Europe, and the Middle East. His solo exhibitions include: Hobbart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York (1990); Alif Gallery, Washington, D.C. (1991); Darat al Funun Gallery, Amman, Jordan (1994); Patronato de la Alhambra y del Generalife, Granada, Spain (1998); Galerie Claude Lemand,
Paris, France (1999); and Musée du Château Dufresne, Montreal, Canada (2002). Boullata also participated in a large number of group exhibitions throughout the world.

The early work of Boullata included logos and identity designs for many organizations, including the National Association of Arab Americans, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, the Palestine Human Rights Campaign, and the Palestine Congress of North America, among many others. He was an art director for a number of publications, including Arab Perspectives, a well-known publication during the 1980s published by the Arab Information Center in New York.


In his book Twelve Lanterns for Granada (1996), Boullata created 12 silkscreen prints that originated from architectural features of the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. In reviewing Boullata’s work, Jocelyn Ajami writes:

> The field of color of the twelve silkscreen prints mirrors the role played by the Alhambra’s mosaic ceramic tiles that contrast the engraved texture of the Arabic verses on Alhambra’s walls. The underlying structure governing each print is based on a geometric principle of symmetrical and repetitive relations that generated many of the patterns found in Alhambra’s tiles. The prints reflect a vocabulary of diagonal and vertical lines that intersect in opposite or alternating orders within the square.

In 1984, Boullata was allowed to visit Palestine and Jerusalem and exhibited his work in Ramallah, Palestine. An award-winning documentary titled Stranger at Home (1985) was produced in the Netherlands, documenting his visit to Jerusalem and his feelings upon seeing the city after 18 years of being denied a visa. Boullata moved to France in 1997 and currently lives and works in Menton in Southern France.

**Resources**


Ghossein, Mirene. “Five Arab Artists.” *Arab Perspectives* 1, no. 3 (June 1980).


### Web Sites and Places to See Boullata’s Work

Birzeit University Museum, Birzeit—Ramallah, Palestine.

The British Museum, London.

Darat al Funun, Khalid Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan.

Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute), Paris, France.

Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan.

“Kamal Boullata” at Sakakini Cultural Center: http://www.sakakini.org/.


Museum of Contemporary Arab Art, Doha, Qatar.

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.


Sakakini Cultural Center, Ramallah, Palestine.

Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey.
Huguette Caland was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon. She is the daughter of Bishara Khoury, Lebanon’s first president after it gained independence from France in 1943. At the age of 16, Caland became interested in painting and trained with Italian artist Fernando Manetti. She also studied art in the fine arts department of the American University of Beirut from 1964 until 1968. After she held her first solo exhibit at Dar Al Fan in Beirut in 1970, Caland moved to Paris, France. In the early 1980s, Caland also became associated and studied with Romanian sculptor George Apostu, which allowed her to produce a series of granite and terra-cotta sculptures. Caland moved permanently to the United States in 1988 and settled in Venice, California. She became an internationally recognized painter, sculptor, fashion designer, and filmmaker.

Caland is famous for her caftan designs, woven tapestries, and dyed cloths. While she was in Paris, she designed the Islamic fashion line Nour for the Pierre Cardin collection, which was presented at Espace Pierre Cardin in 1979. The Pierre Cardin collection, over 100 caftans, took her about a year to complete (Warfield, “Byzantium”).

Caland’s paintings fit into abstract art. Peter Frank also describes Caland’s work as “drawing on and extending the reach of, among other phenomena, the unstretched, patterned and textured painting the Parisians call Support/Surface and the gritty, physically hyper-present work that southern California knows as Material Abstraction” (Frank, “Huguette”).

For over three decades, Caland has exhibited her work throughout North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Her solo exhibitions include: “Dar El Fansee,” Beirut, Lebanon (1970); Faris Gallery, Paris, France (1980); Gallery 5, Santa Monica, California (1992); Toepel Gallery, Kirkland, Washington (1992); Janine Rubeiz Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (1994, 1997, 2000, 2003); Off Main Gallery, Bergamont Station, Santa Monica, California (1999); and other exhibits in Switzerland, Hungary, France, and Lebanon. She has also participated in numerous group exhibitions internationally, including Lebanese Artists at the Smithsonian Institution (1970); the 36th Biennial of Venice (1972); Contem- porary Lebanese Artists at the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan (1972); The Arab World Today, organized by the Permanent Delegation of the Arab

In the exhibit “Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World,” Caland participated with three painted silk robes *Foule* (1970), *Tete a Tete* (1971), and *Tendresse* (1975). On the back of *Foule*, Caland painted faces that are peeping out from under the hem, while on the front they appear full-face and smiling (Nashashibi, 81). In another group exhibit of Arab artists in 2004, Caland participated with two pieces of abstract work, *Bleu de Nuit I* and *Bleu de Nuit II* (2004), described by Caland as “writing without words.” The pieces, featuring gold pigments on fine Japanese gumpi paper, “were extremely well mastered and pure brushstrokes of golden memories” (Caland, 54). By focusing on the power of the brushstroke in itself to invent new forms, the patterning, rhythmic lines, and earthy tone of Caland’s recent works are exclusively linear in composition, and represent a distillation and refinement of past experiences (The Articultural Gallery). In reviewing Caland’s recent work, the Los Angeles-based critic Peter Frank describes Caland’s paintings as if they “propose a civilization.” He also writes:

... Caland’s art, in its vibrant patterning and earthy tonality, refers visually and metaphorically to woven tapestries and dyed cloths, to myriad indigenous cultures whose people, like all humans, seek to excite their eyes, stimulate their minds, and explain their world with their handiwork. Caland does not imitate, nor even emulate, any one specific people; indeed, her primary intention is not to confabulate ersatz batiks or set us imagining the ethnicity that may be responsible for them. She alone is responsible for these startling objects, and invites us to regard them first and foremost as self-sustaining visual phenomena. Still, their allure is as much atavistic as optical; we know them from somewhere else as well as from right in front of us. (“Huguette”)

Caland played an instrumental role in organizing an international exhibit of Palestinian embroidery and costumes at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles. The exhibit, “Sovereign Threads” (2006), was a collaboration of a number of organizations and individuals including the Association for the Development of Palestinian Camps (INAASH), co-founded in Lebanon in 1969 by Caland. The purpose of the association is to improve living conditions in the refugee camps by creating jobs for women and preserving Palestinian national heritage. Caland describes the motifs in Palestinian costumes and embroidery as “some of the most beautiful in the world[, having] influenced textile and fashion designs for years” (Palestinian Heritage Foundation).

In 2004, Caland worked with her son Philippe Caland on a film *Hollywood Buddha* (YBG Productions, 2004). Caland herself played the role of the “mom” of a film producer trying to make it in Hollywood. Caland currently lives in Venice, California, where her large house, which she personally designed, serves as her studio and gallery. She also opens her house for
community meetings and events, especially those organized by the Levantine Center of Los Angeles, California. In an interview with Anne Marie O’Connor, Caland stated:

I never thought I would end my life in Los Angeles. Sometimes you feel like you’ve lived such a long time. It’s like a train running down a track. I love Venice. I love every minute of my life. I squeeze it like an orange and I eat the peel, because I don’t want to miss a thing. (San Francisco Chronicle)

Resources

Web Sites and Places to See Caland’s Work
Galerie Janine Rubiez, Beirut, Lebanon.
Gallery Saint Germain, West Hollywood, California.
Weisman Foundation, Los Angeles, California.
Adnan Charara was born in Lebanon, grew up in Sierra Leone, Africa, and was educated in the United States. Charara is a painter, etcher, printmaker, and sculptor, working in a variety of materials and techniques. In 1983, Charara received his B.F.A. in architectural design from the Massachusetts College of Art.

While Charara was growing up in Africa, he taught himself drawing and painting. From the beginning, he used ink so that “if he made a mistake, he would start the drawing all over” (Charara, “Personal”). Some of Charara’s drawings and paintings have an African influence. Charara attributes that to the beautiful African rituals and the spirit behind them. In introducing Charara for Artbeat, a Detroit Public TV program, host Robert Maniscalco said:

- Adnan Charara is a deceptively complex artist. On the surface, his colorful and imaginative works are attractive and playful, yet, on a deeper level his art is politically charged and full of satire, commenting on the folly and foibles of contemporary society. (Artbeat)

Charara’s drawing and painting style combines drawings from different times and periods. As he writes in his statement, these styles present a myriad of “scattered faces, often twisted and intertwined in a cityscape that reflects the worlds of geometry, poetry, and theories—chaotic in nature, yet fitting sublimely together” (Charara “Personal”). The faces of the cartoon-like characters in Charara’s drawings and paintings grow from each other. A hand or a leg, for example, becomes another face for another character.

Besides drawing and painting, Charara creates sculptures of found objects that he collects from flea markets. Charara is fascinated with hammers, wrenches, and other tools. In his studio in Detroit, Michigan, there is a display of hundreds of sculptures made of such found objects. A number of interesting sculptures of hammers can be seen in his studio, including one being attacked by nails, another with a twisted head depicting the hammer’s shameful face of hitting so many nails, and another one being displayed as a horse or a trophy for all the good jobs it was involved in (Oweis, 21). Using wax and non-dry clay, Charara also creates sculptures that later get cast in bronze.

Charara has exhibited throughout the United States and the Middle East, including solo exhibits at Whistler House Museum of Art in Lowell, Massachusetts, and at the Michigan Modernism Exposition in Southfield, Michigan. He has won grants from the Lowell Office of Cultural Affairs and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In 2003, Charara participated in “Diversity in Harmony” (2003), a national exhibit by artists of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage at the Alfred Berkowitz Gallery, University of Michigan-Dearborn. The exhibit, curated by Hashim Al-Tawil, demonstrated a unique style of visual presentation rooted in the complex identities of Middle Eastern American culture. Charara exhibited three pieces of mixed media on paper. His works were full of playful and
colorful faces, animals, landscapes, and symbols in a satiric style depicted in “Cubist-inspired visual language” (Rogers, 45). One of these pieces was *Migrating*, mixed media on paper (7” x 10”), which shows his unique drawing style that combines renaissance, cubism, and futurism. On the use of satire and metaphoric symbolism, Charara has written that it is “to comment on the current human condition. My images offer wry studies of human failing and loss of dignity while remaining humorously optimistic” (Diversity, 6). Sarah Rogers, in reviewing “Diversity in Harmony,” wrote that artists such as Charara challenge the notion that contemporary Arab artists privilege political concerns over aesthetics. Rogers also says that Charara’s work “envelops the viewer in a microcosmic world of satire and metaphoric symbolism” (46).

Charara also participated in “Re-Interpreting the Middle East: Beyond the Historical Stereotype,” an international print exchange portfolio of the work of 23 international artists. The portfolio commenced as a call for a thematic print exchange by Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Washington D.C., in March 2005 (*Re-Interpreting*). Charara’s print for the exhibition was *I am an Arab American* (2005). The piece was full of different faces in what looks like an American cityscape scene. As an Arab American artist, Charara presented this identity through the combination of Arabic and English letters in the phrase “I am an Arab American.” The text was creatively done in a way that can only be read by someone who knows both Arabic and English. This combination of letters clearly demonstrates Charara’s identity through a new language that he invented himself. Of this piece, Charara wrote in his statement:

...we see today the American city vibrant with the complex web of different peoples sharing together and making up that landscape. Just as in these past waves of immigration, the Arab-American is in the same struggle of immersion. The writing, a mixture of Latin and Arabic script, is representative both of that transition from resistance to acceptance
and the generation, which bridges that gap. It is comprehensible, but not without difficulty, to the Arab speaking American; the one new to the American society. But to the English speaking American, it is still quite foreign despite the familiar (Latin script) already being assimilated. We see the give and take evolving before our eyes.

In 2005, Charara participated in “Journeys & Distances” at Dearborn’s Ford Community and Performing Arts Center, in Padzieski Art Gallery, Michigan, with artists from OTHER: Arab Artists Collective Detroit. The exhibit and art installation was a commemoration for the opening of the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. “Journeys & Distances” addressed the concept of immigrants in a constant state of journey, depicting the experiences of Arab American immigrants in Dearborn. A statement for the exhibit explained the exhibit’s theme:

Through emigration, displacement, or the search for a better existence, people’s lives become linked to the old and new. They live in a state of transformation resulting from the hybrid merging of cultures, values, and places, physically and emotionally migrating back and forth in search of their identities. (Journeys)
Charara’s most recent works depict “a world of blinding speed,” where man is driven as a machine. Charara notes that in his drawings, which resemble WPA murals, he tries to create something new out of what was deemed worthless (Diversity 6). For most of his paintings and drawings, Charara keeps a journal of his sketches that are based on his own research on various topics, including nature, butterflies, and even fireflies.

In March 2007, the Arab American National Museum presented a solo exhibit, “Juxtaposed! New Work by Adnan Charara,” in which Charara displayed his work that explored the challenges of immigrating to the United States, and the process of becoming American (Juxtaposed).

Charara now lives in Detroit, Michigan, where he continues to paint, sculpt, draw, and sometimes cooperate with OTHER: Arab Artists Collective Detroit in community art projects.

Resources
“Journeys & Distances.” Dearborn’s Ford Community & Performing Arts Center.
Oweis, Fayeq. “Adnan Charara’s Art Inspired by Styles, Symbols of Identity.” Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts 11, no. 52 (Summer 2005).
Rogers, Sarah. “Arab Art: Beyond Dichotomies.” Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts 9, no. 45 (Fall 2003).

Web Sites and Places to See Charara’s Work
Arab American and Chaldean Council, Lathrup Village, Michigan.
Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, Michigan.
Lowell Public Library, Lowell, Massachusetts.
Rhode Island Black Heritage Society Museum, Providence, Rhode Island.
Wasmaa Khalid Chorbachi (b. 1944), Ceramicist, Calligrapher, and Painter

Wasmaa (also spelled Wasma’a) Khalid Chorbachi was born in Cairo, Egypt, to Iraqi parents and grew up in Baghdad, Iraq. Chorbachi began molding clay and baking it along with the bread in her family’s traditional bread oven when she was five years old (Ameri, 236). After studying art and philosophy at the University of Beirut, Lebanon, and receiving her M.F.A. from the American University of Beirut, Chorbachi came to the United States, where in 1989 she earned a Ph.D. in the history of Islamic art and design from Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Chorbachi, an accomplished ceramicist, started painting in abstract forms in the 1960s, which according to her created crises in her artistic identity. She felt that art in Western styles could not express her feelings. After the 1967 war between Israel and some Arab states, Chorbachi responded to the war with a number of paintings in the Abstract Expressionist style. She later criticized her own work:

In looking at my work at that time, I came face to face with a major problem: I suddenly felt that these paintings were not me: “the Arab and the Muslim.” I realized that this was due to the artistic language or style in which they were painted...I had not been trained in an artistic language that would enable me to express the inner identity I so strongly felt...I was speaking with a foreign artistic language. (Chorbachi, 144)

After abandoning abstract paintings, Chorbachi turned to traditional Islamic art, combining the main three elements of Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterns, and floral motifs in beautifully glazed ceramics. Her work emphasized the linear and geometric designs inherent in Islamic media, such as dyes, textiles, clay, and drawing. Chorbachi’s research and artwork continues to focus on the development of Islamic art and design, and the intersection between science and the art of design in Islamic tradition (Ameri, 237).

Since 1966, Chorbachi has exhibited in Lebanon, Italy, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, England, and throughout the United States. In 1994, she participated in “Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World” at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Chorbachi’s ceramic platters and tile murals with Arabic calligraphy were part of “Ancient Traditions, Contemporary Visions” (2003), an art exhibit at the Ethel H. Blum Gallery in the College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine. She joined four other American artists from Asian and Western traditions, representing the Islamic traditional arts in this exhibit that expressed the complex multicultural realities in painting and sculpture.
Chorbachi has lectured about Islamic art and culture at many institutions throughout the United States. She has also participated in a number of conferences and symposiums, including The Arts in Arab Societies: Culture in a Transnational Era (1999), a symposium at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University.

In describing Chorbachi’s *The Mystery of Supplication* (2000–2003), a series of ceramic tiles with Arabic inscriptions inspired by the cover of the Kaba (the Muslim’s holy site) in Mecca, Salwa Mikdadi notes that Chorbachi’s contemporary ceramic works are embedded in Islamic traditional art, “not only because they are inscribed with Arabic calligraphic and Islamic religious phrases but also because they reflect that tradition’s techniques and visual repertoire.” Mikdadi continues to describe Chorbachi’s work:

Starting with the calligraphy, Chorbachi improvised the design, introducing vegetal arabesques, geometric patterns, and relief modulations, using a wide range of colors in multiple glaze firings. The words that initially dominate the tiles, “the mystery of supplication,” gradually interlace with and are nearly subsumed by elements of vegetal and geometric forms. The words never completely disappear, however, for the mystery of supplication is manifested as the spiritual meaning that lingers in the mind of the perceiver. (“West”)

In 2002, the Ceramics Program of the Office for the Arts at Harvard University presented both a three-day symposium and a three-week seminar highlighting important Islamic contributions to world ceramics at the Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Chorbachi participated in the program with a series of lectures as a distinguished scholar in the field of Islamic art and ceramics history. In the same year, Chorbachi held a solo exhibit called “Invocations: Contemporary Islamic Ceramics’ works by Wasma’a Chorbachi” at the Sackler Museum, where she showed a number of ceramic pieces, including plates and tile murals, all featuring traditional Islamic arts elements and techniques.

Chorbachi now lives and works in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is a professor of art history at both Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is an authority and expert on traditional Islamic ceramics.

**Resources**


Chorbachi, Wasmah. “Arab Art Twenty Years Later,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 1989).

Carole Choucair-Oueijan (b. 1966), Mosaics Artist and Painter

Carole Choucair-Oueijan is a mosaics artist and oil painter. She was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and is of Lebanese and Greek heritage. Choucair-Oueijan received her early training in art at the YWCA College in Beirut, Lebanon, where she received a Technical Degree in Interior Design in 1985. She continued her art education at the Institut Nationale des Beaux Arts at the Lebanese University of Fine Arts, and completed her Bachelor of Art degree in 1989. Influenced by her father, Farid Shoucair, who was a mosaic artist and iconographer in Lebanon, Choucair-Oueijan traveled to Greece, where her family roots extend, and there she learned the essential skills of classical mosaic art at the hands of Greek clergymen devoted to preserving the art of creating religious icons.

When Choucair-Oueijan moved to the United States in 1990, she converted her technique of mosaics into fine art, working on projects that reflected her heritage: “All my work is inspired by people or places from my country. By reflecting my cultures and memories from back home, I get to feel better and I enjoy my time painting” (Choucair-Oueijan, Personal). In addition to her mosaics art, Choucair-Oueijan is a painter, using oil to create landscape scenes, architectural contours, and portraits that are unique in their harmony of color and degree of serenity and sublimity. She also combines oil paintings with mosaics by mixing two of her favorite mediums to create unique pieces of art. Her mosaics are executed over a period of months using a mixture of hand-cut smalti and marble to complete the images on the surface. The mosaics are then cemented onto a prepared canvas which is hand painted. Describing this unique process, Choucair-Oueijan wrote:

After I draw the image on a canvas, I start cutting my desired pieces of smalti to small sizes varying from 5 to 1 mm. Then I glue the pieces face down and add the marble and granite. Here I have to use my imagination.
to figure out the harmony of colors and shape, because the backside of these stones is coarse and not polished. I cannot see what my artwork looks like until after I fill it with concrete and turn it to the other side. After this stage, the work, which usually takes about a month or two to finish, cannot be fixed any more. Thus for me the most exciting part of all is the minute I uncover my artwork to see how these two media come together successfully. (Choucair-Oueijan, "Biography")

Choucair-Oueijan has had a number of solo and group exhibits throughout California including at the following events and venues: World Contemporary Art, Celebrity Center International, Hollywood (2002); Los Angeles River Center & Gardens, Los Angeles (2002); Orange County Fine Arts, Santa Ana (2003); St. Nicholas’ 8th Festival, Los Angeles (2004); Assunta Fox Gallery, Santa Ana (2003, 2004, 2005); Center for Children Who Stutter, Brea Community Center, Brea (2005); and at Guggenheim Gallery, Chapman University, Orange (2004, 2005).

In her mosaics, Choucair-Oueijan uses stones such as a marble-smalti combination to craft exceptional art pieces with three dimensional effects. In one of her pieces, *Finesse* (2004), Choucair-Oueijan combined her reverse mosaic techniques using smalti, marble, and granite with a painting of oil on canvas. This large piece (45 1/2” x 36”), which shows a dancer, won her an “Honorable Mention—Master Of Mixed Media Award” from Artists Helping Artists (AHA) in October 2004. In another mosaic piece called *Break* (2002), Choucair-Oueijan represents the Lebanese-Phoenician sailboats of the nineteenth century. Her technique in combining oil on canvas with mosaics was also used to create a 44” x 43” piece, *Harmony* (2005), which shows musical instruments. Choucair-Oueijan comments on her choice of selecting mosaics as a medium for her fine art pieces:

I love all colors; I cannot claim to have a favorite one, because each has its own symbolic and artistic aura. We live in a world of endless color.
variations. These colors invade our visions, dreams, and thoughts to inspire our intellectual and imaginative faculties. I am a painter in love with colors and working with Mosaic, that is why I chose the Smalti, which is the most colorful tesserae with a highly light-reflective surface. ("Biography")

Choucair-Oueijan’s mosaic art won her a number of awards, including a “Best of Show Award” from World Contemporary Art in November 2002, and from Artists Helping Artists (AHA) in October 2004. In 2005, Choucair-Oueijan was selected from a group of mosaic artists to work on a public art project on the famous and historical Santa Cruz boardwalk and public park at Harbor Promenade in the city of Santa Cruz, California. For this art project and permanent installation, Choucair-Oueijan created four mosaic circles 24” in diameter that reflected the history of the city of Santa Cruz. All of the mosaic pieces, which were inserted in benches on the beach of Santa Cruz, were made out of Italian smalti, marble, and granite, using the Byzantine technique (reverse techniques). Three of the four pieces show scenes of different boats sailing into the Santa Cruz Harbor. One of the boats was the fishing boat of Victor Ghio, one of the first fishermen in Santa Cruz, where his boat is still on display on the beach. The fourth mosaic piece shows an underwater scene of a gray whale and other sea life, with a research boat in the background observing. On her selection to create these pieces, Choucair-Oueijan wrote:

I was selected because of the unique interpretation of details and 3-D effects using colorful Italian mosaics called “Byzantine Smalti” mixed with natural stones such as marble and granite. These stones are used in large, uneven shapes to break the monotony of the tiny little pieces of Smalti. I love to use natural stones. Every piece is unique in its color and texture. ("Inspired," 66)

In 2006, and after working with other Arab American artists for over a year, Choucair-Oueijan started an artists group as part of the House of Lebanon foundation. The House Of Lebanon Artists Group includes over 30 visual artists, composers, writers, and filmmakers. The group organized its first Festival Of Art in November 2006. Choucair-Oueijan now lives and works in Los Angeles, California. She is also a professional member of the Society of American Mosaic Artists, Artists Helping Artists (AHA), and an active member of Southern California Artists.

Resources
“Orthodox, the Original.” OCTV Program, Orthodox Christian Television, Los Angeles, California, March 2005.

**Web Sites and Places to See Choucair-Oueijan’s Work**

Asssunta Fox Gallery, Santa Ana, California.
Mosaics Public Art at Harbor Promenade, Santa Cruz, California.

**Rajie “Roger” Cook** (b. 1930), Graphic Designer and Sculptural Assemblage Artist

Born in New Jersey to Palestinian parents from Ramallah, Palestine, Rajie “Roger” Cook is an internationally known graphic designer, photographer, and sculptural assemblage artist. Cook’s father Najeeb Esa Cook was one of the very early Arab immigrants to America. At age 20, Cook’s father came to the United States and worked as a peddler selling fine linens, draperies, and bedspreads in New Jersey.

Cook’s birth name was Rajie, which means “hope” in Arabic. As for the name Roger, it was given to him by his fourth grade teacher. After 50 years of internationally-recognized achievements as Roger, he is restoring his original name Rajie, and retiring “Roger,” which in his words will “open a hopeful new dimension of creative endeavor, focusing his attention on the needs and aspirations of the people for whom Rajie means Hope” (Cook).

Cook has been the president of Cook and Shanosky Associates, a graphic design firm that he founded in 1967. The firm specializes in corporate communications and has created design work for major U.S. and international corporations. His work has received many awards. In 1984, Cook received the prestigious Presidential Award for Design Excellence from President Reagan for the transportation-related symbols for the Department of Transportation. The “Symbols Signs” project was accepted into the collection of the Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in 2003.

A graduate of Pratt Institute in communications design in 1953, Cook was selected as Alumni of the year in 1997, and has served on the Pratt Advisory Board. Cook’s graphic design work has been featured in many publications, including; *Graphis Magazine, Graphis Annual, Diagram Graphics, Communication Arts, AIGA Graphic Design USA, Art Direction Magazine*, and many others. He also participated in major design exhibitions, including those at the Whitney Museum of Art and the Grand Palais in Paris.
Inspired in part by the work of twentieth century assemblage artists like Joseph Cornell, Cook turned to sculptural assemblage in 1999, concentrating on the four themes of “Human Condition, Human Emotions, Human Reflection, and Human Reaction.” (Cook, Rajie Cook’s Web Site). In his Boxes, Cook incorporates found objects such as toys and game pieces. The focus of these Boxes is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the struggle of the Palestinian people for peace and freedom. Cook has participated in a number of exhibits focusing on peace in Palestine. His solo exhibits include these venues: McGraw Gallery, Newark Academy, Livingston, New Jersey (2006); Pennswood Gallery, Newtown, Pennsylvania (2005); Cape Cod Museum of Fine Arts, Dennis, Massachusetts (2003); Germantown Academy Arts Center, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania (2003); Jerusalem Fund Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2003); and George School Walton Gallery, Newtown, Pennsylvania (2002).

In the exhibition “Both Sides of Peace,” featuring Israeli and Palestinian political poster art, Cook participated with three posters. In Two Symbols, One Message (1996), the Star of David is wrapped by the American flag, inviting the viewers to interpret the combination of the two symbols. The same poster was also featured by Liberation Graphics, a poster art project dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In his second work for “Both Sides of Peace,” The Kaffiyah Speaks its Peace (1996), Cook took the Palestinian headdress “Kaffiyah” and juxtaposed the western peace symbol with the colors of the Palestinian flag (Black, Green, White, and Red) to indicate the Palestinian desire for peace. The third poster, The Stone (1997), consists of a photo of a stone with the words “A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones together” (Bartelt, 136).

In 2003, Cook participated in the exhibition “Made in Palestine” at the Station Museum in Houston. This exhibit was the first comprehensive art exhibit in the United States that chronicled the modern history of the Palestinian people. Cook’s work, A Time to Cast Stones (2003), featured in the exhibit, was a giant replica of a United States military ammunition box (65” x 50” x 18”) filled...
with stones, an ironic commentary on unfair fighting (Made in Palestine, 16). In a video produced by Cook to show how he creates Boxes, he shows a smaller version of A Time to Cast Stones and explains that the ammunition box could have been used by the Israeli military, supplied by the American government using his tax money (Cook). The piece received a lot of media coverage and attention. Elaine Pasquini of the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs commented on Cook’s A Time to Cast Stones as:

...an explicit commentary on the disparities in weaponry used by Palestinians resisting their Israeli occupiers. While the Israel Defense Forces employ a cache of high-tech American-supplied F-16 fighter jets, Cobra helicopters and Caterpillar bulldozers, Palestinians defend their homes with a meager arsenal of low-tech weaponry—rocks. (54)

For the “Made in Palestine” exhibit, Cook also designed the exhibition catalogue. His concern for the human condition in the Middle East came from his ten years experience serving on the Task Force for the Middle East, a group sponsored by the Presbyterian Church, USA. With this group he has traveled on fact-finding trips to Israel, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Cook has used the image of a house key in a large number of his assemblage sculptures. The key is a symbol of the Palestinian refugees and the diaspora. When asked why he chose to tell the Palestinian story using small window boxes, he explained:

As in the theater, where performers work within a three-dimensional environment to convey comedy or tragedy, I am creating miniature (silent) theaters to express the same. Within a three-dimensional space (which I construct) and with the use of found and fabricated objects (the performers), I am trying to share my innermost feelings with my audience. (Hanley, 50)

In an interview with Peter Applebom for the New York Times in 2004, Cook talked about his connections to the Middle East and his feelings toward peace in the region. He talked about how his father, who died at age 94, used to sit by the radio waiting to hear something good about peace in the Middle East. Cook did not want the same thing to happen to him: “I’m 74 and I don’t know if I’ll ever hear it, either. I don’t want to die at 94 still waiting for peace” (Applebom).

Cook, like many other artists—especially Arab Americans—whose work expresses the struggle of the Palestinian people, had a lot of difficulties exhibiting his work in museums. Cook was turned down many times and in his words “without an explanation” (Murphy). Cook now lives and works in Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania, where he continues to work “toward creating public awareness of the tragic living situation under the occupation and hoping for peace, the most important change of all” (Berger).
Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Cook’s Work

Abdelali Dahrouch (b. 1964), Painter, Conceptual and Media artist

Abdelali Dahrouch was born in Tangier, Morocco. His family emigrated to France in 1968 and then he emigrated to the United States in 1984. Dahrouch studied at the State University of New York and the Pratt Institute in New York, where he received an M.F.A. in painting, video, and art criticism in 1997. After graduating from Pratt Institute, Dahrouch was awarded a fellowship at the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study Program in New York. Dahrouch has also completed art residencies programs in the Czech Republic, and he was a visiting artist in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2003.

As a multimedia and conceptual artist, Dahrouch uses photography, paintings, and video installations as a forum to address sociopolitical issues, and in particular those related to the United States and the Arab world. He also explores the issue of migration, especially from North Africa to Europe and the loss of life through these migrations. In his earlier work, Dahrouch also explored the role of the media in issues of gender, race, and ethnic and economic subjugation (Marquez “Pomona College Museum of Art web site”). Dahrouch exhibited his work throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. He has been exhibited at the Athens Institute of Contemporary Art in Athens, Georgia; the Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University in Orange, California; the Liquidation Total Art Space in Madrid, Spain; the University of Alabama; the Puffin Room in New York; and Darat Al Funun Art Center in Amman, Jordan.

Dahrouch’s solo exhibition entitled “Desert Sin, Revisited” (2003) at the Montgomery Art Museum, Pomona College in Claremont, California, was a newer version of a video installation, Desert Sin (1995), which addressed the Gulf War and “Operation Desert Storm.” Desert Sin, Revisited was a 30-minute video loop depicting obscured figures and images of soldiers, veiled women, building destruction, and blowing sand. In addition to the original footage from the 1995 installation, Dahrouch has added other components: “a floor piece made out of loose plaster upon which is impressed a fragment of text from the New American Century Project, a projection on the plaster surface of images of sand blowing, and the subtle sound of desert winds commingled with distorted excerpts from George W. Bush’s speeches” (Marquez). In reviewing the exhibit, Laura Kuo explains that Dahrouch “complicates his
imagery further by projecting his film onto sculpted surfaces, and he engineers acoustics to transform the environment” (Kuo).

In 2004, Dahrouch participated in “Somewhere Elsewhere,” an art exhibit featuring artists from Arab and Middle Eastern backgrounds, at Worth Ryder Gallery on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley. Dahrouch’s installation *Yellow Citizen* (2004) consisted of video footage of “Japanese Americans being transported on trains and buses, and building the very barracks that caged them, interspersed with images of Arab/Muslim citizens” (Dahrouch “Artist’s”). The same installation was also part of a group exhibit at the Guggenheim Gallery on the campus of Chapman University, Orange, California.

In *Yellow Citizen*, Dahrouch draws a parallel between the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the racial profiling of Arabs and Muslims after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Through this installation, Dahrouch hopes that it will remind us of “lessons that should have been learned so that they will never be repeated again” (Dahrouch “Artist’s”). Dahrouch’s video images were projected on a wall with a painted yellow band that:

sweeps across the faces of those imaged on the video. The band draws a connection to the Jewish Holocaust (when Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, and the mentally ill were forced to don color coded bands under the Third Reich) with the post 9-11 climate of fear and terror, in effect linking the current Bush administration to a long legacy of hegemonic imperialism and racial profiling. (Dahrouch “Artist’s”)
For the exhibition “In/Visible” in Dearborn, Michigan, which featured contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage, Dahrouch participated with a series titled Crossing (2005), consisting of ten paintings of dry pigments on paper that included embossed and almost-invisible media reports about border crossings and stories of immigrants (In/Visible, 21). The series was divided into two sections, one representing the sea and the other one representing the desert. As described by Salwa Mikdadi, Dahrouch’s work “explores the parallels between the human tragedies surrounding the illegal border crossings in the deserts of North America that divides Mexico and the U.S., and the Mediterranean Sea that divides Spain from Morocco” (In/Visible, 21).

Dahrouch’s work in Crossing also evokes the “struggles and sacrifices of migrant workers during their border crossings” and it “juxtaposes the plights of two migrant communities forced by poverty and political turmoil to risk their lives for the prospects of economic security” (Farhat). In his artist’s statement, Dahrouch explores how the North/South divide creates desperate situations for those seeking prosperity and a better future, and the suffering of those who had “no choice but to cross treacherous waters and arid deserts only to perish, forgotten” (In/Visible, 36). Dahrouch’s work in Crossing was similar to another installation called Liquid Cemetery (2004), which addressed “Europe’s methods for controlling the flow of immigrant labor from the south and the tragic loss of life in the Strait of Gibraltar” (Merrill).

One of Dahrouch’s recent floor installations, Strange Fruit (2007), consists of small sculpted plaster and clay cones painted yellow, and a small painting of an olive tree. On this installation, he writes:

> In many war-torn regions of the world, the devastation is manifest in the landscape as unexploded weaponry such as cluster bombs litter the ground. These bombs remain a constant and deadly threat, and they prevent farmers from harvesting their crops, here represented as the olive grove. The reference to the actual bombs, and the context that the work represents overall, is abstracted to a sensorial landscape the viewer must navigate in order to view the painting. (Dahrouch, “Personal”)

Dahrouch is also an art educator. He has taught at Pomona College in Claremont, California. Currently he is a visiting lecturer at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, California. He has been awarded a fellowship at the Banif Center in Canada. He lives and works in the United States, France, and Morocco, and continues to explore issues of war, migration, and globalization.

**Resources**


Web Site and Places to See Dahrouch’s Work


Joyce Dallal (b. 1956), Photography and Multi-Media Installation artist

Joyce Dallal was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, to Iraqi-Jewish parents who immigrated to the United States from Baghdad in the 1940s. Dallal received her B.A., magna cum laude, from UCLA in 1978, and an M.F.A. from the University of Southern California in 1990. Dallal is an artist who works in a variety of media, including handmade books, collage, photography, video, installation, and public art. In her biography, Dallal states that “the struggle to reconcile her Jewish, Iraqi, and American identities has been a major impetus for her work”.

In her artwork and installations, Dallal explores the evolution of contemporary American identity, incorporating issues of immigration, assimilation, conflicting loyalties, and changing cultural traditions (“Finding Home”). Her projects involve narratives on her family’s history and her personal experience. She also works on community based and public projects that examine “the ways cultural and ethnic identities mix, evolve, and accommodate to contemporary American culture, and in the attempt to understand, describe, and affect that interaction” (Dallal).
Dallal had exhibited her work in galleries, museums, and non-traditional spaces. Among her solo exhibits and installations: *Three Words*, an installation on the facade of the Fairfax Branch of the Los Angeles Public Library (2001); *Homesite*, a collaborative window installation in Westside Pavilion, the Promenade at Woodland Hills, Sacred Grounds Coffee House in San Pedro, The Cooper Building; Los Angeles, CA (1992); *The Promise*, a window installation, Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum and the Broadway Spring Center, Downtown Los Angeles (1990); and *The Distance Between*, Helen Lindhurst Fine Arts Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (1990). She has also participated in numerous group exhibits and collaborative projects at the Japanese American National Museum; Bibliotheca Alexandrina Arts Center, Alexandria, Egypt (2005); Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, CA; Skirball Cultural Center and Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Santa Barbara, CA; and many other venues.

Dallal is a recipient of many awards and grants, including a grant for *Do You Remember*, a public art project at Fairfax Branch Public Library, Los Angeles, California (2005); *The Conjunction of 500 Wishes*, a public art project at Los Feliz Branch Public Library, Los Angeles, California (1999); WESTAF/NEA Regional Arts Fellowship in Photography, Western States Arts Federation (1995); California Community Foundation Brody Arts Fund Fellowship (1995); and the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Grant (1991-1992).

One of Dallal’s major installations is *Family Album* (1991-1992), which consists of a large arrangement of furniture, artist books, and a collaged rug made from linoleum, photocopies, and newspaper clippings. This installation was created during the 1991 Gulf War “to examine and communicate the complexities of a political situation that was tremendously simplified and dehumanized by the media accounts” (Dallal, “Artist’s Statement”). Dallal experienced the war through her Iraqi father, who at that time got frustrated with the war and began slipping back into using Arabic and having dreams that he was back in Baghdad (Steinman). Dallal offers this description of the installation:
The piece consists of two areas where the viewer may sit and read a book. These face each other across a collaged prayer rug made from newspaper clippings, linoleum, and photocopies. One book focuses on my father’s reaction to the war. The other book attempts to put current events into a historical perspective by telling the story of my uncle who was executed by the Iraqi government in 1949. The colonial style furniture is recognizable as “American” since this is an American story of immigration and the distancing, displacement, and confusion about one’s identity that can result. (Dallal, “‘Artist’s’”).

In 2005, Dallal created an update of Family Album by including Media Storm, a large tornado made of newspaper clippings from the Los Angeles Times about the American war in Iraq from 2002 through 2005. Made of ink-jet on rice paper, the tornado can grow up to 8’ in diameter and up to 20’ tall. In another large installation, Small Stories in a Language I Don’t Understand (2005-20077), which consists of video projection with ink-jet on rice paper screen, Dallal documents the language that was spoken by the Iraqi-Jewish community in Baghdad. The text on the screen is a translation of the American “Pledge of Allegiance” into the Judeo-Arabic script, which combines Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian characters (Dallal, “‘Artist’s Statement’”). The video shows stories of memories of her family in Baghdad.

Dallal is a member of Piece Process, a group of Jewish and Arab artists that show and work together to “demonstrate that an environment of dialogue, tolerance, integrity, dignity and attentiveness can exist (Piece). The group also
includes Doris Bittar, Rajie Cook, Hanah Diab, and John Halaka. In 2007, Dallal participated in a panel titled “Arab and Jewish Intersections during the Time of War, Siege and Boycott,” at DIWAN: A Forum for the Arts at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Dallal currently lives in Southern California, and since 1992 she has been a professor of art and digital media at El Camino College in Torrance, California.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Dallal’s Work

Fairfax Branch Library, Los Angeles.


Los Feliz Branch Library, Los Angeles.

Aissaa Deebi (b. 1969), Photographer, Video and Digital Artist

Aissaa Deebi was born to a Palestinian family in Haifa, Israel. Before receiving his B.F.A. in visual arts from the University of Haifa in 1995, Deebi attended a year-long course in drawing at Avni Art Institute in Tel Aviv. In 1998, Deebi received his M.F.A. in Theory and Practice from the University of Liverpool, England. Deebi completed an art residency in Aarau, Switzerland, before moving to the United States in 2000. In his artwork, Deebi explores issues of identity, dialogue, and exile (Williamsburg).

In 2002, Deebi participated in “Williamsburg Bridges Palestine,” an exhibit at Williamsburg Art and Historical Center in New York, featuring the work of 50 Palestinian artists. The exhibit was organized by Samia Halaby and
Zena El-Khalil from Al Jisser organization. The theme of the exhibit focused on “social and political issues dealing with identity, displacement, democratic rights, war, Diaspora, and death” (Williamsburg). Deebi’s work in this exhibit included photographs from his series using toy soldiers, which examines the tension between the reality of war and the fantasy of military toys. As Deebi describes in his statement, the use of toy soldiers “blurs the distinction between toys and what they represent and, by extension, fantasy and reality. The results are at once uncanny and grotesque, as his figures revealed fantasies based in childhood experiences of imaginative heroes and desires” (Deebi).

Deebi has collaborated with Israeli artist Yuval Shaul in an internationally touring exhibit featuring their work on the issue of victims in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The exhibit was originally premiered at Julie M. Gallery in Tel Aviv and the Tel Aviv Museum of Contemporary Art in 2000. The exhibit also traveled to Universita degli Studi di Catania in Italy; Galerie Feichtner & Mizrahi in Vienna, Austria; and the Art Gallery at Haifa University in Haifa, Israel. Deebi’s work included Dead Sweet (2002), a 12-minute video loop showing a young woman ravenously eating a chocolate soldier. The collaboration between Deebi and Israeli artist Yuval Shaul featured seven portraits “composed by digital editing from 28 photographic portraits of terror and shooting victims, both Jewish and Arab” (Ayal). Avishay Ayal, curator of the exhibit at the University of Haifa, Israel, writes:

The result of the cross between the victims’ faces appears, on the one hand, familiar and banal, and on the other - deceptive, bizarre, and dark. The practice of computerized “facial hybridization” is well known from television commercials; it conveys the message that all human beings are equal.

When the collaboration work came to the United States, it was presented at Slought Foundation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, under the name “Terror: a Collaboration between a Palestinian and an Israeli Artist” (2004). Deebi explained his motive for the exhibit: “We are sharing this place in a ridiculous way. Die in it; dont live in it…. Israelis and Palestinians are producing the same thing—dying people” (Rosef).

In 2004, Deebi curated “Near: Four Multinational Artists from the Middle East,” an exhibition at Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, which was also displayed at Tangent Gallery, Detroit, Michigan. In addition to Deebi himself, three other artists—Egyptian-German Susan Hefuna, Palestinian Bashir Makhoul, and Iranian Mitra Memarzia—participated in this exhibit, which explored issues of identity and exile. Deebi’s work for the exhibit included Dead Sweet (2002). Lily Faust described Deebi’s video:

the woman attacks the soldier with her mouth, licking, scratching, biting, and sucking the chocolate, while it melts all over her fingers and gets licked, over and over, until the end, when it is diminished into an unidentifiable blob of brown goo. The expression on the face of the young woman varies from sheer delight to sadistic annihilation, and gains surrealistic
proportions as the chocolate’s color, at times, turns into menacing hues that suggest dark blood.

In addition to *Dead Sweet*, Deebi exhibited photographs of naked toy soldiers wearing only their gas masks, boots and guns. As Phaedra Robinson described the exhibit, the toy soldiers were piled on top of each other and posed in the fore-, middle-, and background. Robinson also offers the following description of Deebi’s photographs: “The artist is cognizant of what he is doing and potentially saying, playing with messages and images of homosexuality, military roles of power/protection/abuse, the role of toys as military products that function as propaganda, and race/nationality issues, in that the toys are all white males.”

Deebi currently lives and works in New York. He was one of the founders of ArteEast, a New York based non-profit organization established in 2003 to promote the visibility of the arts and cultures of the Middle East in the United States. Deebi currently serves as the director of visual arts for ArteEast.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Deebi’s Work**


Haifa Museum of Contemporary Arts, Haifa, Israel.

Hecht Museum, Haifa University, Haifa, Israel.

Liverpool University, Liverpool, England.
Hanah Diab (b. 1976), Painter and Mixed-Media Artist

Hanah Diab was born in Las Vegas, Nevada, to an immigrant Palestinian family. Diab studied at the University of Nevada and then received her B.F.A. from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1997. Through combining and layering fabric, wood, wood stains, acrylics, ink, charcoal, hand-made papers, and dried plant materials; Diab creates abstract and figurative images that are nostalgic and historical narratives and records capturing the spirit of struggle against injustices. In her artist’s statement, Diab states the role and theme of her artwork:

As a Palestinian woman born in the United States, my work reflects the experience of never having truly been home—of awaiting some unknown beauty—of longing for a place that is alive only in my mother’s eyes. My paintings and drawings document my own existence and the existence of a culture that is often denied, either through direct portraiture of my own family or a more abstract depiction of patterns and colors to resurrect beautiful memories and replace a much harsher reality (Personal communications).

Diab has exhibited nationally, including her solo exhibits at Agate Force, Chicago, IL (1998), and at the Arab Heritage Festival at Marquette University in Wisconsin (2005). She also participated in two person exhibits: Hanah Diab and Stacy Puckett at Casa Guatemala in Chicago (2001), and “Sacred Spaces: Hanah Diab and Ron Mendez” at Gallery 501 in Chicago (2003). She also participated in many group exhibitions, including: Art Against the Nightstick, ARC Gallery, Chicago (1999); Artists Against the Occupation, Reset Art, Philadelphia (2003); and Williamsburg Bridges Palestine, Williamsburg Art and Historical Society, Brooklyn, New York (2002), which was organized by Al Jisser, a non-profit organization in New York dedicated to the promotion of Arab art and culture.

In the group exhibit “Against the Nightstick” (1998), which explored the faces and facets of police brutality and resistance, Diab participated with a piece, The Fire In My Mother’s Eyes, which consisted of a painting, a slingshot, and a pile of rocks. The painting contains images of Diab’s mother, human figures, and rocks. On this piece, Diab stated that the idea behind throwing rocks was “a way of the underclass to stand up to their oppressors” (X). The use of “throwing rocks” is a symbolic connection to the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation.

Diab is a member of Piece Process, a group of Arab American and Jewish artists that show and work together. The collective was formed in 2002 as a response to the fragile “Peace Process” in the Middle East. Diab participated in the group’s exhibitions: “Piece Process I” at ARC Gallery, Chicago (2002);
“Piece Process II” at Athens Institute for Contemporary Art, Athens, Georgia (2004); “Piece Process III” at Gavilan College, Gilroy, California (2005); and “Piece Process IV: After Lebanon” at Hartnett Gallery, Rochester, New York (2007). One of Diab’s pieces in the exhibit “Piece Process III” (2005), was My Favorite Plum (2003), an acrylic on canvas painting which consists of a green plum dangling on a thin string against a reddish abstract background. Based on stories that her mother used to tell her about the fruits in Palestine, Diab stated that My Favorite Plum is an imagined depiction of a plum that had green skin and red flesh, which her mother loved to eat when she was in Palestine. Diab also stated the reason for painting this plum: “I have it dangling on a string as an unreachable object for me—the Palestine that she once knew, that is so close in her memory will never be real for me. The patterns that run subtly in the background are pressed textures from fabrics that have a nostalgic quality” (Diab, Personal Communications).

In another mixed-media piece, Promises (2003), Diab uses abstract elements that surround small and almost hidden figures. A central pattern in the painting is inspired by traditional Islamic designs “and acts as a visual anchor for all of the other more chaotic elements of the piece.” Small drawings of Diab’s mother are repeated throughout the painting, which Diab describes this way: “each time she is kissing a word ‘you,’ ‘me,’ and ‘baby,’ the last time the word is intelligible” (Personal Communications). The fruits of Palestine are also depicted in the painting:

The orange shape that is the background for these drawings points to a fruit of the same color with a drawing of a young couple—faces pressed
closely together. The green shape at the lower left reveals a female figure dressing. Each of the drawings is a promise—potential love. At the top left, in the black area a woman’s face, she may be surveying what has occurred. At the upper right, there is a torn bit of fabric. The viewer is left to consider if the promises are already broken, or if they are being made. (Diab, Personal Communications)

Diab currently lives and works in Chicago, Illinois, and she is part of a Chicago-based not-for-profit organization, Palestinian Humanities and Arts Now (al-PHAN), dedicated to promoting the many artistic talents of Palestinians and artists influenced by the Palestinian experience.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Diab’s Work

“Hanah Diab” at AOL Public Galleries: http://pictures.aol.com/galleries/widgettttt/.

Saliba Douaihy (1912-1994), Painter and Stained-Glass Artist

Born in Ehden, Lebanon, Saliba Douaihy began his artistic education as an apprentice to Lebanese artist Habib Srour (1860–1938) in Beirut. Douaihy worked in Srour’s studio and worked with him on the large murals that he painted in Lebanese churches. In 1932, the Lebanese government sent Douaihy on a scholarship to study art in France. From 1932 to 1936, Douaihy studied at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. After he completed his studies in France, Douaihy returned to Lebanon and opened his own studio in Beirut. In the early 1940s, Douaihy was commissioned to paint the walls, stained-glass windows, and ceilings of the Maronite church at Diman, Lebanon.

Douaihy was one of the pioneers of the early school of Impressionists and Expressionists schools in Lebanon (Ali, Modern, 40). His paintings in Lebanon consisted of landscapes of the countryside, figurative forms of village life, and representational religious work. The religious paintings of Douaihy in Lebanese churches were influenced by the classical work of Leonardo Da Vinci.
and Michaelangelo, but with a very distinctive change in the look of the figures that he used. Douaihy replaced the white faces that are common in the classical Italian style with darker faces that looked similar to Eastern and Lebanese people (“The Life”).

In 1945, Douaihy had his first solo exhibit at St. George Hotel in Beirut, Lebanon, where he displayed paintings inspired by the folklore, villages, valleys, and mountains of Lebanon. The exhibit was inaugurated by Bishara Khoury, the president of Lebanon at that time (“The Life”). In 1947, Douaihy participated in a group exhibit by Lebanese artists at the national museum in Beirut. Among the works in the exhibit were those of another Arab American artist, Khalil Gibran.

Douaihy moved to the United States in 1950, where his style underwent a gradual change from landscapes and figurative paintings to abstract forms consisting of flat forms of brilliant colors and hard edges (“Saliba”). Douaihy developed his own style, which became known as the “Douaihy style,” characterized by a pictorial flattening, giving the paintings a two-dimensional quality, length and width with colors spread between the lines to give an impression of depth (“Style”). Douaihy’s abstract experimentations were based on his usage of indigenous forms such as the trousers worn by the local people of Lebanese mountains and turned into abstract form (Ali, Contemporary, 199). Afif Bahnassi also confirms that even though Douaihy turned to abstraction in his art, his paintings are full of the realistic life of Lebanon and his mountainous birth place (110).

In 1956 Douaihy returned to Lebanon for a year, where he painted 27 panels and paintings for Saint John the Baptist Cathedral in Zgharta. The ceiling and wall panels included paintings such as John the Baptist, The Last Supper, and Joseph Carrying Christ. In the same year, he also received the Medal of High Honor from President Camille Chamoun of Lebanon.

The year 1966 witnessed Douaihy’s first solo exhibit at the Contemporaries Gallery in New York. In the exhibit, Douaihy showed his abstract paintings based on his experiments for many years with simplification of form and color while seeking flatness. Douaihy was fascinated with the bright sun of the Mediterranean, which was evident in his abstract work. In a review of Douaihy’s exhibit at the Contemporaries Gallery, Charlotte Willard wrote in the New York Post:

Douaihy offers us the fruit of years of experiment and work with the conundrums of color. First, as an artist using stained glass, later as an abstract expressionist, he has presently resolved his past experience in a kind of Near East hard-edge painting. The highly sophisticated colors of Persia, the glow of stained glass, the emotional overtones of expressionism come through to us from his paintings. His canvasses break away from the anonymous formulations of most of the hard-edged work of today by his interruptions of his geometric line with unexpected projections, sensuous curves, original forms. With a minimum of flat colors, he has been able to create a harmony and order, moving and motionless where the near and far meet in equilibrium. (Quoted in “Who’s Who”)
In another visit to Lebanon in 1971, Douaihy worked on stained glass panels at the Maronite convent church at Annaya in Lebanon, where he employed for the first time his own technique, in which the colored glass was built up in overlapping layers without lead bars (“Saliba”). Another project involving stained glass work was completed in 1978, when Douaihy created 65 stained-glass windows for the church of Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon, America’s oldest Maronite Church, in Jamaica Plain near Boston. The Saint Maron’s parish in Youngstown, Ohio, was another place where Douaihy created a number of paintings and stained-glass panels of religious scenes. These paintings included *Saint Maron*, *The Birth of Christ*, and *The Resurrection* which include Syriac writing that begins with “Father of truth, behold your Son, a sacrifice pleasing to you” (“Maronite”).

A retrospective exhibition of Douaihy’s work of about 40 years was held at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh in 1978. In 1982, Douaihy went to London, where he got married and lived for four years. He then went to Paris, France, in 1989, where in 1993 L’Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute) held a retrospective exhibit of his work. Douaihy came back to New York in 1993, where he died in 1994. By his will, he was buried in his birth town of Ehden, Lebanon.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Douaihy’s Work**

Agial Art Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.

Church of Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

David Rockefeller Collection, New York, New York.
Nihad Dukhan (b. 1964), Calligraphy Artist and Designer

Nihad Dukhan was born and grew up in Gaza, Palestine. During his elementary schooling, he became fascinated with the art of Arabic calligraphy. In the sixth grade, and with the help of his Arabic language teacher, he started learning and practicing different classical styles of Arabic calligraphy and competing with neighborhood children in writing words on the nicely finished outside walls of the neighbors' houses ("Limelight," 10). In 1983, Dukhan moved to the United States, where he started his studies at the College of Engineering at the University of Toledo, Ohio. He obtained a B.S. degree in mechanical engineering in 1988, a Master's degree in fluid mechanics in 1991, a second Master's degree in applied mathematics in 1996, and a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering in 1996.

Despite Dukhan’s training and education in mechanical engineering, his fascination and involvement with the Arabic language and the art of Arabic calligraphy continued, and he trained himself in all the classical styles of Arabic calligraphy. In 1998, he became a student of the noted Turkish master calligrapher Hasan Celibi in two of the major styles of traditional Arabic calligraphy ("Limelight," 10). Arabic calligraphy is an art form that, for almost 1,400 years, has been used as a link between the Arabic language and the religion of Islam:

Delighting and elevating, Arabic calligraphy evokes the sacred and lifts the viewer into joy. Marked by its flowing patterns and intricate geometry, Arabic calligraphy expresses a broader dimension of the aesthetic. It aims at a mystic balance of meaning and beauty using strokes that flow from right to left with splendid energy. ("Limelight," 11)

Dukhan has developed his own distinctive style of contemporary Arabic calligraphy that does not necessarily follow the classical or traditional styles. His modern interpretations, which he started refining in 1989, are simple, legible, and highly stylized (Dukhan, Personal). Dukhan’s designs incorporate some of the meaning of the written words without compromising the general shape that the letters can take (Dukhan, Personal). Arabic words can be
rendered in a way so that they can be read visually by non-Arabic viewers. For example, a rendering by Dukhan of the word *ard*, which means earth in Arabic, is done in a globe shape, revealing the concept of earth in the color green representing the plants and blue representing the water.

In an article titled “Comments on the Modern and the Traditional in Arabic Calligraphy” (2002), written for a Web site in the Netherlands that is devoted to research and experiments in Arabic typography, Dukhan wrote that his approach for a new and a distinctive style was “to invent a modern form of the art of Arabic calligraphy that can stand alone, so that it can be weighed for its intrinsic value and its own experiment in addressing the esthetics” (Dukhan, “Comments”). Dukhan’s goal and intent for his contemporary calligraphic design, as he puts it, “is not only to attract the Arabic speaking audience, but to cross barriers and touch other languages and cultures” (“Limelight,” 11). In 2001, Dukhan’s Web site of contemporary Arabic calligraphy designs became part of the Library of Congress’s September 11 Web Archive, which preserves the Web expressions of individuals, groups, the press, and institutions in the United States and from around the world in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Dukhan’s site offered Arabic words such as Peace, Hope, and Diversity, rendered in his own distinctive style.

Dukhan’s work includes logos and identity designs for a number of Arab and Arab American organizations, including RAWI (Radius of Arab American Writers) in New York. His design for RAWI included the word *Qalam* (“pen” in Arabic), rendered in his own distinctive Arabic calligraphic style. Dukhan has also produced the logos and identity designs of the annual conferences that RAWI sponsors to promote the literary work of Arab Americans. He has also produced a logo for the Arab American Studies Program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In 2001, Dukhan designed a signet for the noted Arab American musician Simon Shaheen using his first and last name. This design became the emblem of Simon, which he used on the CD jacket of his album and on his Web site and other publications (Dukhan Personal).

Dukhan’s work has been exhibited throughout the United States, mostly through community, educational, and cultural events. He has participated in
a number of exhibits, including those at the Middle East Studies Association Conference (1996, 1997, 1998, 1999); the Fourth Festival of Arab World Culture, Brooklyn Museum of Art and the World Music Institute (1998); the Department of Religious Studies at DePaul University, Chicago, (2000); and at the Jerusalem Fund Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2006). Dukhan has written a number of articles, and has given many lectures and demonstrations on the Art of Arabic calligraphy. He had published a book, *Contemporary Arabic Calligraphy* (Palm Press, Cairo, Egypt, 2002), in both Arabic and English, which includes his unique calligraphic designs and compositions. The book also briefly discussed the history and development of Arabic calligraphy.

In addition to his calligraphy art, Dukhan also plays Arabic musical instruments. He has been playing Arabic percussion (Riqq) for the past 15 years. He is a member of Taqaseem (Arabic for “improvisations”) Ensemble, a group that plays classical music of the Middle East. After working as a research engineer in Chicago for three years, Dukhan joined the mechanical engineering department at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez as an associate professor from 2001 to 2005. Dukhan moved to Michigan in 2005, where he is an associate professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Detroit. He is an active member of the community and participates in events promoting Arabic culture through his calligraphy demonstrations, workshops, and lectures. Dukhan is also working on developing a new computer font based on his modern form of Arabic calligraphy.

**Resources**


“Arabic Calligraphy from Antiquity to the Contemporary.” *The Art Paper* 3, no. 6 (January 2003).


**Web Sites and Places to See Dukhan’s Work**


Mona A. El-Bayoumi (b. 1962), Painter and Mixed Media Artist

Mona A. El-Bayoumi was born in Alexandria, Egypt, and moved to the United States with her family when she was four years old. She grew up in East Lansing, Michigan, where her father was a professor and her mother was an educator. El-Bayoumi obtained her B.F.A. with an emphasis in painting and drawing from Michigan State University in 1985. While obtaining her B.F.A., she also traveled for a year to London, England, to study studio art as part of an overseas program. El-Bayoumi also completed a nine-month program at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. (1998-1999). In 2002, she received a Certificate in museum exhibition planning and design from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

El-Bayoumi works with acrylic, watercolor, and mixed media on canvas to create vibrant and very colorful paintings that reflect the influence of her North African roots, her training in the United States, and her extensive travels to Egypt, North Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Europe. Using iconographic imagery, saturated colors, and whimsical subtlety with a mystical style, El-Bayoumi’s subjects include people, portraits, animals, objects, and landscapes, focusing on issues such as racism towards the Arabs, sexism, and injustices in the Arab world (El-Bayoumi, Personal).

El-Bayoumi also worked on the issue of the depiction and stereotypes of Muslim Arab women. Comparing the issue of the “poor oppressed Arab Women” as opposed to the “liberated Western Women,” she had shown veiled women next to the half-dressed western women to question who is oppressed and who needs to help liberate the other from sexist views (El-Bayoumi, Personal). In recent years, some of her themes also included the consequences of war in the Arab world. On issues that influence her work, El-Bayoumi states:

Arab issues of justice have had a profound impact on my subject matter. Growing up in a university town with issues like Palestinian injustice, the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the dictator Shah of Iran, South African apartheid, and United States government dealings in Latin American, meeting and even having the family host great activists and leaders like Felicia Langer (the Israeli lawyer who defends Palestinians,) Liat Simmel, and the great artist Nagi Al Ali, to name a few—these all influence my
subject matter, and I even paid a toll in some painting classes where professors who were anti-Arab tried to punish me with low grades that were later over turned by administrators. My experiences and the political work that my parents were involved in spilled on to my canvas. (El-Bayoumi, Personal)

In an exhibit, “Effects of Greed, Dreams of Justice,” at the Jerusalem Fund Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2004), El-Bayoumi provided a provocative and unsettling commentary on the human side of the current conflicts, most notably the war in Iraq and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination (Effects). In a statement for the exhibit, El-Bayoumi stated that the exhibit is her personal visual diary:

We are witnessing a growing group of Arab Americans that don’t have to prove their American identity to anyone. They are flourishing in the Arts...comedians, poets, and many more. These talented artists are not apologists for their overt portrayals of issues in the Arab world and beyond. As for me I come from a father who is politically outspoken and a mother who is also eloquent with grace. Being a mother myself of four teenagers who commonly tend to be raw in their self expression, I too like to think I have a bit of a young heart in expressing my frustrations and dreams during a very difficult time in our world’s history (“Artist’s”).

Under the title “Working People and Women: Their View of the War in Iraq,” El-Bayoumi held her first exhibit in Cairo, Egypt, in 2004. In this exhibit she presented paintings based on photographs of ordinary Americans in order to establish Americans as regular and hard working people like any other people, and to differentiate between them and the government. She wanted to show these images as an American citizen herself and as an insider because the mainstream media does not show that. (Salih).

In a series that she called Social Justice Art, El-Bayoumi created a number of paintings that reflected the effects of war, her opposition to war, and her optimism for peace and justice through painting images such as olive trees, oranges, Jerusalem, and the Palestinian people. In one of El-Bayoumi’s mixed media on paper pieces, Yafa Oranges Are Part Of Me (2004), a woman is carrying a bunch of oranges on her head while her hair is forming the a traditional basket used to carry the oranges. Yafa Oranges refers to the once-famous Palestinian product that is now marketed as an Israeli product, Jaffa oranges. The expression on the woman’s face is sad, full of memories and hope. In another mixed media work, El-Bayoumi created a memorial piece for Rachel Corrie (1979–2003), a young American human rights activist with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) who was crushed by an Israeli bulldozer while trying to protect a Palestinian home from being demolished. The piece, Rachel Corrie, An American We Will Always Be Humbled By (2004), consisted of images of Corrie juxtaposed with the American flag and with tears turning into hearts.

In addition to her work in her private studio, El-Bayoumi is also a community activist and an educator. Since 1998, she has been giving various lectures and workshops on specific exhibitions at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. She also taught art classes at the Continuing Education Program, Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.; Aidan School, Washington, D.C.; and at Michigan State University, East Lansing. In January 2005, she joined the Arts For the Aging (AFTA) faculty of artists to provide artistic outreach services to psychologically and physically impaired seniors in senior day care centers and not-for-profit nursing homes in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. El-Bayoumi currently resides and works in Washington, D.C.
Resources


Web Sites and Places to See El-Bayoumi’s Work

District of Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C.

Dahlia Elsayed (b. 1969), Painter, Writer, and Teaching Artist

Dahlia Elsayed was born in New York City to an Egyptian father and Armenian mother who immigrated to the United States in the early 1960s. Elsayed studied at the Center of Book Arts, and in 1991 she graduated magna cum laude as a member of Phi Beta Kappa from Barnard College, where she earned her B.A. degree in English. In 1994, she received her M.F.A. from Colombia University School of the Arts with an independent study in book art with Archie Rand. Elsayed is an award-winning painter and a writer who has been influenced by literature and her family background.

When Elsayed was a little girl growing up in New Jersey, she kept illustrated journals using images overlapped with text, which have developed into the kind of paintings she makes today. In her paintings, prints, and art books, Elsayed combines text with images to create diptych style illustrated documents about the environment as a way to record visual narratives of locations and experience that are informed by autobiography and landscape. Her interest in mapping or visually documenting places is due to the history of her family, which “relocated from country to country in the past three generations due to political strife.” On the themes of her artwork, Elsayed explains:

Part data-tracking, part topography, these conceptual maps examine the aesthetic surfaces and ephemeral cultural markers of recent immigrant populations, of which I am a product. My recent work explores the idea of emotional landmarks. These journalistic, text-driven paintings are records of internal and external geographies. Often they describe the most
mundane details: weather, high tide schedules, detailed menus, and street names. (Elsayed)

In her diptych style work, which includes text, images, aerial views, charts, and symbols, Elsayed explores the identity of places and monuments. Her drawings have been described as large “illuminated manuscripts” (Zimmer). After a visit to Egypt in 2002, Elsayed exhibited new work at the Jersey City Museum (2003), in which she links images from her home in New Jersey to those in the Middle East. In these images, Elsayed explores “the idea of emotional landmarks” (“Dahlia”). One of these “journalistic paintings” is a painting of a White Castle in Union City, New Jersey, compared with the Citadel Mosque in Cairo, Egypt. William Zimmer of the New York Times describes another diptych:

In “And All That’s in Between” the left side of the diptych shows the control tower and a runway at Newark Airport, with the code letters for the airport, EWR, sketched. The letters are raised on sticks, in a nod to the famous Hollywood sign. The second panel shows contours of mountains identified as the Caucasus. Ms. Elsayed labels them both, “My Favorite Places.”

Combining paintings, typewritten text, and digital images, Elsayed also creates art books that document a certain landmark or journey. In one of her art books, Pulaski (2003), Elsayed combines hand and digitally printed images in an accordion-like book to illustrate the history behind Pulaski Bridge in New Jersey, which was named after a Polish patriot and general who aided American forces in the Revolutionary War. Another book, Voyage (1998), illustrates a personal journey and daily routines, combining handwritten text with images and photographs.

Elsayed’s work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. Her solo exhibitions include: Portlock Black Cultural Center, Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania (2006); Clementine Gallery, New York (2006); Women’s Studio
Workshop, Rosendale, New York (2004, 2006); Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdansk, Poland (2004); the Jersey City Museum, New Jersey (2003); Armenian Library and Museum of America, Watertown, Massachusetts (2002); and the Gallery of South Orange, South Orange, New Jersey (2000). From 1994 to 2006, Elsayed also participated in numerous group exhibitions throughout the United States including these venues: New Jersey State Museum, Trenton (2006); Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey (2005); and in the third International Gyumri Biennial, Center for Contemporary and Experimental Art, Yerevan, Armenia (2002).

Elsayed had received a number of awards and participated in many residency programs, including: Haedlands Center For the Arts, Sausalito, California (2005); Artist Fellowship, Rutgers Center for Innovative Printmaking, New Jersey (2005); Artist in Residence at the Newark Museum, New Jersey (2004); Artist Teacher Institute Scholarship Grant, William Paterson University, New Jersey (2003); Center for Contemporary Art, Yerevan, Armenia (2002); Edward Albee Foundation, Montauk, New York (1999); and New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship (1999, 2004).

In addition to her artwork, Elsayed has taught as a teaching artist at a number of institutions, schools, and colleges. She was a visiting artist at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania (2006), and in 2004, she was a teaching artist at Rutgers Newark Master Class Workshops, Newark Museum Education Program, and at the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts. She has also published a number of articles. Elsayed currently lives and works in Palisades Park, New Jersey, where she grew up.

Resources


Web Site and Places to see Elsayed’s Work

Hunterdon Museum of Art, Clinton, New Jersey.
The Jersey City Museum, Jersey City, New Jersey.
Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey.
Morris Museum, Morristown, New Jersey.
The Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey.
Newark Public Library, Newark, New Jersey.
New Jersey State Council on the Arts, New Jersey.
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, New Jersey.
Noyes Museum of Art, Oceanville, New Jersey.
Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Layla Zarour Elshair (b. 1948), Ceramist, Painter, and Calligraphy Artist

Layla Zarour Elshair was born in Yafa (Jaffa) in historic Palestine and raised in Amman, Jordan. She moved to the United States in 1986 and settled in Chicago, Illinois. Elshair, a self-taught artist with few courses in the arts, works with ceramics, porcelain, oil paintings, and Arabic calligraphy. She is influenced by Islamic art and architecture, Arabic calligraphy, and her artistic family. Elshair has created two ceramic pieces for the Jordanian Royal family; a porcelain chess set, and a portrait of King Abdullah II and Queen Rania on a vase.

Elshair has shown her work at community events and group exhibits in the United States and Jordan. Her work is traditional, based on Arabic and Islamic arts and crafts with elements such as Arabic calligraphy and traditional Islamic patterns. Her paintings are of traditional scenes of Arab people and culture, such as her painting Dabka (2004), which captures the traditional folk dancing that is common in Jordan, Palestine, and other Arab countries. The painting shows men in traditional costumes holding hands with women in embroidered dresses in a group dance that commonly performed at weddings in the Arab world. Her purpose is to spread and promote the beauty of Arabic culture (Elshair). Her ceramic and porcelain works were featured at the conference of the Arab Medical Association in Chicago (1998). One of her ceramic pieces was presented to the first female Arab judge in the United States, Judge Charlene Mekled Elder in 2007.

Most of Elshair’s ceramic vases are decorated with Arabic calligraphy and Islamic geometric and Arabesque patterns. She uses verses from the Qur’an to decorate these pieces. For example, a ceramic vase, 1998, is decorated with the Qur’anic Arabic verse that deals with treating parents with good manners, and it can be translated as: “And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be dutiful and kind to your parents” (Qur’an 17.23.) Another vase (2003) is decorated with floral and vegetal patterns, Arabesque, and includes a calligraphic rendering of the opening chapter of the Qur’an.
Elshair participated in a national juried exhibition called “Jerusalem: Between Visions and Realities” (2006) at the Jerusalem Fund’s Gallery in Washington, D.C., which featured works by 12 artists in a variety of media that “speak to Jerusalem’s complex historical, religious and emotional significance and that consider the need for a just and peaceful solution to the conflict, recognizing the rights of Palestinians in the city” (Wright). Other artists in the exhibit include Rajie Cook and Zahi Khamis. Elshair participated with a ceramic piece called *The Old City on a Globe*, a handcrafted and carved sculpture of the Old City of Jerusalem. As Jessica Robertson Wright, Assistant Director and Cultural Coordinator at the Jerusalem Fund Gallery, wrote about Elshair’s pieces:

*Jerusalem on a Globe* provides an appropriate starting point for the discussion of this exhibit. Executed in ceramic in a naive style, Elshair presents the ideal Jerusalem, the familiar view of the Old City with its packed cityscape of spires, minarets and domes against a clear blue sky. Jerusalem here is a complete unit, encircled by its ancient walls, filled with history and people living side by side. It is crowded, vibrant and, most importantly, a whole.

Elshair currently lives in Chicago, and continues to create traditional pieces that are displayed in community events and functions.

**Resources**


**Web Site**

Lalla A. Essaydi (b. 1956), Painter and Photography Artist

Lalla A. Essaydi was born and grew up in Morocco and lived in Saudi Arabia for a number of years before she moved to the United States and settled in Boston. Essaydi studied painting and continuing education in 1994 at L’Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris, France. She has a Diploma in photography and installation from School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1999, Essaydi received a B.F.A. from Tufts University, Medford, and an M.A. and M.F.A. from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Tufts University in 2003. Essaydi works with photography, henna and oil painting, installations, mixed media, and video.

In her work, Essaydi addresses the complex reality of Arab female identity and explores the relationship between memory and experience. Her aim is “to challenge spatial and gender boundaries within Islamic traditions as well as the global perceptions of these traditions” (“Embodiments”). Her representation of the female body is based on her personal experience as she tries to examine the relationship between modernity and tradition in Arab and Islamic cultures. Essaydi has adapted the art of Arabic calligraphy, but not in a traditional style that has to conform to strict rules and traditional materials. She paints the script using henna, combing two artistic traditions: the henna art normally practiced by women and the calligraphy widely practiced by men.

Essaydi is best known for her large-scale and monumental color photographs that deal with women’s issues in Arabic and Islamic cultures. For her photographs, Essaydi uses family and friends as models, and covers their bodies and clothing with henna calligraphy, using Arabic text from her diary. The henna calligraphy runs across the figures, the walls, and the floor. These photographs, which became the Converging Territories series, were created in Morocco in a remote house that Essaydi used to be sent to as a child in punishment for transgressions (Lalla Essaydi, Anya Tish Gallery). In her statement for the exhibit “Converging Territories” (2006) at the Anya Tish Gallery in Houston, Texas, Essaydi wrote:

By re-visiting and re-interrogating the Arab female body, I am tracing and mapping a history often coded in misunderstanding. Through my photographs, I am able to suggest the complexity of Arab female identity, as I have known it, and the tension between hierarchy and fluidity that are at the heart of Arab culture. But I do not intend my work to be simply a mere critique of either Arab or Western culture. I am going beyond simple critique to a more active, even subversive, engagement with cultural patterns to convey my own experience as an Arab woman caught somewhere between past and present, East and West (Lalla Essaydi, Anya Tish Gallery).

The large color chromogenic photographs from Essaydi’s Converging Territories series were widely exhibited in the United States. In Converging Territories # 21 (2004), Essaydi shows four separate female figures, from a young girl with
un-covered head or face to a grown up woman completely covered and blending in the background. The figures are in an ascending age arrangement from right to left, capturing what females in certain parts of the Arab and Islamic culture go through in regard to covering their heads and faces. The same figures are joined in one piece in *Converging Territories #30* (2004). In these two photographs and many others, Essaydi “revisits and reexamines the formation of her identity and the identities of the women around her” (Lalla, Lisa Sette Galley). The henna calligraphy that runs and repeats across the figures, the walls, and the floor in the *Converging Territories* series, is from Essaydi’s own writing:

I am writing, I am writing on me, I am writing on her. The more you read, the more I know, the more this is impossible to obey. I am a book that has no ending. Each page I write could be the first? (Gosling)

Essaydi’s work has been exhibited in many major cities in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. Her solo exhibitions include: “TRANSGRESSIONS: Lalla Essaydi Confronts Jean-Léon Gérôme” at Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts (2006); “Converging Territories” at Laurence Miller Gallery, New York (2005); Saltworks Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia (2005); Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston (2005); Schneider Gallery, Chicago (2003-2004); the Boit Grossman Gallery, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2002); and the Annual Juried Painting Exhibition Show, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2001). Essaydi had also participated in numerous group exhibitions and photography shows around the world, including: the 2005 DeCordova Museum Annual Exhibitions, Lincoln, Massachusetts; Chicago Art Institute (2005-2007); the Eighth International Photography Gathering, Le Pont Gallery, Aleppo, Syria (2004); and the major international exhibit, “Nazar—Photographs from the Arab World” (2004-2006).

In her exhibition “TRANSGRESSIONS: Lalla Essaydi Confronts Jean-Léon Gérôme,” Essaydi displayed four new paintings that contained classically rendered figures and were juxtaposed with Gérôme’s iconic painting *The Slave Market* to “form a dialogue across space, time, and cultures” and to challenge the worldview of the nineteenth century French painter (TRANSGRESSIONS). Essaydi currently lives and works in Boston, Massachusetts. She continues to do challenging work, and as she mentions: “I try to present myself in something like my true complexity—as a woman, as an Arab woman living in the West, mediating between worlds, as an artist. It is not a fixed identity, but one that is changing as the world changes and as my life changes…” (TRANSGRESSIONS).

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Essaydi’s Work**

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

The Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio.

The DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts.

The Fries Museum, the Netherlands.

Kresge Art Museum, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.


Laurence Miller Gallery, New York.

Lisa Sette Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.

Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts.
Hala Faisal (b. 1957), Painter and Multidisciplinary Artist

Hala Faisal was born in Homs, Syria, to a Kurdish mother and a Syrian father who later became a minister in the Syrian government. She was raised in a secular, progressive home, where she was exposed to art and music. She received her B.F.A. in visual communications from Damascus University, Syria, in 1983. Faisal also studied cinema, drama, and animation at the Moscow Cinema Institute from 1985 to 1989, and studied drawing and painting at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1994-1995. She settled in New York in 1998 and took some art classes in painting and sculpture at the Art Students League, New York. Faisal is a multitalented visual and performing artist. She also speaks six languages: Arabic, Russian, French, Spanish, German, and English. She describes herself as “a woman who loves life, who writes, sings, acts, dances and plays the piano; a woman who loves the sun but her best friend is the moon” (Faisal).

Using various painting techniques, including acrylic, pastels, watercolor, and oil, Faisal’s paintings are symbolic images of women, mostly nude, and sometimes include other animal symbols and metaphors. Her dream and theme is “to turn all miseries and unfairness of the world into a paradise” (Faisal). Describing Faisal’s painting techniques and features, art critic Cesar Nammour writes:

Her neat linear contours, clean thin colors, and the two-dimensional rendering of volumes lend strong personal expression to her portraits, still lives and nudes. Lines maintain a smooth even width, and the simple uninterrupted curves are controlled yet graceful. The portraits are in simple poses, delicately balanced. The linear definition of the nudes is simplified, throwing an air of stillness to the paintings, while figurative distortions add an element of dynamism (Nammour).

Faisal’s paintings of women combine symbols and elements from the East and the West. Her paintings express personal dreams and reality. In one of her mixed media pieces, *The Presence Within* (2004), she shows a woman dressed in contemporary clothes and sitting on a chair with Arab writing in the background. The woman seems to be thinking, and the expressions and
feeling on her face are clearly defined. In *Self-Portrait* (2000), Faisal paints a sad Arab woman with a dark complexion against a background of animal symbols. A large number of Faisal’s paintings contain nudity, such as *Arabian Night* (2000), which is drawn against a background of Arabic motifs and patterns. To Faisal, nudity is not merely physical, but also emotional, and she wants the viewer to see the sadness and the suffering of her subjects through its nudity (Marrouch).

Since 1983, Faisal’s work has been exhibited throughout the United States, the Middle East, and Europe. She has had many solo exhibits and participated in a number of group exhibits, including at these venues: Soviet Cultural Center, Damascus, Syria (1984); Syrian National Museum, Damascus, Syria (1989); American Cultural Center, Damascus, Syria (1993); Syrian Cultural Center, Paris, France (1995); Arabic Cultural Center, Damascus, Syria (1997); Turkish Cultural Center, United Nations Plaza, New York (1998); Rivers Edge Gallery, Wyandotte, Michigan (1998); Berlitz School, Mainz, Germany (2001); Public Library—New York (2004); Village Quille Gallery, New York (2005); and many other exhibits in Syria, Lebanon, and France.

In 2007, Faisal held a major solo exhibit at the Four Seasons Hotel in Damascus, Syria, showing about 50 large paintings and excluding the paintings of nude women due to conservative cultural issues in the Arab world. The exhibit featured paintings that focused on the faces of women, because as Faisal stated, the face shows the feelings and the suffering of these women, especially the women of Iraq (Nayouf).

In August 2005, Faisal was arrested by New York City police for appearing nude in Washington Square Park. She was released and was given a court summons for exposure. Challenging all the customs and traditions, she took off her clothes in public to protest the war on Iraq and the continued occupation of Palestine. She appeared nude with anti-war slogans such as “stop the war” written all over her body in both English and Arabic. In a statement after her protest, she stated that it was her way to do a peaceful protest against the unjust occupations (“NYC”). Faisal’s protest stirred some criticism in the conservative Arab and Muslim community, and she was accused of defaming Muslim, Arab, and Syrian women (Marrouch). In an interview with Rami Eljundi, she had this response to the people who criticized her actions:

Let them go and find something better for their nations. Let them go and liberate Palestine. Let them get angry at the occupiers of Palestine for more than 50 years rather than wasting time getting angry at a woman who got naked expressing her anger for just 15 minutes in Washington Square Park in New York City. Let them go and express their anger at their totalitarian regimes that are ruling them. I did not act as a stripper. I wanted people to see this in context.

In addition to painting, Faisal taught art and lectured on art history in Damascus and at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. She also taught Arabic language at the New York University for over a year. As a performing artist,
she played a leading role in a number of films and documentaries, including *Islamic Cities of Samarqand, Khiva and Bukhara* (1988) and *Chronicles of the Coming Year* (1984), and she also produced an animated film, *Night Thief Robs the Day Thief* (1989). She currently lives in New York, and she is working on a movie project about her life in New York and Damascus.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Faisal’s Work**


**Simone Fattal (b. 1942), Painter, Sculptor, Art Critic, and Publisher**

Simone Fattal was born in Damascus, Syria, and lived in Lebanon until the civil war. She studied philosophy at the *École des Lettres* in Beirut, Lebanon, and the Sorbonne in Paris. While in Lebanon, Fattal was an art critic for Radio Lebanon, and she had her own art studio where she met Etel Adnan in the late 70s. In 1980, Fattal moved to the United States, where she founded a publishing house in 1982, the Post-Apollo Press in Sausalito, California, which publishes some of the most celebrated poets and writers.

Fattal started her artistic career in 1969 as a painter. In 1980, she moved to photography, and in 1985, she started working with ceramic sculptures. In an interview with Karl Roeseler of *Rain Taxi*, Fattal talked about her past experience as a painter and how it ended:

My painting stopped completely when I started publishing. In fact, it had stopped before I started publishing, so it’s not that I stopped
because I was publishing. It stopped because I left Lebanon, and stored my studio in boxes, and that was a very traumatic experience. My painting did not survive that. And there is another reason: I worked for ten years and I made a statement and that body of work was done. It was as if I had written a book that was finished. Before I packed my studio I was already doing assemblage, I wanted to branch out... maybe if I had gone on I would have done installations, what they call installations today. I don’t know. But my painting had arrived at a finishing point. (Roeseler)

Fattal exhibited her work nationally and internationally. Her selected solo exhibitions include: Galerie One, Beirut, Lebanon (1973), and a retrospective exhibition at Dar Al Nadwa, Beirut, Lebanon (1992). She also participated in a number of group exhibitions, including: Dar Al Fan, Beirut, Lebanon (1974); Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan (1974); Espace Cardin, Paris, France (1978); Museum of Modern Art, Tunis, Tunisia (1979); Perception Gallery, San Francisco, California, (1983-84); and “Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World,” The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. (1994).

When her publishing company became successful and well established, Fattal took some art classes in ceramic sculptures and started using clay as a medium of expression. She found in clay a medium with which to express a statement on the history of the Arab East through sculptures of goddesses, heroes, horses, Sufi masters, and normal people. Her ceramic sculpture work has been exhibited at many venues, including: Sursok Museum, Beirut, Lebanon (2006); Gallery Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon (2002); Cité internationale des Arts in Paris, France (2003); and at Cairo Biennale, Cairo, Egypt (2000). At the Cairo Biennale, Fattal exhibited five clay figures in the Lebanese contingent. One of the figures is Enkidu, a mythical character from the Epic of Gilgamesh. Another figure is Ishtar, a warrior goddess.

In 2006, one of Fattal’s glazed ceramic sculptures, Goddess of Fertility (2005), was featured in “Prologue and Epilogue: Arab Feminism Past and Present,” an art exhibition in San Francisco on the theme of Arab feminism and its impact on Arab women artists. On Fattal’s latest exhibit in Beirut, Laure Ghorayeb wrote:

I can not ignore what Simone Fattal’s hands and mind have done. It is the first time I feel that an artist has done something out of the ordinary and left the bourgeois familiar topics. She invented a “Trojan horse,” an aged bronze color sculpture that tells the novelty of the days in which we live and takes us back to the past, to remind us that we have learned nothing from our history.

The first book that Fattal published through Post-Apollo Press was the English translation of Sitt Marie-Rose, a feminist novel on the Lebanese Civil War by Etel Adnan, which is a best seller and considered a classic of Middle Eastern literature. In addition to publishing the work of Etel Adnan,
Post-Apollo Press also publishes literary fiction, poetry, and plays by well-known American, European, and Arab American poets and writers. The Post-Apollo Press has also published one of the most important scholarly studies on the great spiritual master and Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) and his life and work. The book, *Rumi and Sufism* (1988) by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch, was translated from the French by Fattal herself, and it gives the American reader a broader understanding of Islam and Sufism. For most of the books published by Post-Apollo Press, Fattal illustrates or designs the books and their covers, and sometime she cooperates with Etel Adnan on the design.

Fattal has been active in promoting women’s literature and has spoken at numerous events regarding both this issue and the status of women in the Middle East. She also writes for The Los Angeles based *Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts*, which publishes reviews and articles about Arab culture and arts. Fattal reviews art exhibits, translates poetry, and writes on Arabic and Islamic art, spirituality, and the work of philosopher Ibn Arabi and the Persian poet Rumi. Her research and work on Rumi were featured in a documentary film called *Rumi: Poet of the Heart* (Haiden Reese, 1999), which explored the meaning of Rumi’s mystical poetry. After the events of September 11, 2001, Fattal published a translation of the oral poetry of the women of Afghanistan. The *Songs of Pashtun Women* covered the topics of love, honor, and sorrow for the loss of one’s country (Fattal, “Oral” 6).

Fattal and her partner Etel Adnan currently divide their time between Sausalito, California and Paris, France.

**Resources**


Fattal, Simone. “Women Artists Dominate at Ceramic Biennale.” *Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts* 6, no. 31 (Spring 2000).


Web Sites and Places to See Fattal’s Work

The World’s Women Online: http://wwol.is.asu.edu/fattal.html.

Dalah (Dalaa’) El-Jundi Faytrouni (b. 1975), Painter and Creative Artist

Dalah El-Jundi Faytrouni was born and raised in Tripoli, Lebanon. Growing up in Lebanon during the civil war, Faytrouni mentioned that art galleries and shows were not available, so she trained herself and also received basic studies in art from Andre Karam, a local artist in Lebanon. It had been her dream to become an artist and to do oil paintings. Of this early exposure to art, she explains:

I was lucky enough that my dad hired a private art teacher to come once a week to give me private art classes. I was very happy and I learned a lot and I found that I have potential to do it by myself. So, I started to paint some scenes from magazines, imaginary landscapes and some portraits. (Faytrouni, Personal communication)

Faytrouni moved to the United States in 1993. She enrolled in art classes at the L.A. Valley College in 2002. With the encouragement of her art professor and her husband, she displayed her paintings in a county fair, which was the real beginning of her professional artistic career. In the 22nd San Fernando Valley Fair (SFVF), Faytrouni won first and second place ribbons for her art. Winning these prizes was a turning point in her life: “it was enough to convince me to enter different shows and to display my art in more exhibits and in public and to keep on painting” (Faytrouni, “Biography”).

Faytrouni’s most successful year was 2005, when she participated in a number of exhibits in Southern California, including “God Loves Beauty,” a group show at the Islamic Center of Southern California and the San Fernando Valley Art Club annual show at Stuart Gallery, where she received the Merchant Award at the 2005 exhibit. She also participated in group exhibits at NOHO Gallery, North Hollywood, and the Beth Hillel at Pierce & Valley Colleges in Southern California. In 2006, her artwork was displayed at the Encino Terrace Center, Encino, California; and in 2007, she participated in a group exhibition at VIVA Gallery, Sherman Oaks, California.

The “God Loves Beauty” (2005) exhibit was an interfaith event that brought together Muslim and Christian artists and was organized by a mosque (Islamic Center of Southern California) and St. James Episcopal Church. The show that was held in the two locations “provided an atmosphere of openness and understanding amongst both religious communities.” As one of the organizers stated, “I’m a believer in the arts as one of the best ways to communicate with each other. I see it happening before my eyes in my interfaith work” (Kholoki). Faytrouni’s paintings in the exhibit included a number of portraits of veiled Muslim women, landscape scenes of Lebanon, and art pieces with spiritual and Arabic calligraphy compositions.
Inspired by the beauty of Lebanon, and as a spiritual and a compassionate person, Faytrouni is also “inspired and touched by God’s beauty.” Using oil, acrylic, pastel, charcoal, and watercolor, Faytrouni paints landscape scenes, gardens, flowers, architectural settings, and portraits. Her recent work also deals with the political situation in Lebanon. Some of her portraits include Muslim women wearing traditional dresses and the Hijab (veil or head scarf). In one particular painting, which Faytrouni displayed in the “God Loves Beauty” exhibit, the woman is sitting down on a prayer rug reading the Qur’an in a place that looks like a mosque or a prayer niche.

In the last few years, Lebanon has been going through a series of bombings and assassinations of a number of political figures and leaders, including the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. These events resulted in mass demonstrations throughout Lebanon. In a recent work, Independence Walk (2005), Faytrouni captured the unity of the Lebanese people in a colorful and a powerful acrylic on canvas painting with the flag of Lebanon and the text of the national anthem flowing through it. As Faytrouni stated, this painting is a tribute to the “freedom and peace that come at a very high price and after so many lives were lost and loved ones went missing. But the light will always shine for a new beginning upon my beloved Lebanon” (Faytrouni, “Biography”). In another painting, Liberty Walk (2006), she also captured this unity by adding what looks like a combined building of a church and a mosque. A third painting, Finally Independence (2005), a large (5’ x 4’) mixed media piece, Faytrouni provides this description:

This work tells the whole story of Lebanon. The details in the lower left of the canvas show the civil war that started in 1975. The middle portion of the canvas shows the historic revolution that occurred in March 2005 after the assassination of Mr. Hariri. In the top left part of the canvas, I included the world flags as a symbol for unity and peace. The circle is an indication that life must go on with peace; and the velvet canvas speaks about unity and tolerance. The top right part of the canvas is a
celebration of Lebanon being finally independent of foreign troops (Faytrouni, “Biography”).

Faytrouni currently lives and works in the San Fernando Valley, Southern California. She is a member of the San Fernando Valley Art Club and the Watercolor Society. In 2006, Faytrouni joined other Arab American artists in Southern California in an artists group as part of the House of Lebanon foundation. The House of Lebanon Artists Group includes over 30 visual artists, composers, writers, and filmmakers. The group held its first Festival Of Art in November 2006. She is currently working on a series inspired by faith, peace and unity in religion.

Resources

“Artist Dalaa Faytrouni in her new exhibit” [Arabic]. Al Arab Newspaper, April 12, 2006.


Web Sites and Places to See Faytrouni’s Work


Chawky Frenn (b. 1960), Painter and Educator

Chawky Frenn was born in Zahle, Lebanon, a country of beauty, mysticism, and conflicts. As a teenager, he took private painting lessons with Marie Khayyat, a local artist whose life and guidance instilled in him a deep love for painting and teaching (Frenn, Personal communications). With the beginning of the war in Lebanon in 1975, his drawings became “active meditation” on life’s paradoxes. He writes:

I was fifteen or sixteen when I did my first drawings. Thoughts about God and Man, Life and Death, Good and Evil, Fate and Freedom were too ambiguous to be expressed in words; they manifested themselves in images, little meditations, solitary and reflective. As I retrace the origins of the image in my life—and where the need to create images comes from—I see the sources flowing from intimate, personal, and meditative inquiries observing inner and outer realities and asking questions. (Frenn, Personal communications).
The tragic element manifested itself in his earliest work. After a year and a half of studying French literature, it became impossible for Frenn to pursue a college education as varied factions carried violence and death to university campuses across the country. After a brief escape to Paris, he emigrated to the United States in 1981.

In 1985, Frenn received a B.F.A. from Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, where he studied with George Nick, a mentor, artist, and teacher who influenced the young student. He attended Tyler School of Art of Temple University in Philadelphia and participated in the Temple Abroad Program in Rome, Italy, where he completed his M.F.A. in 1988. He taught at Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, Massachusetts; Montserrat College of Art, Beverly, Massachusetts; and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Currently, he is Associate Professor at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia.

Frenn’s iconography is pregnant with metaphors for inner and outer observations, for loss of innocence, for children betrayed by society and civilisation, and for the daily interaction of the ever-present birth and the never-absent death in and around us. Life nurtures his heart with mysticism, spirituality, beauty, conflicts, and paradoxes. A search for meaning and purpose underlies the roots and origins of the images: each of the elements, contextually and conceptually re-evaluated, has the potential of becoming the thing itself or its opposite. The skull could be death, sin, refuge, salvation, interlocutor; the dolls could be abused or abusive, innocents or victims, animate or still; the nude a mother, a lover, a symbol, other, self, femme fatale—Thanatos and Eros ever dancing! In the relation between Thanatos and Eros, are we certain that Eros may not be more responsible for death than Thanatos, and the latter more inspiring of love than the former? (Frenn, “Chawky”) His panel formats recall religious altarpieces, triptychs, and icons, a direct reference to searching and finding the spiritual in the mundane and commonplace. In an artist’s statement for The Holy Cost, Frenn writes:
Through my images I’m walking a path of reconciliation, searching for unity in my understanding of Hope and Fear, Mind and Heart, Body and Soul, Male and Female, Justice and Self-Interest, Power and Fragility, Truth and Falsehood, Sacred and Profane. I found in me saints and sinners, martyrs and murderers, marginal and elite. Every stone has been turned so I may be confirmed in the realization of the Oneness of Life. We are the Holy Cost. When Deception and Falsehood seem on the verge of triumph, all my hope and belief is that Truth will prevail and set humankind free, free to be unified, free to be one, free to be love. (The Holy Cost)

Frenn exhibits extensively, both nationally and internationally, and has participated in many museum shows, including: Oglethorpe University Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia; Arnot Art Museum in Elmira, New York; Sursock Museum in Beirut, Lebanon; the Florida Museum of Hispanic and Latin American Art in Miami; Alexandria Museum of Art in Louisiana; and the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts and George Walker Vincent Smith Art Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts. He has had shows in the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, and Paraguay. In 2000 through 2002, Frenn’s first traveling show, “ECCE HOMO,” was hosted by Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee; George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia; the Hoyt Institute of Fine Arts, New Castle, Pennsylvania; the Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, Connecticut; the Erie Art Museum, Erie, Pennsylvania; and St. Paul’s School, Concord, New Hampshire. His work is included in the collection of the Housatonic Museum of Art, the Springfield Museum of Art in Springfield, Ohio, and many private collections.

Frenn has received numerous awards, including a Summer Research Grant from George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, in 2003; Blanche E. Colman Award, Mellon Trust, Boston, Massachusetts, in 1998; The Stacey Scholarship Award, the National Academy of Western Art, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1993; the Sheldon Bergh Award and the Basil H. Alkazzi Award, both in 1993; and the Gibran Khalil Gibran Foundation Grant, Gibran Khalil Gibran Foundation, Boston, Massachusetts, in 1982, 1983, and 1984.

Enthusiastic reviews and critical acclaim of his work have appeared in newspapers and magazines, including the New York Times, NY ARTS, Art New England, Connecticut Post, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, The Boston Globe, The Daily Star, and l’Orient-Le Jour. Frenn’s work has appeared in publications in the United States, France, and Lebanon in numerous museum catalogs and in David Leddick’s Male Nude Now by Universe Publishing, a division of Rizzoli. An award winning 72-page catalogue documenting his work was published to accompany the traveling show “ECCE HOMO.”

Art for Life’s Sake, a hardcover monograph on Frenn’s work, was published in 2006 by Fine Arts Consulting and Publishing in Beirut, Lebanon. Six distinguished writers and art critics contributed essays on his work. The following excerpts from the contributing writers to Art For Life’s Sake reveal a humanist whose love and concern for humanity are guiding forces:
“Beneath all the dichotomies that are thrown at us lies one fundamental message—the message of compassion and love for humanity.”

Cesar Nammour

“He constructs a spiritual space in which the contemporary public can feel emotionally at home, however troubling the emotions his imagery evokes in them.”

Donald Kuspit

“This art drawn from the core of his being—in an almost literal sense, the art he was born to do.”

Daniel Cohen

“His struggles are not held inside. They are painted for everyone to see. They are his struggles and they are struggles shared by millions.”

John D. O’Hern

“The artworks of Chawky Frenn have been designed by the artist’s heart working in intricate sympathy with his mind to tell us something important about the human condition.”

Howard L. Resnikoff

“His work is about modern spirituality, about an anguished and tormented faith to which doubt is consubstantial, about a faith in crisis detached from religion and its rites and its dogmas.”

Raphael Karim Hamoudi

Frenn lives and works in Arlington, Virginia. He is represented by the Fraser Gallery, Bethesda, Maryland.

Resources

Web Sites and Places to See Frenn’s Work

Fraser Gallery, Bethesda, Maryland: http://www.thefrasergallery.com/.
The Housatonic Museum of Art, Bridgeport, Connecticut.
The Springfield Museum of Art, Springfield, Ohio.
Mariam Ghani (b. 1978), Video, New Media and Installation Artist

Mariam Ghani was born in New York to a father from Afghanistan and a mother from Lebanon. After receiving her B.A. in comparative literature from New York University in 2000 with a specialization in Italian literature, cinema studies, and Middle Eastern studies, Ghani changed course to visual arts. In 2002, she received an M.F.A. in photography, video, and related media from the School of Visual Arts in New York.

Ghani participated in a number of residencies and received a number of awards and fellowships, including: Aaron Siskind Memorial Scholarship, 2001; Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, 2000-2002; Artist in the Marketplace, Bronx Museum of the Arts, 2002-2003; Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Artist in Residence, 2003-2004; Eyebeam Atelier Artist in Residence, 2004; Smack Mellon Artist in Residence, 2005-2006; and the Akademie Schloss Solitude Fellowship, 2005-2007.

Working in video, installation, new media, photography, text, and public dialogue performances, Ghani investigates the issues of immigration and living in the diaspora. Influenced by the writings of Arab American philosopher and theorist Edward Said, Ghani also looks at ‘how history and memory are constructed and reconstructed as narrative in the present, particularly in the border zones and political spaces of transition where past, present and future emerge as stories told in translation, contest and counterpoint’ (Ghani).

Ghani’s installation work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally since 1999. She has had solo exhibits at the Kevorkian Center, New York (2005); Wesleyan University, Connecticut (2004); White Box, New York (2004), Smart Project Space in Amsterdam, Netherlands (2004), American Center for Exp. Art in Yerevan, Armenia (2001), and at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University in Boston (2001). She also participated in numerous group exhibitions including: the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan (2005); the Academy of Fine Arts in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (2004); Kyrgyz National Museum in Bishkek, Kyrgyz; the Bronx and Brooklyn Musuems; the Asia Society in New York; Eyebeam Atelier in New York; and the Liverpool Biennial (2004).

Since 1999, Ghani has created a number of videography projects, including: Repeat Fugitive (1999), Shahrazade Divided (2000), Blind Crossing/Crossing Blind

Ghani has created a number of multimedia projects, including *Universal Games* (2000), in which Ghani manipulated footage from New York network TV news in October of 2000, when the two top stories were the Subway Series (the Yankees-Mets World Series of baseball) and the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (the Al-Aqsa Intifada), “in order to expose the strange similarity in the way our media outlets report stories of wildly varying gravity” (Ghani). An installation with 43” x 96” sheets of graphically patterned black-and-white wallpaper made from the news images was created. Another project is *Beirut Nocturne* (2001), which included sketches from the vantage point of Ghani’s grandmother’s apartment in the city of Beirut, Lebanon.

Ghani’s project, *Kabul: Reconstructions* (2003), documents the post-conflict reconstruction of the city of Kabul, Afghanistan, from the winter of 2002 to the winter of 2005. Ghani describes the project as “an insider’s perspective on the back-room politics of critical moments in the reconstruction and an outsider’s perspective on the changing surface and structures of the city” (Ghani). The project consisted of a video installation housed in a refugee tent and a collaborative web-based forum for viewing, creating, and exchanging information. Shaheen Rassoul describes the relation of this project to Ghani’s examination of her identity:

Mariam makes use of “Kabul: Reconstructions” as a allegorical vehicle to explore her own identity as an Afghan-American in the context of Kabul’s reconstruction; investigating her image of self by deconstructing the reconstruction of a home which is as much myth for her as reality. Thus, in the video installation, we see scenes of carpenters carving ornamental cabinetry to outfit her parents’ new home in Kabul and of Mariam undressing in front of a mirror then ceremoniously and methodically re-dressing in her father’s traditional Afghan clothing. Mariam’s use of these significant personal images in the video suggests that the examination of self-identity is an intrinsic part of Kabul’s reconstruction, but she doesn’t quite take us fully into the process.

For the May 2005 inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, Ghani participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. Her video and mixed-media installation, *Points of Proof* (2005), was commissioned by the museum and was based on the answers of Arab Americans and other ethnic groups to the question, “If someone questioned your right to call yourself an American, what is the one story, object, image or document
you would offer as your proof? (In/Visible, 38). Points of Proof was shown as a single-channel video on a monitor with a grid of postcards featuring the same question asked in the video hanging on the wall beside it. The installation was also shown in Los Angeles and New York, and visitors were provided with pencils and invited to add their answers to the collection (Ghani).

Ghani is currently a fellow of the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, and also teaches in the Department of art, music, and technology at the Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to see Ghani’s Work**

Featured Artist at ArteEast Web Site http://www.arteeast.org/.

How Do You See the Disappeared? http://turbulence.org/Works/seethedisappeared/.


**Rajaa A. Gharbi (b. 1958), Painter, Filmmaker and Poet**

Rajaa A. Gharbi was born and raised in Tunisia. She also lived and worked in Morocco, her grandfather’s homeland, and Andalusia, Spain. She has been
living in the United States since 1982. In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, Gharbi was a practicing puppet theatre artist with the Troupe Nationale de Theatre de Marionnettes in Tunis. An interdisciplinary artist, she is a poet, a painter, and a filmmaker, who owes most of her informal education in language and art to her mother, her father, and her paternal grandmother. Her formal education is in fine art, creative writing, filmmaking, and sociolinguistics, with an M.A. in transcultural communications from Antioch University, Seattle, Washington.

Gharbi uses extensive layering and re-layering of watercolor, gouache, ink, and pencil to explore and create semi-abstract visual narratives. In many of her paintings she draws and paints with Arabic and sometimes other ancient scripts. She uses individual letters and diacritical signs in single large or minute brush strokes, and macro-zoom-like framed images, to explore real or imagined stories, emotions, and wanderings. Her passion for poetry and music and her love for her native homeland and her adoptive American northwest are also elements that influence her palette and themes. On the use of Arabic script in her paintings and how her paintings involve calligraphic elements that are deeply rooted in the great contributions that converged to create the splendors of Arabic calligraphy, Gharbi stated that she uses the brush, the nib, as well as the traditional methods and techniques of a reed pen. She also compares her techniques and usage of Arabic script to music:

I use the improvisational effect of paint as particular Oud or Jazz piano players might refer or allude to established musical modes, but always long for the unexpected, innovation, or at least a re-interpretation of what’s there. In searching for the origin of the “written” word, working to re-contextualize and translate my findings into contemporary and dynamic visual idioms, I had to create my own botanico-visceral “script.” (Gharbi, “Artist’s”)

Gharbi’s paintings and even her poetry integrate themes of life, death, and relationships with a feminine quality. Her work is connected to her cultural roots “in a unique form of visual poetry,” and she has the ability to show human themes “so powerfully through her strong and affective use of poetry woven through her paintings with the Arabic and other scripts, and her vivid use of colors and images,” as stated by Artist Patti Bezzo (Gharbi, From Songs).

Curator Ken Matsudaria wrote that Gharbi’s work and artistic voice lend an important feminist presence to the recent upsurge in dialogue about the Middle East, North Africa, and the relationship between the United States and Muslim peoples worldwide (Gharbi, From Songs).

Gharbi’s visual art and poetry work have been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions and events, including a number of celebrated individual readings and shows. In November of 2005 her work was honored by the Ambassador of Tunisia in Washington, D.C., in a retrospective exhibition, poetry recital, and signing of her 2004 book From Songs of a Grasshopper. She was the featured artist at the New York based Tunisian-American Cultural Association in 2004. Her solo exhibitions include exhibitions at Art and Soul
Gharbi has received a number of grants and commissions from national and state organizations, among them the Seattle Arts Commission, the American Institute for the Preservation of the American Languages, and King County Arts Commission. Gharbi’s literary work appeared in publications by Aperture Foundation and the Seattle Art Museum, in *Upstream, Off Our Backs, the Glacier Reporter, Arab Film, Dancing Words, She Speaks*, and other publications. Gharbi is a featured writer in the tenth anniversary issue of the international anthology *Le Maghreb Litteraire*. She has read from her literary work at numerous events and venues in the United States, including the African Diaspora International Film Festival at Columbia University, National Public Radio, *Working Mother Magazine*, Bumbershoot’s International Readers program, Washington State’s historical Elliott Bay Book Company and Langston Hughes Arts Center, PBS, The World Affairs Council, the Alliance Francaise’s *Journee Internationale de la Francophonie*, Goodwill Arts Festival, and Poets Against the War.

Dr. Najib Redouane, literary critic and chief editor of the international *Le Maghreb Litteraire* who has published and presented studies of Gharbi’s work, wrote about her 2004 book titled *From Songs of a Grasshopper*,

*Her poetic writing is fresh, powerful...Gharbi meditates on the question of identity, religion, language, culture, exile, poetry, history...The poetics of her writing embody a motion that is unpredictable...that opens the door of the wondrous and...Her words, are like blood that comes out to translate the interiority of silence...She looks into the night for what transcends it...giving space to poetic meanings that initiate an enriching dialogue...* (Redouane)
As a filmmaker, Gharbi produced and directed a number of films and documentaries, including *This Time We Won’t Let Them Go*, filmed in Montana, Wyoming, Washington, Tunisia, and Spain. This short film is an American Blackfeet-North African co-production documentary celebrating the 1995 historic return of the Indian horse. She also produced *Blue Forces*, filmed in the American Northwest, India, and other fish farming countries. This film is a visual poem that explores unseen faces of seafood farming.

Gharbi is working on an exhibition of new paintings titled *The Carthage Series*. She is currently the editor and translator of the first U.S. English language anthology of North African literature. She is a former member of the Executive Council of the Consortium for Artists of Color. She is a professor in Seattle University’s Department of Modern Languages and Literatures.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Gharbi’s Work**

Gallery 110, Seattle, Washington.

**Gibran Khalil (Kahlil) Gibran** (1883-1931), Poet, Philosopher, and Painter

Art is life, art is worth everything, art is glory, art is beauty...
Art is a step from nature toward the infinite, a mist carved into an image...
Art is a step from what is obvious and well-known toward what is arcane and concealed.

(Gibran Museum)

These are the words of internationally acclaimed author, poet, philosopher, and visual artist Gibran Khalil Gibran, known also as Gibran Kahlil Gibran. Gibran was born in Bsharri, a Maronite Christian village in the mountainous
area of Northern Lebanon. In 1895, Gibran’s family immigrated to the United States and settled in Boston. Gibran’s mother, Kamila Rahmeh, made a living as a peddler selling goods on the impoverished streets of Boston (Ameri, 172). Gibran attended Quincy School in Boston, where his name was changed to Kahlil Gibran by his English teacher.

With the help of a number of people who recognized his artistic talents, Gibran had his first exhibit in Boston in 1904. This exhibit came after two years of sad events in his life: his sister and brother died of tuberculosis, and his mother died of cancer. During the 1904 exhibit, Gibran met Mary Elizabeth Haskell, a headmistress of a school in Boston. Haskell became Gibran’s benefactor, patron, and collaborator. She greatly influenced Gibran’s writing career and recommended to him that he start writing in English, having written exclusively in Arabic (“Biography”). Haskell collected over 80 of Gibran’s paintings and later gave them as a gift to the Telfair Museum of Arts and Sciences in Savannah, Georgia.

From 1908 to 1910, Gibran studied and exhibited his work in Paris, and also studied with famous French sculptor Auguste Rodin. Gibran then settled in New York in 1912, where he was able to establish a studio and produce most of his finest artistic work. In New York, he also established Arrabitah Al-Qalamyiah, an Arab organization dedicated to promoting Arabic writings and literature worldwide. Gibran is widely known for his mystical writing and poetry, specifically his signature work *The Prophet* (1923), a collection of 26 poetic essays, which has been translated into more than 40 languages. The poems are about a prophet who lives in a foreign city 12 years and is about to board a ship that will take him home. He is stopped by a group of people, whom he teaches the mysteries of life. *The Prophet* influenced American popular culture in the 1960s, and even today some of its verses are read at weddings and celebrations. Gibran became one of the most famously known Arab Americans and an inspiration for new generations of Arab Americans.

Gibran’s writings have also inspired millions of Americans, including President John F. Kennedy when he said, “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” This was originally written by Gibran in 1925 as, “Are you a politician asking what your country can do for you, or a zealous one asking what you can do for your country?” This original quotation of Gibran was rendered in Arabic calligraphy and was part of the first Arabic/Islamic cultural mural in San Francisco (2003), which was designed and painted by Khalil Bendib, Said Nuseibeh, and Fayeq Oweis (Oweis, 49).

In addition to illustrating his own books, Gibran created other works of art including oils, watercolors, pencil drawings, and charcoal drawings. His drawings and paintings of landscapes and portraits are mystical in nature: “The spiritual nature of Gibran’s figures is suggested through his use of soft, muted, and sometimes blurred outlines around them” (To Discover). Gibran drew and painted portraits that depicted Jesus, goddesses, characters from Greek mythology, and people that he met and associated with, including the spiritual leader of the Bahá’í faith, Abdul-Bahá’. He also painted a number of self-portraits. Gibran’s mother was also the subject of a number of paintings
and drawings. Most of Gibran’s paintings expressed his personal vision, incorporating spiritual and mythological symbolism.

One of the famous paintings by Gibran is *The Divine World* (1908-1914), which shows an eye in the middle of a hand, and the hand is surrounded by what looks like wings of angels and human figures in a circular motion. The eye in the hand reflects an eastern belief in the protection against the “evil eye.” Other paintings show excessive nudity, which made a number of galleries in New York reluctant to display his work. Among the galleries that showed Gibran’s work were the Montross Gallery on Fifth Avenue, New York (1913); and M. Knoedler and Co., New York (1917).

Gibran died of cancer in a New York hospital on April 10, 1931, at the age of 48. He was mourned in both the United States and in the Arab world. Gibran had expressed his wish to be buried in Lebanon. In the 1970s, a museum that houses his original paintings and personal belongings was established in his birth city of Bsharri, Lebanon. The Gibran Museum is located in the Mar Sarkis Monastery, where Gibran was buried.

Since his death and through literary clubs, organizations, conferences, exhibits, academic institutions, and events by Arab American organizations, Gibran’s work has been celebrated throughout the United States and the Arab world. Annual conferences and symposiums celebrate his birth or passing away. A memorial for Gibran was created in Washington, D.C., and awards commemorating his achievements have been presented by many organizations.

In 2006, The Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, hosted an exhibition of Gibran’s original artworks on loan from the Telfair Museum of Arts and Sciences, Savannah, Georgia. The exhibit, called “To Discover Beauty: The Art of Kahlil Gibran,” included over 40 original paintings. A permanent installation that includes a maquette for the Kahlil Gibran memorial in Washington, D.C., was installed at the Living in America gallery at the Arab American National Museum, along with Gibran’s quote to early Arab immigrants:

I believe that you have inherited from your forefathers an ancient dream, a song, a prophecy, which you can proudly lay as a gift of gratitude upon the lap of America. (Gibran, “I Believe in You”)

Gibran was the godfather and uncle of Boston based sculptor and painter Kahlil George Gibran.

**Resources**


Kahlil George Gibran (b. 1922), Sculptor and Painter

Kahlil George Gibran is the nephew, godson, namesake, and biographer of the well-known Lebanese poet, artist, and philosopher Gibran Kahlil (Khalil) Gibran (1883-1931). Gibran was born in Boston and followed the footsteps and the encouragements of his cousin and godfather, and became an established painter, sculptor, philosopher, writer, and poet. On the influence of his cousin and godfather, who let him use his paint boxes, Gibran said:

As a child, I used to crawl around my cousin’s studio. When I was about seven, he promised me a five-dollar gold piece if I could dismantle a clock and put it back together in working order. I did. That gold piece was the shiniest thing I’d ever seen. (White)

Gibran studied at the Museum School in Boston from 1940 to 1943 and took painting instruction with German-born American artist Karl Zerbe (1903-1972). During the 1940s, his paintings were in modernist style with themes that included life and death, children in caskets, young muses, and girls doing every day things in an unconventional or eccentric manner (“‘Kahlil’”). He exhibited his paintings from 1945 to 1952 at many museums and galleries, including the Margaret Brown Gallery, Boston; Mortimer Leavitt Gallery, New York; Boston Museum; Carnegie Institute; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.
Since 1953, Gibran has turned to sculpture, preferring hand hammering, using bronze, steel, marble, and aluminum. His sculptures of bas-relief portrait busts and life-size figures in realist style are “celebrations of the human spirit” and sometimes they are “provocative celebrations of death” (“Kahlil”). Gibran exhibited his sculptures throughout the United States and internationally, including at the Boston Arts Festival; Chicago Art Institute, Houston Museum, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Norfolk Museum of Fine Arts, Copley Society of Boston, and many other venues. His sculptures can be seen throughout several Boston neighborhoods.

One of his celebrated sculptures and bronze bas reliefs is a monument of Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1977) in Boston’s Copley Square, which consists of a bronze bas relief of the poet as a young man sitting on a pink granite slab between two great landmarks, Trinity Church and the main branch of the Boston Public Library. Gibran also created three portraits at Boston’s Federal Court House, representing Judge Francis Ford, an Irish-American (1977); Austen Jones, the first African American clerk of a Boston Court (1980); and the Italian American Judge Anthony Julian (1995). Another of Gibran’s monumental sculptures is located at the Maronite Church of Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon, which consists of a ten-foot statue of Our Lady of the Cedars, Virgin Mary (1981).

Gibran created a series of nude figures, adorned in straw hats and carrying sheaves of wheat, called The Ceres Series, which opened at a one person show at the Copley Society of Boston (1995). The series also include The Seated Ceres (1993), a large bronze sculpture of a seated “Good Goddess,” which was installed at the Forest Hills Cemetery in Boston. On this piece, Gibran wrote:
The myth of Demeter or Ceres, the “Good Goddess,” has always fascinated me. I prefer her Roman title—Ceres—not only for the eponymous cereal, but also for her later association with creativity, both agricultural and artistic. When I first sculpted two standing goddesses and then finally this larger seated version, which I call my “Ceres series,” I was paying homage to the mother who waits each spring for her daughter Persephone’s annual return from Hades. Just as artists wait for muses, we all celebrate reunions. The images and symbols of this Ceres are my record of spring and its subsequent harvest, of imagination and its subsequent fulfillment. (“Contemporary”)

Gibran has won numerous international gold medals and honors, including: Wiedner Medal, Pennsylvania Academy (1958); John S. Guggenheim fellowships (1959-1960, 1960-1961); National Institute of Arts & Letters, award and fellowship (1961); Popular Award and Grand Prize, Boston Arts Festival (1964); Gold Medal for Pieta (sculpture) International in Triste, Italy (1966); Citation of Merit, Massachusetts Horticultural Society. He is a founding member of the Copley Society, Boston’s oldest cooperative gallery, the Guild of Boston Artists, the National Sculpture Society, Provincetown Art Association, and the New England Sculpture Society Cambridge, where he served as a vice-president in 1968.

One of Gibran’s latest sculptures is a six-foot processional cross, which was hand wrought and studded with blue gems, commissioned and completed in 1993 for All Souls’ Episcopal Church in San Diego, California. In the last few years, Gibran returned to paintings and drawings, and created a number of mixed media pieces with subjects ranging from flowers to spirituality, such as John The Baptist (2003). With his wife Jean, Gibran has published the most authoritative study and biography of Gibran Kahlil Gibran, the author of The Prophet, titled Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World. Gibran currently lives and works in Boston, and he continues creating sculptures and drawings that are “uniquely individualistic pieces of esteem” (“Kahlil”).

Resources


Pierce, Patricia Jobe. “Sculptor Kahlil Gibran is Back…” The Inquirer & Mirror, August 8, 1991, 8B.

Web Sites and Places to See Kahlil Gibran’s Work
Cedars of Lebanon Church, Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts.
Cheekwood Art Center, Nashville, Tennessee.
DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts.
Elmira College, New York.
Museum of Fine Art, Boston.
Virginia Museum, Richmond, Virginia.
Samia Halaby (b. 1930), Painter and Mixed Media Artist

Prominent Palestinian American and leading contemporary artist Samia Halaby was born in Jerusalem and lived in Yafa (Jaffa) until her family was forced to leave in 1948 when Israel was created. The family immigrated to Lebanon, and in 1951, Halaby moved to the United States, where from 1954 to 1959 she attended the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, and received a Bachelor’s of Science in design. Halaby then attended Michigan State University, East Lansing, in 1960, where she received an M.A. in painting. In 1963, she received her M.F.A. from Indiana University, Bloomington.

From 1963 to 1991, Halaby taught extensively as both an assistant and associate professor at a number of institutions, including the University of Hawaii, Kansas City Art Institute, Indiana University, the University of Michigan, and 10 years at Yale University School of Art (1972-1982). In 1997, she was also a visiting artist at Birzeit University, Palestine. Halaby is also an activist working on Palestinian issues. Her memories of Jerusalem and Palestine are always present in her art. On this memory, Halaby writes:

In my memory there is a shape like a candle flame, luminescent but cooler in color and warm to the touch. This is the very shape which visually forms in my mind as the aggregate of my memories of Jerusalem. It is made up of grandmothers, visiting relatives, wonderment at fountains in gardens of fruits and blossoms, the turn of a narrow street, the old city walls and shops, the calm and peace of its people, the stone arches and domes of an old bakery, the grand uncle in his shoe repair shop, the vegetable seller on his donkey, and the modern burgeoning new neighborhoods with beeping cars and bustling shops” (“Paintings”).

Halaby had numerous solo exhibits throughout North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Her solo exhibitions include: Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago (1971); Yale School of Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut (1972); Marilyn Pearl Gallery, New York (1978); Housatonic Museum, Bridgeport, Connecticut (1983); Tossan-Tossan Gallery, New York (1983, 1988); Darat Al-Funun, Amman, Jordan (1995); Galerie Atassi, Damascus, Syria (1997); Agial Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (1999, 2004); Sakakini Art Center, Ramallah, Palestine (2000);
Using oils, acrylics, encaustic, and electronic media, Halaby creates non-figurative and abstract art works. Influenced by nature and the trees of Palestine, mainly the olive trees, Halaby creates multi-layered color abstract paintings on canvas, paper, or digital prints, with textures of light and shades that convey a sense of movement (Bushnaq, “Places”). Halaby often works on large pieces measuring up to 24 feet. In an interview with Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, Halaby commented on her choice to do abstract painting:

I embrace it, because of its political roots, because of its roots in rejecting capitalism. But, you know, abstraction doesn’t reject Renaissance thinking. It just adds to it... to me, as an artist, the painting I do is political because of the artistic choice I made. I’ve consciously made the choice to be, let’s say, a descendent of these radical movements in the 20th century. That’s the area of investigation. I’m not interested in Surrealism, which investigates states of mind and dreams and nightmares. To me, that is the garbage heap of history.

In 1985, Halaby began working with digital media using a computer program that she developed to create kinetic paintings and perform them with live musicians. The computer program converts the “computer keyboard in such a way that pressing the keys creates the moving images in the similar way as the keys of a piano create sounds” (Halaby, “Paintings”). Halaby’s kinetic paintings have also been performed and presented in numerous locations, including the Fourth International Symposium on Electronic Art, Minneapolis and Philadelphia (1993, 1994); Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (1994); and Williamsburg Art and Historical Center, Brooklyn, New York (1998).

Halaby also participated in “Contemporary American Printmaking” at Indiana University Art Museum (1977); “Forces of Change” at the National Museum of Women, Washington, D.C. (1994); and in “Williamsburg Bridges Palestine 2002” at Williamsburg Art and Historical Center, New York (2002), which she curated with Zena El-Khalil through the Al Jisser organization that she co-founded in 2001. Halaby was also an active participant in the “Made in Palestine” exhibit at The Station Museum, Houston, Texas (2003), which

Mohammed Al-Sadoun, *untitled* (2005), Mixed Media Installation, 18.5”x19”x37”. Photo Credit: Tommy Conant. Courtesy of the Artist.
Sama Alshaibi, *Return II* (2005), Giclee Print, 14”x16”. Courtesy of the Artist.

Khalil Bendib, *Couscous* (2005), Bronze, approximately 98” x 62” x 46”. Private Commission, Dayton, Ohio. Courtesy of the Artist.

Carole Choucair-Oueijan, *Finesse* (2004), Mixed Media: Canvas, Grout, Concrete, Mosaic (Smalti, Marble, and Granite), and Oil, 45 1/2” x 36”. Assunta Fox Gallery, Santa Ana, California. Courtesy of the Artist.

Rajie Cook, *All Flights Canceled* (2006), Sculptural Assemblage 11” x 25.5” x 3.5”. Photography of art and courtesy of the Artist.

Chawky Frenn, *Nothing personal, just economic interest, or We are not the last* (2005), Oil on panel, 24” x 32”. Courtesy of the Artist.

Samia Halaby, *Demolish the Wall, Let Life Be Fertile* (2004), Acrylic on canvas, 56” x 59”. Courtesy of the Artist.

Leila Kubba, *War and Peace* (2005), Acrylic, gold leaf and collage on canvas, 30"x 30". Courtesy of the Artist.
Mamoun Sakkal, *Shahada Cube* (2005), 18”x13”, ink jet print on water color paper. Courtesy of the Artist.

was also shown at Somart in San Francisco (2005), and The Bridge in New York (2006). In addition to participating in the exhibit with three paintings, Halaby played an instrumental role in organizing the exhibit, and she accompanied the curators on their trip through the Middle East to collect the artwork of over 20 Palestinian artists.

In the exhibit “Made in Palestine,” Halaby’s abstract paintings, created with acrylic on canvas and paper, carried titles that referred to Palestine. In her large (up to 85” x 154”) paintings—Palestine, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River (2003), Mountain Olives of Palestine (2003), and Al Quds (Jerusalem) (2003)—Halaby explored the beauty of the landscape of Palestine through an array of vibrant colors and movements. Her paintings carry “an air of nostalgia as Halaby explores the beauty in the natural landscape” (“Artist”). As Tex Kerschen wrote about Halaby’s work in “Made in Palestine,” the abstract expressionist paintings are “her idea of place, her childhood home in Palestine, with flowering, emotionally expansive modes of lush pointillism” (21). The paintings also represent the topography of Palestine “from the yellow desert boundaries along the Jordan River to the turquoise blue of the Mediterranean Sea” (Mikdadi, 70).

In the last few years, Halaby has been active against the “security barrier,” or as the Palestinians call it “the apartheid wall,” that has been built to separate Israelis from Palestinians, and Palestinians from one another. In a painting in acrylic and paper on linen, Demolish the Wall, Let Life Be Fertile (2004), Halaby “suggests that behind the wall is a secret garden abloom with flowers and vegetation, and that through resistance such beauty will come to the fore” (“Artist”).

Halaby has published a book, Liberation Art of Palestine, (H.T.T.B. Publishers, 2003) and a number of articles on contemporary Arab art and Palestinian artists. A hardcover monograph on Halaby’s work was published in 2006 by Fine Arts Consulting and Publishing in Beirut, Lebanon. She has also maintained an online visual diary of experiences, discussions, and readings, and exchanges letters with other artists, including Arab American artist Sari Khoury. Halaby currently lives and works in New York and continues her activism through the arts on behalf of Palestine.

Resources
John Halaka (b. 1957), Painter, Mixed Media Artist, and Art Educator

Born in Egypt to Palestinian parents, John Halaka came to the United States to study art in the early 1970s. In 1979, Halaka received his B.A. in fine arts from the City University of New York Baccalaureate Program, with Brooklyn College as home school. He continued his art education at the University of Houston and graduated with an M.F.A. in painting and drawing in 1983.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, Halaka held a number of art teaching positions at various institutions in the state of Texas, including the Glassell School of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the School for the Performing and Visual Arts, and East Texas State University.

Halaka’s paintings and drawings use simple compositions both abstract and figurative to create works that are “psychologically complex and emotionally rich” (Halaka). From 1985 to the present, he has exhibited his work in
numerous solo and group exhibitions both locally and nationally. On the issues of simplicity, composition, themes, and meanings of his paintings, Halaka wrote:

It has been my goal throughout my career to avoid creating works that are overt, dogmatic, propagandistic or simplistic in the treatment of the themes. Rather, I try to create images that are subtle and multi-layered in their meaning, delicate and beautiful in their form, poetic in their character and deliberately ambiguous in their conclusions. (Halaka).

Halaka has also received a number of grants and awards from the California Council for the Humanities in 1993, the University of San Diego in 2003, 1997, 1996, and 1993, and the National Foundation for the Arts, Dallas Museum, and the Jane Guggenheim Winslow Fellowship.


In his monumental works for the exhibit “Made in Palestine” (2003) at the Houston Station Museum, Halaka presented a mural painting titled Stripped of Their Identity and Driven from Their Land (1993/1997/2003), from his series Forgotten Survivors. The painting, measuring 87” x 272”, created with acrylic paints and rubber stamped prints of the phrase “Forgotten Survivors,” showed dispossessed figures that memorialized the diaspora of the Palestinian people. The mural, which occupied an entire wall at the exhibit, was a dramatic exodus, a forced march of men, women, and children (Avila). In regard
to this work, Tex Kerschen wrote in the introduction to the *Made in Palestine* exhibition catalogue that those figures could be the Palestinians in the Negev desert or the Cherokee marching the Trail of Tears. She also added that if a common sentiment can be found in these works it is that suffering is not exclusive to any one people (*Made in Palestine*, 20).

Halaka confirms the universality of the “dispossessed” characters in the paintings and drawings that make up the series *Forgotten Survivors*. He writes:

> Whether it is the indigenous people of the Americas, Africa, Australia, the Bosnians and Croatians, the Jews, the Palestinians, the Kurds or another group, the paintings and drawings that make up the series “Forgotten Survivors” permit each viewer to project his/her experiences and concerns on my images. (Halaka)

For the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Salwa Mikdaddi, a leading expert in contemporary Arab art, curated “In/Visible,” the first exhibition of contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. Halaka participated in the exhibit with two paintings from his series *Whispers and Echoes*. One of the paintings, *A Path of Least Resistance* (1999-2000), was a large oil on canvas measuring 68” x 124”. In his statement for the exhibit, Halaka writes that this work is a “transition from exploration of political concerns, to the investigation of certain psychological and emotional conditions, such as doubt, delusion, desire and obsession.” (*In/Visible*, 40). On the same issue, Mikdadi describes Halaka’s work as “a move from his earlier engagement with socio-political themes to a more personal and introspective approach in which the process of painting become a medium for meditation.” (*In/Visible*, 22)

As an artist concerned with the Palestine-Israel issue, he participates in events that explore the prospect of a peaceful coexistence between the Palestinians and the Israelis. In the summer of 2005, Halaka traveled to Palestine with a group of Palestinian and Jewish artists to paint murals on the wall that separates a Palestinian farmer from his farmland and his village. The objective of the mural was to bring emotional and psychological support to the family and international attention to their suffering (Bell). The group of artists, including Halaka, also worked on a mural in Rafah, Gaza Strip, on a building that houses a cultural center dedicated to the memory of American activist Rachel Corrie, who was killed while trying to stop a bulldozer from demolishing a Palestinian home in Gaza in 2003.

A community and human-rights activist, Halaka’s artwork explores the suffering of people and their hope for a better life. Halaka currently resides in San Diego, California. He is a professor of visual arts at the University of San Diego, where he has been teaching painting and drawing since 1991.

**Resources**

Avila, Robert. “History in the Waking: The Unprecedented ‘Made in Palestine’ Dramatically Asserts a Narrative too Long Suppressed.” *San Francisco Bay*


Web Site and Places to See Halaka’s Work

Halaka Studio, San Diego, California.
The Rachel Corrie Cultural Center, Gaza, Palestine.
University of San Diego, California.

Nabila Hilmi (b. 1940), Painter and Mixed-Media Artist

Nabila Hilmi was born in Jerusalem, Palestine. She received a Licence en Droit (Law Degree) from St. Joseph University in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1963. After receiving another law degree in 1973, Hilmi pursued her studies in fine arts and received a B.A. with High Distinction from Beirut University College in 1983. Hilmi moved to the United States in 1984, where she studied at the Art Students League in New York, and in 1994 she completed a three-year program in the philosophy of art and art appreciation at the Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania.

With themes that explore the dualities of light and shadow, mass and void, strength and sensitivity, Hilmi works on a variety of media and techniques including oil paintings, watercolor, monotypes, pastels, and drawings. Color plays an important role in Hilmi’s work. She uses soft and muted tones to create dynamic rhythms and explores the relationship between form and line. Often using the figure as the basis for abstract explorations of form and color, Hilmi’s works possess a delicate sensuality and grace. Layers of recurring, rhythmic lines and shapes convey the flow of time, its sequences and imprints (Hilmi, “Artist’s”). The lines and forms that Hilmi uses are influenced by the
two worlds she belongs to and by her cultural heritage, as well as her sense of space, light and color (Hilmi, Personal communications).

Since 1978, Hilmi’s work has been exhibited in national and international venues, including: “Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World” at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C. (1994), the Nexus Contemporary Center in Atlanta, the Balch Institute in Philadelphia, the Tuscon Museum of Art, and the White Columns Gallery in New York City (Hilmi, “Artist’s”). In 2001, she was featured on the National Geographic Channel in relation to the “Women of the World (2000-2005), a Global Collection of Art” exhibition that traveled throughout the United States.

As an artist of Palestinian heritage, Hilmi is active in supporting a peaceful and just solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. She donates her artwork to benefit the refugee children of Palestine and has participated in a number of exhibits on this issue. In 2002, she participated in “Williamsburg Bridges Palestine,” an exhibition of work by 50 Palestinian artists curated by Samia Halaby and Zeina El-Khalil from Al Jisser, a New York based organization dedicated to bringing Arab artists to international attention. Hilmi showed her series of monotype paintings Beyond Time (2000). People and places fill the space in Hilmi’s work. They move freely in a world with no boundaries, bringing memories of people and places from the past (“Williamsburg”).

Hilmi is a longtime member of the Foundry Gallery, Washington, D.C. In 2002, an exhibit of her new black-and-white drawings Motion and Emotion Series, Recent Drawings, was held at the gallery. The horizontal drawings (8” x 41”) using black ink and charcoal were described by Metro Weekly as a “frenzy of elongated, black and white horizontal drawings” that “create a feeling of chaos and confusion” (“Art Preview”).

For the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Hilmi participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. In her ink drawings on paper series Motion and Emotion I, II, III (2002), Hilmi replaced her previous vibrant colors with black ink. This shift from colors to black came as a result of the tragic events of September 2001. The 8” x 41” drawings are a blend of Hilmi’s fascination with the art
of lettering in Arabic culture with Chinese calligraphy (In/Visible, 22). In her statement, Hilmi writes that as a result of the events of 2001 her work had stopped:

When it resumed, things were not the same. The hand, however, active, flowing, reaching out, knew what it wanted to say. Colors disappeared. Black ink replaced them. Black, of course, I thought, reflects the sadness and worry that are filling the world. To my surprise, the work is not sad. On the contrary, as light moves through it, black motions sadness away. Assertive and rhythmic, the drawings mean harmony and flowing life. (In/Visible, 42)

Hilmi currently lives and works in Villanova, Pennsylvania. She is represented by the Foundry Gallery in Washington, D.C. Hilmi is an active supporter of al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Group, and her artwork appears periodically on calendars, or donated to raise funds for Palestinian children and to support the Palestinian desire for peace and justice.

Resources

Hasan Hourani was born in Hebron, Palestine, to a large family that includes a number of artists. He was the youngest among his 21 brothers and sisters. In 1993, Hourani went to Iraq, where he attended the College of Fine Art in Baghdad and received his B.F.A. in 1997. When he returned to Palestine, Hourani worked as an art instructor at the Women’s Society College and also coordinated exhibitions at the Mattal Gallery in Ramallah. He participated in The Summer Academy at Darat Al Funun in Amman, Jordan, in 1999, working with the Syrian artist Marwan Qasim Bashi. From 1999 to 2000 he was an exhibition coordinator and researcher at the Wasiti Art Centre in Jerusalem (Staines). In 2001, Hourani moved to the United States, where he studied at the Art Student’s League of New York and continued to live in the city for several years until his life was ended in a tragic accident in 2003.

Hourani was a painter, illustrator, and installation artist. In the short life that Hourani lived, he produced a large amount of artwork, held several solo exhibits, and participated in group exhibits in the United States and the Middle East. His solo exhibitions include “What Remains” at the College of Fine Art, Baghdad, Iraq (1997) and the Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Ramallah, Palestine (2000).
Hourani also participated in a number of other exhibitions, including at Birzeit University, Palestine (1997); Alexandria Biennale, Egypt (1997); Sumud Camp, Jerusalem (1998); Al Sharja International Festival, United Arab Emirates (1998); United Nations, New York (2000); Museum of Young Arab Artists, Doha, Qatar (2001), and Williamsburg Art and Historical Gallery, New York (2002).

By using materials from the local environment of Palestine, such as soil, wood, ropes, sand, and plants, he explored issues of memory, place, and time (Staines). As Palestinian artist Suliman Mansour puts it, Hourani was “always trying in his works to create this bridge between himself and his surroundings . . . as if he is trying to draw a new map of things” (“Artist”). Hourani’s most notable show was Minna wa Finna (Of Our Flesh and Blood) (2000), which brought him acclaim. He was awarded the second prize in the First Young Artist of the Year competition, which was hosted by the A.M. Qattan Foundation (“Artist”). The installation, which was made of soil and herbs, was rooted in the artist’s memories and connections with place, and presented a series of cubes of clay and sand from across Palestine (Staines). In 2001, Hourani’s installation Minna wa Finna became a permanent installation at the Museum of Young Arab Artists in Qatar. Hourani offered the following words about the installation:

Soil . . . Originating from us . . . The secret within a place that pushes us to leave only to return . . . Speaking endless words in its silence, ever increasing its magic . . . The magic of myths hidden under the city’s lifeless details . . . Here, it builds its original and ultimate shape anew. Reciting stories of the present, it draws in upon itself, condensed. Feel the virtuousness of your body so that you might find love. Allow your soul to touch the energy that lives within the place, and maybe the place will touch you. It is soil. Let it bring you back. (“Artist”)

One year after Hourani arrived in New York, he participated in a group exhibition called “Williamsburg Bridges Palestine” (2002) at Williamsburg Art and Historical Center in New York, which featured the work of 50 Palestinian artists. In conjunction with the exhibition, Hourani conducted a collaborative drawing project called One Day for One Night, in which he showed a creative technique he called “Drawing through Yoga.” He described his approach: “Freedom emits from the body and mind alike. Creative art depends on this. While the body is the means of physical production, the mind is what gives it creative direction” (Staines).
In addition to painting and installations, Hourani produced numerous sketches as studies for different works. Some of the sketches also function as individual pieces in their own right. He had a “distinctive style that centered on use of the linear and the power of line’s expression” (“Artist”). In many of Hourani’s sketches and illustrations, he tried to “re-capture a style of childhood innocence.” Hourani wanted his pencil on paper sketches Hasan fī kul makan [Hasan Everywhere] (2001), to be combined into a book that addresses children. He passed away before completing the book. He described his main character in the illustrations, Hasan, as:

...a beautified male figure. He celebrates and enjoys every place he finds himself in, be it ancient Egypt or on the rooftops of New York. Hasan rides the waves, is fed by the birds, flies on his magic bicycle, sits on the rooftops, always looking on to see the panorama of the world. Finally the freedom of flight and travel of Hasan in Hasan Everywhere carries particular resonance in the context of the confinement of Palestinians for whom such freedom is a dream (“Artist”).

In a farewell letter to Hourani, his Israeli Jewish friend, Dorit Rabinyan wrote about him and about his dreams for a better and a peaceful life in Palestine. She also described some of the sketches that Hourani was working on in his Hasan Everywhere children’s book. She writes: “In one drawing your hero is embracing a drop of dew in the desert, in a second he is playing the violin to a swarm of bees and in a third he is diving into the depths of the sea to kiss a sad fish.”
In 2003, Hourani returned for a short visit to his family in Palestine. During the visit, he went with his nephew Samer Abu Ajamiyya, another young Palestinian artist, to visit the area where their family had lived before 1948, new Jaffa. On Jaffa beach, Hourani and his nephew went to swim in an isolated area away from the Israeli police and they drowned. The Jaffa sea “refused to let them go after such a very long separation” (“Palestinian”).

After Hourani’s tragic death, the culture and science program at A.M. Qattan Foundation in Palestine established the Hasan Hourani Young Artist Award in his memory. The biannual competition “offers opportunities for young Palestinian artists to enrich and expand their creative experiences and to produce challenging art works” (“Hassan Hourani Young Artist”). The first exhibition was held at the Khalil Sakakini Center in Ramallah, Palestine (2004). In 2004, Hourani’s brother, Khaled Hourani, who is also an artist, worked on the production of the art book Hasan Everywhere, and it was released in 2004. Hourani’s death was a big loss to the Palestinian and Arab American art community, and “to everyone who knew him as he was one of the most promising and talented artists of his generation, creating works in drawing, painting and installation as well as being a writer and poet” (“Artist”). In early 2007, a new Palestinian art gallery was established in Jerusalem called Al Hoash, Palestinian Art Court. The opening show at Al Hoash was a retrospective of the work of Hourani.

Resources

Web Sites and Places to See Hourani’s Work
Al-Hoash, Palestinian Art Court, Jerusalem.
“Hasan Hourani” at the Virtual Gallery of Birzeit University, Palestine: http://virtualgallery.birzeit.edu/tour/exhibition?id=79627#.
After working with other Arab American artists in Southern California for over a year, mosaics artist and painter **Carole Choucair-Oueijan** founded an artists group as part of the Lebanese American Foundation (The House of Lebanon Foundation) in Los Angeles. Choucair-Oueijan is the chairperson of the House of Lebanon Artists’ Group, and **Dalah (Dalaa') El-Jundi Faytrouni** serves as the secretary of the Artists’ Committee. The group includes over 30 visual artists, performers, composers, writers, and filmmakers. The majority of the artists are of Lebanese heritage living in Orange County, California. The first time that the group got together was in November 2006 for a “Celebration of the Arts” in Los Angeles in a festival that included a fine art exhibition and musical performances. The art exhibit featured a diverse selection of the artists’ work in almost every imaginable medium, including paintings, sculpture, ceramics, and glass. Individually, each artist works in his or her own specialty and participates in exhibits and community events.

**George Chamaa** is a sculptor and oil painter. Chamaa was born and raised in Egypt in a Lebanese family and immigrated to the United States in 1985. He graduated from the Institute of Applied Arts in Giza, Egypt, in 1950 with a diploma in applied arts. Chamaa participated in a number of group and solo exhibitions in the United States, Lebanon, and Egypt. He received a number of awards for his work, including first prize (1987) and best of show (1986) awards at Gregg Art Gallery, La Puente, California. Chamaa’s paintings are abstract representations of human figures including those of the Virgin Mary and Jesus.

**Jeanice Deeb** (also known as J.D. Mina) is a Glass Artist who was born and raised in the San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles. Deeb was born to a Lebanese family that was very active in the Orthodox Church; her father and mother started St. Michael’s Orthodox Church in Van Nuys, California. She received an undergraduate degree from Pepperdine University in business with a minor in art and a Master’s Degree in architecture from the Southern California Institute of Architecture. Deeb works with free form glass, where each piece is cut or bent into shape and layered onto the other glass. Deeb stated that her art creates a balance to the everyday discipline of the chaotic business world in which she thrives (Deeb). Without using any paint or enamels, Deeb creates very colorful and attractive bowls, platters, vases, and other glass pieces.
Reem Hammad is a ceramic artist who was born in Aleppo, Syria. Before she moved to Los Angeles in 1981, Hammad studied at Beirut University in Lebanon and then continued her education at UCLA, graduating with a B.F.A. degree in design. She draws inspiration from her Middle-Eastern background, Islamic art, and her diverse life experiences as an Arab-American woman. (Hammad). Since 1992, Hammad participated in group exhibits and in Interfaith Visual Arts festivals in Los Angeles, California. Using earthenware with hand carving and glazing techniques, Hammad creates ceramic pieces that are both functional and decorative. Symmetrical geometry, stars, and Arabic script are among the elements that she uses in her ceramic work.

Joseph Hawa is a painter of Lebanese background. Using oil, acrylic, and watercolor, Hawa paints still life, figure drawings, landscapes, geometric compositions, and abstract paintings. Hawa is a graduate from the American Academy of Art in Chicago with further studies at Northwestern University. He has exhibited his work in the Chicago area and in Southern California. He has won many awards in both oil and watercolor, and has also taught watercolor painting at the Irvine Fine Art Center, California. At the Celebration of the Arts, Hawa exhibited a number of paintings, including a scene of the ruins of Baalbeck, a city in Lebanon known for its ancient Roman architecture. His work is very colorful, with many textured layers of oil pigments.

John Hajjar was born in Beirut, Lebanon, to an Assyrian family. Hajjar uses oil, acrylic, and calligraphy to create pieces that are mostly of religious themes. A graduate of the American University of Beirut in mechanical engineering with a minor in art, Hajjar moved to the United States in 1975, and since then, he has been exhibiting his artwork and calligraphy in many venues. Hajjar’s calligraphic work is based on the ancient Aramaic script, the language that Jesus spoke. In addition to Aramaic script, Hajjar’s Assyrian artwork pieces also include a number of symbols such as the Winged Bull, Pegasus, Queen Theodora, and St. Ephrem. The Winged Bull (Lamassu in Assyrian) combines the four symbols of the Four Gospels: St. John as the Eagle, St. Luke as the Bull, St. Matthew as the Man, and St. Mark as the Lion (Hajjar).

Father Farid Shoucair, a mosaic iconographer, was born in Showeyfat in Beirut, Lebanon. For many years, he was a leader of several Boy Scouts Organizations and other national and international groups in Lebanon. In 1975, he became a priest and was sent to Greece by his bishop, George Khodor, for several years, to learn the art of mosaic iconography. Father Shoucair’s religious mosaics and unique icons can be found in several churches and convents in Greece, Lebanon, and the United States.

Other members of the group include Michelle Constantine, an artist specializing in illustration, oil painting, and mixed media; Maryam El Zein, an interior designer; Ahmad Habli, a graphic designer; Mohamed Kaakaty, an oil painter and publisher; Lamia Maalouf, an interior designer, painter, and photography artist; Carole Williams Gelker, an American artist who specializes in oil and mixed media; Gisele Shalhoub, an oil painter; and Wafa Tarafi, a ceramics artist specializing in Islamic art.

The HOL Artists Group performing artists include: Joseph Chamaa, a violinist and composer; Julia Cunningham, a professional harpist; Nadine
El-Khoury, a singer and filmmaker; Mary Fakhoury, a singer, model, and actress; Fidel Fayad, a singer and webmaster; Joelle Chamaa Ferrando, a singer, songwriter, and composer; Souhail Kaspar, a composer, doumbek (Darabuka), and tambourine player; Nabila Mettouali, a dancer and singer; Naser Musa, a singer and oud player; Tony Nicola, a singer, violinist, and painter; Louie Sadd, a comedian; Dzovig Seferian, a singer; and Fahd Shaaban, a musician. There are also two writers, Karim Cheikh Ali and Adel Saouma, and a songwriter, Roger Yazbeck, as members of the HOL Artists Group. Most of the members of the HOL Artists Group live in Southern California. They continue to meet on a regular basis and are planning a series of group exhibits in the near future.

Resources


Visual Artists’ Web Sites


Alya Abdul Razzak Husseini (b. 1954), Oil Painter

Alya Abdul Razzak Husseini was born in Tartous, Syria. She graduated from the University of Damascus in 1977 with a B.A. degree in French literature and the history of European art. She moved to the United States in 1978 and settled in Michigan, the largest concentration of Arab Americans. Husseini started painting in 1998 after she took a number of art classes in different media including oil, watercolor, and pastel at the Grosse Pointe War Memorial. She later found herself drawn more to the realism school and concentrated on oil paintings on canvas.

Husseini’s education in European art, and her admiration of the work of famous artists such as Johannes Vermeer, John Constable, and Rembrandt, have helped her in the process of becoming an artist:
I started improving my techniques by emulating the famous artists that I studied as a youth. This often involved recreating many of the great masterpieces I grew up admiring, a process that helped me grow tremendously as an artist, establishing skills I would later use as I began to create my own pieces. The more I found my abilities improving, the more I moved to my current passion of creating scenes in the Middle East and North Africa, which I feel work as a form of cultural diplomacy by turning something foreign and alien into something familiar and intimate. (Husseini)

Consisting of images of tree lined streets, historic homes, and people in traditional dresses, Husseini uses her artwork as a vehicle to educate fellow Americans about her native Arab culture. Her paintings depict the rich cultural heritage of the Arab world, and she gets her inspirations from pictures in books and her travels to places like Syria, Morocco, Egypt, and Lebanon. Husseini aims “to bridge the gap between different cultures with her art” (Williams, 2L). As Husseini stated: “I like to bring different cultures together, when I visit a place, I bring back my memories and create art” (“About Alya”). As Lanetta Williams also stated, Husseini uses her artwork as a vehicle to link worlds together, and her paintings offer a glimpse of life thousands of years ago (2L).

Husseini exhibits her paintings mostly in Michigan. Her solo exhibitions include these venues: University Liggett School, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (2003, 2006); Flint Culture Center, Flint, Michigan (2003); and Sterling Height City Hall, Sterling Height, Michigan (2005). In 2006, a year after the inauguration of the Arab American Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, Husseini was one of the first Arab American Artists to have a solo exhibit at the museum, the first museum in the country dedicated solely to the preservation of Arab American history. She also participated in group exhibitions, including: Grosse Pointe Art Association, Grosse Pointe, Michigan (2003-2004, 2006); University
of Detroit Mercy Art Fair, Detroit, Michigan (2004); Pontiac Creation and Art Center, Pontiac, Michigan (2004); and at Unity Center of Bloomfield, Bloomfield, Michigan (2005-2006).

Husseini received a number of awards, including “the best traditional oil painting” in a juried exhibit at Grosse Pointe Art Association (2003). She was also chosen as the artist of the month (September 2005) for the city of Sterling Height, Michigan, and was granted recognition from the cultural commission of the city (Husseini). At the exhibit in Sterling Height City Hall, Husseini displayed paintings that “depict women from a Bedouin tribe in Morocco, an old house in Damascus, a scene from a ceramic wall that hangs in the Louvre Museum in Paris that is originally from Persia in the 1300s, a 2,000-year-old building in Cairo, and her favorite painting, a street in the historic city of Jbail, Lebanon” (Oparka, 3A).

One of Husseini’s paintings has been displayed at the American Embassy in Damascus, Syria. She normally does not sell her original paintings, but she produces limited edition prints. To her, a painting that may take months to complete is “hard to let go” (Oparka, 3A). She converted one of the rooms in her house to a studio and a gallery. Looking at Husseini’s paintings, one can travel through the entire Arab world, from a traditional market scene in Fez, Morocco, through the streets of Cairo, Egypt, to a dervish dancer in Damascus, Syria. These photo-realistic paintings offer the viewer an opportunity to see something different as far as the subject matter, as Sharon Arend, a member of the Sterling Height Cultural Commission, stated (Williams, 2L).

Husseini is a member of the Grosse Pointe Art Association and the Art and Culture program of ACCESS, Detroit’s Arab American Organization that
established the Arab American National Museum. She currently lives in Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to see Husseini’s Work

Alya Husseini Studio, Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan.


Happy/L.A. Hyder (b. 1947), Fine Art Color Photography; Assemblage and Installation Artist

Happy/L.A. Hyder was born of Lebanese ancestry in Worcester, Massachusetts. A self-taught artist, Hyder photographed exclusively in black and white from 1969 until 1992 when she switched exclusively to photographing in color. Her images continue to hold the elements so essential to strong black and white imagery: light, shadow, and texture, producing shapes and forms that capture the viewer’s attention. Because of her years working in black and white, her color palette is often subtly based, layering what the image brings to her viewer.

Her “2007RetroContempo” was an exhibition of black-and-white vintage prints, contemporary fine art color photographs, and mixed-media constructions with displays of memorabilia, musings, and a few rocks gathered along the way, at the San Francisco Main Public Library. Hyder wrote this about her work:

My intent has always been to be a fine artist using photography as my tool. It is not surprising then that many call my work paintings. As a printer uses her canvas, I use my negative, full frame, to bring an image to life. Those negatives I choose to print hold all the elements of a strong narrative to draw a viewer in and hold their attention. I have come to call my work “intricately simple”—the more one looks, the more one sees.
Hyder began using installations for artistic expression in the mid-1980s while working with Vida Gallery collective at the San Francisco Women’s Building. Having the opportunity to use a small room during one of the collective’s exhibitions, she created the first *Temple to Transformation*, a subtitle she uses with all her installations. She often includes her own photographs within an installation. A lesbian and activist, her installations carry political themes of identity as Arab, as feminist, and as lesbian.

Hyder’s photographs, on the other hand, are based in wonder and awe of the natural world. She occasionally juxtaposes images of nature and architecture to bring a political message that no matter the manmade object, it begins with the resources of the natural world.

Hyder photographs whenever she can find a block of time, which is especially available when traveling. Her Parisian images are among her earliest color work and were included in the online exhibit “Contempo Lesbos” (1998), which focused on contemporary lesbian artists. The curator of the exhibition, Adrienne Fuzees, wrote of Hyder’s Parisian architectural details, they “resonate with a passionate intensity, capturing the essence of a site romantically and realistically” (Fuzees).

Hyder was chosen to participate in “Prologue and Epilogue: Arab Feminism Past and Present” in San Francisco (2006), an exhibition organized by Sunbula, a grassroots organization of radical Arab feminists in the Bay Area working for equality, social change, and gender justice. Hyder’s mixed media construction, *No More Blood for Oil* (2005), was a statement against the war. In her artist’s statement, she describes the installation and the message behind it:

My construction work is blatantly simple to bring my message easily to viewers. I use as the main image a photograph I took in Vallejo CA a few years ago; it is not retouched. A hawk is standing on a pigeon it had just taken out of the sky. USA is written near it on the macadam. A sign proclaiming “no parking, any time” stands behind the birds, and the sign’s key-shaped shadow is cast upon the wall. To the left of the image, I strung topaz-colored glass beads (on wire) to signify drops of pure oil, then added deep red beads to signify the mixing of oil with blood. Below the image is a pile of broken cement. To return to purity (of oil, of self-directed peoples) is a struggle (a winding of the beads through the rubble) that can result in regeneration (a pomegranate sits atop the rubble with three beads of pure oil). To my mind, peace is the only solution. (“Prologue”)

An activist and community leader, during the mid-1980s Hyder was a founding collective member of Vida Gallery, housed in the SF Women’s Building. During this time, she created the image *New Country Daughter/Lebanese American* (1981). Many Arab women have told her this is the first image they had ever seen depicting their own likeness. *New Country Daughter* was included in *Lesbian Art in America, A Contemporary History* by Harmony Hammond (2002) and in the third Edition of the feminist classic, *This Bridge Called My Back, Writings by Radical Women of Color*, as one of eight seminal
representations of art coming from the feminist movement of the 1970s and 80s.

In 1990, Hyder founded LVA: Lesbians in the Visual Arts, a multicultural organization of lesbian artists, curators, and commentators. Vida and LVA produced exhibitions with themes that varied from self-portraiture to anti-nuclear focused art. She produced the exhibition “Dynamics of Color: Works by Lesbian Artists on Racism” for the 1989 conference of the same name, looking at racism within the lesbian community. She also spoke on the opening plenary about anti-Arab racism.

Hyder was awarded the Bay Area Career Women’s Lesbians of Achievement Vision and Action award (1996), and in 2002 she was named a “Local Hero” by KQED-TV. She was a community-voted Grand Marshal of the San Francisco LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) pride parade and celebration in 2004. That same year, she was a featured speaker at the Dyke March, with “Uprooting Racism” as the theme.

Also an accomplished writer, Hyder’s Dyke March speech and her article, “I Am Also a Belly Dancer,” were included in the spring 2005 MIT Electronic Journal of Mid Eastern Studies. “I Am Also a Belly Dancer” was written in response to a question about being a feminist, a lesbian, and a belly dancer. It will be published as part of the book In Gender, Nation, and Belonging: Arab and Arab American Feminist Perspectives, edited by Rabab Abdulhadi, Nadine Naber, and Evelyn Alsultany. She also published her writings and photographs in Food for Our Grandmothers, edited by Joanna Kadi (1994).

Hyder currently lives and works in San Francisco. She exhibits her work extensively, and her images are in collections around the world, including the Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan. She sits on the advisory board of the New York Camera Club, which boasts such illustrious early members as Alfred Stieglitz.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Hyder’s Work

Uma Gallery, New York.
Annemarie Jacir (b. 1974), Film, Video, and Photography Artist

Annemarie Jacir was born to Palestinian parents from Bethlehem and lived in Saudi Arabia until the age of 16 before she moved to the United States, where she received her B.A. degree in political science and English literature in 1996 from Pitzer College in Claremont, California. She worked in the film industry in Los Angeles before attending school in New York to obtain a Masters degree in film from Columbia University, New York, in 2002. Jacir has been working in independent cinema since 1992. She is an accomplished filmmaker, photographer, and writer who has written, directed, and produced a number of award-winning films. She is the sister of conceptual installation artist and photographer, Emily Jacir.

Jacir’s films reflect self-representation with narration that focuses on borders, class, and self-identity. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the main theme of Jacir’s work. Her deep understanding of dispossession, injustice, and inequality has affected her work and the way she approaches all other things, whether they have to do with Palestine or not (Jacir, Personal). She is an activist and co-founded Philistine Films, an independent production company, focusing on productions related to the Arab world and Iran. Jacir is also a chief curator and co-founder of the groundbreaking Dreams of a Nation Palestinian cinema project, which promotes access to Palestinian films through collaborations with film festivals, organizations, and screenings.

Jacir has directed a number of films and videos, including A Post-Oslo History, Video (1998); Chronicle of Civilized and Consequential Moments of Reconciliation, Video (1999); Two Hundred Years of American Ideology, Video (2000); The Satellite Shooters, 16mm film (2001); and Like Twenty Impossibles, 35mm film (2003). Jacir also shot and produced the documentary Until When (2004), an in-depth portrait of the lives of several families living in the Deheisha refugee camp near Bethlehem. Her short film The Satellite Shooters, which satirically plays with the conventions and racism of the Western film genre, was featured on the PBS program, ColorVision, showcasing up and coming filmmakers.

Jacir’s film The Satellite Shooters satirically tells the story of Tawfiq, a young Arab boy in Texas trying to find his place in America, and The Kid, a local
white American boy who became a friend of Tawfiq, only after he found out that he was from Bethlehem. In this film, Jacir wanted to tell a story about an awakening, as she stated in her artist’s statement at the “Somewhere Elsewhere” exhibition in Berkeley, California (2004). The film is about a character living in many worlds who finds a way to choose his own fantasies and own position in his life (Somewhere Elsewhere). It is also a story of “assimilation and an immigrant experience,” and it is also “a critique of the imagination that the Western arises from—that fantasy land wherein masculine idealizations and racial hierarchies lead to the prevailing cowboy hero and his stunted sidekick” (Jacir, “Artist’s”).

Jacir’s Like Twenty Impossibles (Arabic, English, and Hebrew) is a fiction film that wryly questions artistic responsibility as a Palestinian film crew navigates various obstacles of the Israeli military occupation of Palestine (Jacir, “Artist’s”). The film premiered in Cannes, France, and was a Student Academy Awards Finalist. It also won numerous awards at international festivals including Best Film at the Palm Springs Short Film Festival, Chicago International Film Festival, Institute Du Monde Arabe Biennale, Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival, and IFP/New York. The film was named one of the ten best films of 2003 by Gavin Smith of Film Comment Magazine, and Jacir herself was named as one of Filmmaker magazine’s 25 New Faces of Independent cinema (Jacir, “Artist’s”). Jacir talked about the obstacles that face the Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation, as quoted in Filmmaker magazine:

Palestinians don’t have any freedom of movement, not even from one Palestinian town to another—there is a maze of checkpoints. Because I have an American passport, I can get through most of them. I became interested in making a film about the fragmentation of a people based on arbitrary borders and I.D. cards. Even when I was casting and finding crew, I had to choose people with Jerusalem I.D.’s or foreign passports. (“25 New Faces”).
Jacir had also collaborated with Algerian-French filmmaker Nassim Amouache on *Quelques Miettes Pour Les Oiseaux*, a documentary sketch of the lives of a handful of men and women eking out a living in the Jordanian town of Ruwayshed, a small-time oil-smuggling entrepot that’s the last stop on the road to Iraq (Jacir, Personal). Jacir is a recipient of a number of awards, including: Jerome Foundation Media Arts grant (2003), a New York State Council on the Arts distribution grant, and the Kathyrn H. Parlan Screen writing Award at Columbia University as well as a Zaki Gordan Award for Excellence in Screenwriting, Los Angeles (2001). Jacir was also the first recipient of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee’s (ADC) Jack Shaheen Mass Communications Scholarship Award (2005).

In addition to her work with film and video, Jacir also writes poetry. Her poetry was included in *Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, edited by Nathalie Handal and published by Interlink Publishers (2000). Jacir has taught courses at Columbia University, Barnard College, and at Birzeit University in Palestine. She lives and works between New York and Ramallah, Palestine, and she is developing a feature film, *Salt of this Sea*, which follows the story of a working-class Palestinian-American refugee returning home. *Salt of this Sea* was selected for the prestigious Hubert Bals Development Fund as well as the Sundance Screenwriters Lab.

**Resources**


Web Sites and Places to See Jacir’s Work


Emily Jacir (b. 1970), Conceptual Installation Artist and Photographer

Emily Jacir was born in Bethlehem, Palestine, grew up in Saudi Arabia, went to high school in Italy, and studied in college in the United States. She splits her time between Ramallah, Palestine, and New York. Jacir, an artist on the move, has become a prominent conceptual artist who has been exhibited throughout the United States, Europe, and the Arab world. Jacir obtained her B.F.A. from the University of Dallas, Texas, in 1992, and two years later she obtained her M.F.A. from Memphis College of Art, Tennessee. From 1998 to 1999, she joined the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York. Jacir also participated in a number of residencies, including Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt; Al-Qattan Foundation, Ramallah, Palestine; and at the National Studio Program, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York.

Jacir’s installation works employ a variety of media including sculpture, performance, video, and photography. Much of Jacir’s work deals with the concept of movement (both forced and voluntary), dislocation, radical displacement, and resistance (Emily Jacir: Belongings, 3). Jacir held her first major show in Europe at the O.K. Center for Contemporary Art, Upper Austria. The exhibit, “Emily Jacir: Belongings” (2003), featured the work of Jacir from 1998 through 2003, including Undiminished Returns (1998-2002) and Where We Come From (2003).

In 2003, Debs and Co. hosted Jacir’s first New York solo exhibition, “Where We Come From.” The exhibit documented in text, photography, and video installations the response and action generated by Jacir’s question to other Palestinians: “If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?” Jacir, taking advantage of her American passport, unlike other Palestinians, was able to travel to fulfill many of the requests. She also used the question that is always asked at the borders and checkpoints: “Did someone give you something to carry?” as an inspiration for this project. The result of the yearlong project was a series of 30 installations that visually demonstrated the requests alongside the request and origins of each individual and the outcome of the request (Heartney). Jacir fulfilled most of the requests, which ranged from playing soccer with a boy in Haifa, eating seafood in Gaza, to visiting a mother’s grave in Jerusalem. The exhibit was also shown in Ramallah, Istanbul, Oxford, and Bremen. A portion of the work was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial.

One of the requests made to Jacir was to “go to my mother’s grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and put flowers and pray.” As described by Demos:
The text tells us that the man who made it, Munir, lives a few kilometers away in Bethlehem but was denied access to Jerusalem by the Israeli authorities. Consequently, he could not visit his mother’s grave on the anniversary of her death. Jacir could. A photograph shows her shadow floating over the tombstone as she carries out the task. It is a fleeting presence that is rather a painful absence. If it fulfills a desire, it remains phantasmic, vicarious. (Demos, 68)

The *Where We Come From* series received a lot of media coverage and was shown in a number of exhibits in Europe and the United States. To Jacir, the work was personal and autobiographical, coming from her experience of going back and forth between Palestine and other parts of the world (*Emily Jacir: Belongings*, 9). The Arab American writer, philosopher, and critic Edward Said wrote about Jacir’s work:

> Her compositions slip through the nets of bureaucracies and non-negotiable borders, time and space, in search not of grandiose dreams or clotted fantasies but rather of humdrum objects and simple gestures like visits, hugs, watering a tree, eating a meal—the kinds of things that maybe all Palestinians will be able to do someday, when they can trace their way home, peacefully and without restriction. (*Emily Jacir: Belongings*, 49)

When the exhibition “Made in Palestine” (2003) was held at the Station Museum in Houston, Jacir participated with an installation entitled *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Which Were Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948* (2001), consisting of a refugee tent with embroidery thread (138” x 115” x 96”). Writing about the process of creating the tent and sewing the names of the villages, Jacir mentioned that over 140 people passed through her studio and helped her complete the memorial. As she recalls, “they came as Palestinians (some of whom come from these villages), as Israelis (who grew up on the remains of these villages), and people from a multitude of countries” (Jacir, “Visual,” 22).

Jacir’s refugee tent was a symbol of the loss of historical Palestine, the legitimate right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the lack of permanence that characterizes the lives of refugees. Mikdadi interprets the absence of knots in the sewing process of names of villages on the tent as to “create an almost
surreal image of villages erased, yet ever present in the consciousness of Palestinians." (70)

For the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Jacir participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. Her installation *Sexy Semite* (2000-2002) was a documentation of an intervention consisting of personal ads placed in *The Village Voice*, in which Palestinians placed personal ads seeking Jewish mates to return home, utilizing Israel’s “Law of Return” (*In/Visible*, 44). In her artist’s statement for “In/Visible,” Jacir mentioned that those ads were intended to get media attention. Jacir was right; the personal ads received a lot of media attention, including from the *New York Post*, which published an article with a headline “West Banky Panky in Personal Ad Blitz.” The *New York Post*, not knowing who or what was behind the ads, mentioned that the ads were placed by terrorists trying to kill Israelis (*In/Visible*, 44).

Jacir’s movement between places and cultures continues to be a central theme of her work. She documents this movement through a diverse body of work with names that include such words as “crossings,” “from—to,” “change/exchange,” and “everywhere/nowhere.” Through her work, Jacir tells the story of Palestinian diaspora in a humanizing way. In recent years, she and her sister Annemarie Jacir have been writing daily diaries about the occupation in an online journal, the *Electronic Intifada*.

**Resources**


**Web Site and Places to See Jacir’s Work**

Alexander and Bonin Gallery, New York.

Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, Texas.


Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Moderna Museet, Stockholm.


Born in Beirut, Lebanon, Fay Afaf Kanafani is an internationally known writer, artist, and human rights activist. Kanafani had a difficult childhood in Lebanon, and when Kanafani was 17 years old, she got married to a distant cousin through an arranged marriage and moved to Haifa, Palestine, to live with her husband’s family. She lived in Palestine until 1948 when her husband was killed by Israeli soldiers, and the family became refugees in Lebanon. In 1952, Kanafani worked in the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts in Beirut, Lebanon, and won a scholarship supported by the United Nations and came to the United States in 1954 for one year (Kanafani, Nadia, 307). She studied statistics at several universities including Michigan State University and UC Berkeley (“Establishment”). In the early 1960s she met her second husband, and got married after her children had grown up. Her second husband also died tragically after suffering severe injuries during the Lebanese civil war in 1975.

Kanafani published her autobiography *Nadia, Captive of Hope: Memoir of an Arab Woman*, which describes the first six decades of her life from the time of her childhood in the 1920s in Lebanon until the time she moved to the United States in 1985. The book is used by various universities as a textbook on Middle Eastern studies, Women’s Studies, and courses that deal with the conflicts in Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon. In the book, Kanafani also provides an insight into the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the relations between Jews and Arabs during the 1930s and 1940s. In the introduction to *Nadia, Captive of Hope*, Lisa Suhair Majaj, a Palestinian-American writer and poet, wrote:

> Afaf’s journey has not been easy. Childhood experiences of abuse and domination, constraints on personal autonomy, the loss of home, husband, belongings, and country not once, but twice—these might have crushed a woman of lesser spirit. But against the most difficult odds, Afaf prevailed. Her narrative is imbued with strength, resilience, humanity, commitments, and vision that have sustained her through eighty years. *Nadia, Captive of Hope* stands as testimony to the world-shaking act of telling a woman’s life. (xxx)
As an artist, Kanafani creates colorful and often mystical paintings of flowers, landscapes, architectural settings, and figures. Her artwork “speaks of wisdom, love, beauty, and the joy and struggle of the human spirit” (Kanafani, “Artist’s”). Kanafani believes that everything people do in the form of art, from painting to writing and fashion to clothing, is an expression of the freedom of their souls. She uses a variety of tools and techniques, including brushes, knives, her own fingers, and the computer as an artistic medium. Kanafani also creates greeting cards using plants and flowers grown in her own garden. The flower petals and leaves for the cards are pressed between pages in heavy books and left to dry. They are then glued to paper and set against a background of watercolor and gold paint drawings.

Kanafani exhibited her work at various venues and through community events, especially those that supported peace in the Arab world. In her effort to support the organization Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition, she donated a number of her original art pieces for purchase to raise funds for the organization. For a number of years, Kanafani exhibited her paintings at the annual Arab Cultural Festival in San Francisco. In November 2000, she also participated in a group exhibit, AMILA Islamic Art Fair, organized by American Muslim Intent and Learning Association in San Francisco.

The University of California at Berkeley, International House, chose Kanafani to celebrate her contributions as woman of the year in 2001. She was also chosen as the recipient of one of three United Nations Awards for Digital Art (2001). In Spring 2006, the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California at Berkeley announced the establishment of the “Afaf Kanafani Scholarship Fund,” a grant through the donation by Kanafani from the proceeds of her autobiography. This grant will be awarded to students who focus on the issues of women’s rights in the Arab world (“Establishment”). Kanafani currently lives in Oakland, California, surrounded by her sons, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Now in her late 80s, she offers this advice: “people keep growing as long as the soul of the child in them is kept alive, spontaneous, creative and uninhibited” (Kanafani, “Artist’s”).

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Resources
“Establishment of the Afaf Kanafani Scholarship Fund.” University of California at Berkeley: *Center for Middle Eastern Studies Newsletter* 27, no.2 (Spring 2006).

Web Site and Places to See Kanafani’s Work

Mohammad Omer Khalil (b. 1936), Etcher, Printmaker, and Painter

Mohammad Omer Khalil was born in Burri, on the outskirts of Khartoum, Sudan. He graduated in 1959 from the School of Fine and Applied Arts in Khartoum, Sudan. In 1963, Khalil went to Italy to continue his studies in painting and printmaking at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, on a Sudanese Government Fine Arts Scholarship. Khalil immigrated to the United States in 1967 where he started teaching printmaking at the Pratt Institute. He also taught at the New School University, New York University, and Columbia University. As a master printmaker and a painter, Khalil is an internationally exhibited artist and is considered one of the pioneers in the contemporary Sudanese and African art movements, in addition to his accomplishments as an Arab American artist.

Khalil started his artistic career as a painter, but since coming to the United States he has also concentrated on printmaking using etching techniques (*In/Visible*, 23). He combines a variety of etching techniques and he regards the etching as the perfect process and medium to express his artistic agenda. As Khalil explains in an interview with Sylvia Williams, his choice and interest in etching was based on his satisfaction with the resulting black color compared to other processes such as lithography and silkscreen (9). Khalil also demonstrates “an unusual devotion to the use of black and white in his etchings” (18). Khalil’s etchings are mostly abstractions that speak a language that is at once personal and collective using his own artistic symbols and icons, including “postage stamps, envelopes, photography, fabrics, crushed cans and precious little objects” (“Mohammad”). His etching and printmaking techniques have won him many awards, including the First Prize in Printmaking from the New York National Academy (2001 and 2003), First Prize at the International Biennial of Cairo, Egypt (2003); and the Bronze Prize at the Osaka Triennial of Prints in Osaka, Japan (1991).

Khalil has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the United States, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Among Khalil’s many solo exhibitions were those at Hassan II Center for International Encounter in Asilah, Morocco (2004); Skotoa Gallery in New York (2002); Hunderdon Museum of Art in New York (2001); Alif Gallery in Washington, D.C. (1992);

In 1986, Khalil was inspired by the music of Bob Dylan and created a number of “Etching with aquatint on paper” prints including *Tangled Up in Blue* (35 7/8” x 23 3/4”), and *Tombstone Blues* (46” x 62 3/8”). On this series, Khalil explains that the work represents his feelings of the music and does not represent Dylan’s lyrics: “It’s my feelings of the music while I was working…they represent me” (Williams, 11). The series was part of a two person exhibit at the National Museum of African Art, which acquired the prints for its permanent collections. The series was also part of the museum’s group exhibit “Encounters with the Contemporary” (2000-2001). In reviewing the exhibit, Mark D’Amato describes Khalil’s prints as having “two-sided composition: one half contains delicate open patterns, designs, scratches, stripes, and lattice-work and is counterpoised with a darker, more heavily worked half that implies more hidden within” (80).

In another series called *Petra* (1989-1990), Khalil created a number of etchings inspired by the ancient city of Petra, Jordan. In this series, Khalil’s etchings represented his response to the architectural wonders and ancient mystery of Petra. As Sylvia Williams explains, Khalil’s observations of Petra translate into a variety of textured effects. In a series of interviews with Williams, Khalil talked about his *Petra* work and the caves that were part of his etchings. She writes:

When asked about the caves, he commented that he wanted to convey the mystery and ambiguity of suggesting whether one is looking into darkness or looking out into light. Khalil often speaks of light and dark as a series of positive and negative effects that he wants to capture. It seems to sum up not only his pictorial vocabulary but also his philosophy of life. (18)

For the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage, Khalil displayed his *Harlem Series* (1999), 30” x 40” etchings from an artist book with poems. The Arabic poems of the well-known Syrian poet Adonis, which he wrote in 1999, were an inspiration for this series (In/Visible, 46). As Salwa Mikdadi writes, using different etching techniques including “drypoint, spit biting, and aquatint,” Khalil’s *Harlem* series “reflects on Adonis’ poem, revealing a gloomy threatened city; street grids and iron bars fill in the spaces which are emphasized by the large expanse of black that divides Harlem from the city evoking a sense of isolation” (In/Visible, 46).

Khalil has been a professor of art at Columbia University since 2000 and he is also on the faculty at Parsons School of Design, where he has taught since 1988. He is also serving as a master printer for several New York Galleries and has been commissioned by many internationally known artists such as Louise
Nevelson, Romare Bearden, and Jim Dine (“Mohammad”). He also continues, since 1978, to participate in the annual art festival at Assilah, Morocco.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Khalil’s Work**

The Bronx Museum, New York.
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York.
Chamaliers Museum, France.
Grenoble Museum, Grenoble, France.
Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
“Mohammad Omer Khalil” at Assilah Cultural Center: http://www.c-assilah.com/arts/?a=gal.
Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad, Iraq.
The Museum of Modern Art, Osaka, Japan.
National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

**Zahi Khamis (b. 1959), Painter**

Palestinian American artist Zahi Khamis was born in the village of Reineh outside of Nazareth. At age 18, Khamis left his hometown and went to England for about one year and then returned home, but was unable to continue living in
his hometown due to his feelings of being an oppressed "third-class citizen" as a Palestinian living in Israel (Thym). Khamis then immigrated to the United States in 1982 and attended San Diego State University in California, where he earned his Bachelor’s degree in mathematics in 1988, and his teaching credential in 1993. Khamis also studied literature at San Francisco State University at the graduate level in the late 1990s. He continues to write poetry and play the oud "lute," but painting has become his main form of expression.

Khamis’s figurative painting style is reminiscent of cubism, and is influenced by the work of Picasso, Matisse, and Diego Rivera. His work focuses on social justice and political struggle, though not through overt symbolism; his style has been described as "combining legend with memory, anger with beauty, and abstraction with poetry" ("Palestinian"). The subject of Khamis’ expressive paintings is the struggle of oppressed people and the struggle of the Palestinians. As he describes it in one interview, his art is "about all people who are neglected, of people who are in struggle" (Thym).

Khamis’s bright, bold, and optimistic colors, combined with the tragic expressions of his subjects, "express the painful, yet luminous, contradictions of all those who struggle for liberation" ("Fifteen"). Khamis offers the following words about the subject of his paintings and images:

Having lost our homeland, we Palestinians gaze madly at the world—a world that denies our history and memory. In the face of ongoing erasure, Palestinians stubbornly insist: we’re still here. These images behind the glass, are inner reflections of that Palestinian gaze. The fragility, vertigo, and awkward perspectives in these paintings are traces of what little remains from the missing path that would have tied our Present to our Memory. The hope for re-paving that path, with color, with imagination and with struggle, is ever-present for we are always returning to the land which is ours.

The figures in Khamis’s paintings are sad, have distorted faces with huge eyes and twisted necks, and sometimes appear upside down as if searching for a home, or as if they are the victims of either physical or psychological violence. Khamis uses bold colors that evoke "raw emotions of pain, suffering and hope" (Radsch). When Khamis has been asked about the deformed faces in his paintings, he has replied that it "has to do with the fact that we are all
deformed. We are a little off balance, standing on uncertain ground, and precarious in some way” (Thym).

Khamis has exhibited his work in a number of solo and group exhibits throughout the United States. His solo exhibitions include: the Jerusalem Fund Gallery at the Palestine Center, Washington, D.C. (2004); the Creative Alliance, Baltimore, Maryland (2004); the Carnegie Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C. (2004); the Seitz Gallery, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (2004); at Barnes and Noble, Oakland, California (2000); and at Spasso Cafe and Gallery, Berkeley, California (1998). Khamis has also participated in group and juried shows, including: “The Spirit of Palestine” at the Jerusalem Fund Gallery, Washington, D.C. (2005); the “S’lottery” exhibit at Maryland Art Place (MAP), Baltimore, Maryland (2005); and in the Millennium Development Goals Global Watch Art Exhibit at the United Nations Headquarters, New York (2004).

Khamis also participated in a one-day exhibit of Palestinian Arts and Crafts, organized and curated by Haifa Bint-Kadi in White Plains, New York, to raise funds to help bring the “Made in Palestine” exhibit to New York. The “Made in Palestine” benefit exhibit was sponsored by the WESPAC Foundation and Al Jisser, at the Westchester County Center, New York (2004). The show was considered “controversial” by New York Democratic Assemblyman Ryan Karben, who issued a press release calling for its cancellation.

In 2004, the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., the Cultural Committee of the Jerusalem Fund for Education and Community Development, and the American Task Force on Palestine, co-sponsored an exhibit of Khamis’s original paintings at the Jerusalem Fund Gallery in Washington, D.C. In the exhibit, called “Of Exile and Return,” Khamis displayed a number of paintings that captured “a deep sense of loss, anxiety, and yearning for Palestine” (“Palestinian”). The exhibit was also described as an “emotional experience of pain, love, longing and fear that Palestinians feel as they struggle to define themselves” (Radsch).

Among Khamis’s images in “Of Exile and Return” was a
painting titled *Deir Yassin* (1995). In the *People's Weekly World*, Tim Wheeler describes it as the most powerful image in the show, writing, “two figures stare out with huge, sorrowful eyes, flames lick up between them and blue arches circle their heads like halos” (Wheeler). The title *Deir Yassin* refers to the name of a Palestinian village west of Jerusalem that witnessed a massacre in 1948 in which over 250 people were killed, their houses destroyed, and the village removed from the map. In reviewing “Of Exile and Return,” which included work that spanned seven years, Courtney Radsch describes some of Khamis’s paintings, including *Anaat* (2003), portraying a female figure with long hair that wraps around other small figures. In this vibrant, evocative work, it is difficult to distinguish whether the female figure is supporting the human figures, or whether they are, in fact, supporting her. Radsch wrote:

In *Anaat*, a goddess-like figure embraces three small, bent figures…. Khamis recounted the story of the Canaanite goddess of peace and war that inspired the painting. Khamis said there is more optimism than despair in the people he painted, though he says at times there was a sense of hopelessness in the figures, whose black, twig-like arms and legs lack hands and feet. Hands are absent in all the paintings on exhibit, so the focus remains on the eyes and the colors, and how the colors and the figures interact with their environment.

Khamis’s artwork has been featured in a number of publications and books, including the cover of *Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts* (2001) and the Tufts University Arabic Program’s Conference on Arab-American Writing (2004). Khamis now lives and works as a mathematics teacher in Baltimore, Maryland. His wife, American writer and professor Kim Jensen, has published a novel called *The Woman I Left Behind* (Curbstone Press, 2006), a love story between a Palestinian man and an American woman.

**Resources**


Sari Ibrahim Khoury (1941–1997), Painter and Muralist

Sari Ibrahim Khoury was born in Jerusalem, Palestine. In 1948 and at the age of seven years old, his family was forced out of Jerusalem and settled in the city of Ramallah, north of Jerusalem. As a child in Jerusalem, Khoury was influenced by the rich art and architecture of the holy city. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Dome of the Rock, and other ancient sites in Jerusalem influenced Khoury’s spirituality, humanity, mysticism, and were present in his artwork (Khoury).

The loss of his home in Jerusalem and the hardship that his family went through had an impact on the formation of Khoury’s turning to art. In a statement recalling those days, Khoury wrote:

The dispossession of a homeland took its toll on our entire family. As an impressionable child I witnessed all kinds of upheavals and painful situations and learned to internalize the agony of our impoverished status. My therapy from all this was in drawing. I drew figures, and tormented faces, old wrinkled people. (Khoury, “Artist’s”)

At the age of 17 years old, Khoury came to the United States, where he continued his education at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, and earned a Bachelor’s degree in fine arts in 1963, majoring in painting with a minor in sculpture. In 1965, he earned his M.F.A. from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

With emphasis on the spontaneity of shape, line, texture, and color, Khoury forged a unique style by exploring his cultural roots within a modernist visual vocabulary influenced by Cubism, Surrealism, and Abstract Expressionism (Mikdadi, 17). He was influenced by the enigmatic paintings of Klee and Gorky, the structural sense of Kandinsky, and the spontaneity of Matisse (Khoury, “Artist’s”). Khoury also utilized air brush, and his artwork included oils, acrylics, and charcoal drawings.

Khoury’s quest, as he puts it, was not to make pretty pictures, but to meet the intellectual and emotional challenges he had to face. The search for an identity was also a quest for Khoury:

I had to face the humiliation of the defeated and corrupt Arab nations. I had to deal with the distorted images of my culture, and attempted...
to defend my identity to my Western friends whom were duped by the media. I had to rise above that humiliation. (Khoury, “Artist’s”)

Committed to a peaceful and an equitable political solution for the conflict in Palestine, Khoury participated in 1989 with 24 other Palestinian and Israeli artists in an exhibit entitled “IT’S POSSIBLE” at Cliff Michel Gallery in Seattle, Washington (Diversity, 12).

In a series of letters between Khoury and Palestinian American artist Samia Halaby, Khoury wrote about the Arabic writing and calligraphy and how cursive lines were so important to him that he always included the cursive whiplash line in his work (Halaby). Halaby also wrote about how the Arabic calligraphy in Khoury’s work co-existed with the radical formal qualities of twentieth century abstraction. The geometric patterns and abstraction in Arabic and Islamic art had influenced Khoury’s work. As Halaby notes, “he knew the history of Arabic geometric abstraction.” Khoury is one of nine “Jerusalemite” Palestinian artists who were creating abstract art that represented their distance from Jerusalem (Boullata). Among those artists are Samia Halaby, Vladimir Tamari (b. 1942), and Kamal Boullata.

In addition to being an artist and educator, Khoury published a number of articles dealing with many art issues and his own research findings. In an article written in 1987, Khoury wrote about the goals of “Social Art.” In the article, he examined the way Arab artists expressed themselves through highly abstract geometric decorations on mosques and public buildings. Khoury wrote that Arabic script writing and architectural decorations “offer a message of humility, and absorb the viewer into continuous interplay of rhythmical activity similar to the waves of the ocean” (Khoury, “Art,” 19).

One of Khoury’s public art projects was a large mural (6’ x 24’) that looks much like the work of WPA artists of the depression years, depicting the life of an Arab American community in Dearborn, Michigan. The mural hangs in the social services building of ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) and focuses on the life and work of Arab immigrants in the Ford Rouge Plant area of Dearborn (Mikdadi, 18). The mural also tells the story of Arab influence on the growth of Detroit. ACCESS is the Arab American organization that established the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

Khoury was awarded the Wayne County Artistic Excellence and Community Award by the Wayne County Council for the Arts in 1992. He was also
given a Recognition Award for his artistic and creative contributions to the community by ACCESS in early 1997.

Khoury became a successful Arab American artist with a track record of 12 solo exhibits and over 50 group exhibits throughout the United States, Japan, Sweden, and the Middle East. He produced hundreds of paintings, drawings, etchings, sculptures, and prints. His work was also included in “Diversity in Harmony” (2003), a national exhibit by artists of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage at the Alfred Berkowitz Gallery, University of Michigan-Dearborn.

In 1996, Khoury was diagnosed with brain cancer and passed away in June 1997. A retrospective traveling exhibition of Khoury’s work was organized in 1999 by Julia Morrisrose at University Art Gallery, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

As an art educator, Khoury taught at a number of colleges and universities and served as the chair of the art department at Central Michigan University in 1992-1993. In 2001, the Board of Trustees at Central Michigan University extended a professor emeritus rank to Khoury for his teaching excellence in serving the department of art for more than 29 years, and for bringing artistic integrity to his profession.

Resources


Rogers, Sarah. “Arab Art: Beyond Dichotomies.” Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts 9, no. 45 (Fall 2003).

Web Site and Places to See Khoury’s Work
ACCESS Community Center, Dearborn, Michigan.
BirZeit University, BirZeit, Palestine.
Khalil Sakakini Cultural Centre, Ramallah, Palestine.
University Art Gallery, Central Michigan University.

Khalid Kodi (b. 1962), Painter, installation and conceptual artist

Khalid Kodi was born and raised in the city of Wad Madni, Sudan, in a family that supported arts, music, and poetry. He studied painting at the Khartoum Polytechnic College of Fine and Applied Art, Sudan, and received his B.F.A. in 1987. After a short period of travel and work in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, Kodi migrated to the United States in 1990 and studied at Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, and received his M.F.A. in painting in 1993. He was an art educator at the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston, and began teaching in the Boston College fine arts department in 1995. From 1997 to 2001, he taught art at Brown University in Providence.

Kodi is a painter, sculptor, and installation and conceptual artist. His paintings and mixed media works are “richly textured commentaries that both address the sufferings of Sudanese and articulate the roots of the nation’s trauma” (Kodi, “Asrar’’). Through using an abstract expressionist style, Kodi raises many issues, including social and political conventions, religious dogmas, manmade famine, genocide, slavery, gender struggle, taboos, leadership style, and the national psyche. He critiques religious intolerance, bigotry, and the violence that has occurred in his homeland for many years. Kodi’s work is an exploration of his artistic legacy, cultural heritage, and the oral traditions of Sudan. His works also make reference to “ancient Nubian architectural designs, calligraphic motifs, urban and rural Sudanese landscape, and African mask-like figures” (“Khalid”).

In addition to Kodi’s work dedicated to Sudanese and African refugees, he has also explored the magical world of ancient stories. In a series of works entitled A Thousand and One Nights exhibited at the Art Gallery of Northeastern University in Boston in May 1996, Kodi represented “his continued spiritual interest in old stories with images gleaned down from the well known tales.
invoking the magical atmosphere of the Arabo-Persian medieval world” (“Contemporary”).

During a summer residency in 2002, Kodi experimented with creating art from landscape, in which he created motifs and patterns by a controlled burning process in a large field. The Village of Fire, as he named his work, is one of the largest drawings in the world, occupying a field the size of two football stadiums (Kodi, “Nuba”). On this process and the work of Kodi in “Landscape Art,” Nkiru Nzegwu wrote:

The project places great emphasis on process, which is why fire was the tool of choice. Adopting a controlled burning process, Kodi reproduced decorative motifs and forms he derived from the artistic traditions of various African cultures. He traced out and scorched large expansive shapes, creating bold, black designs that covered the field. The project process is reminiscent of the bush burning technique that subsistence African farmers utilize in refertilizing their farms. Although the burning of the field may appear destructive, it actualizes re-energized the farms because of the nitrogen the fire introduced into the soil.

Kodi’s work has been exhibited in many venues in the United States and internationally. His solo exhibits include: Museum of the National Center of African American Artists, Boston (1992, 1999); Medani Studio, Galleria De Arte, Madrid, Spain (1994); Renaissance Art and Design Gallery, Boston (1995, 1997); AAMARP Gallery, Boston (1996, 2001); Kaduna Gallery, Millburn, New Jersey (1998); University of Massachusetts, Amherst, (1998), Skoto Gallery, New York (1999, 2004); Michigan State University, East Lansing (2001); Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts (2004); and at Aljira Gallery, Newark, New Jersey (2006). Kodi also participated in numerous group exhibitions throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East.

As a member of the Board of Directors for the Sudan Studies Association, Kodi held an art installation at the annual meeting of the association at Rhode Island College in August 2006. The purpose of his exhibit, “Darfur Dirty Laundry,” was to raise awareness of the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan, and to raise funds to help the victims of the conflict. The installation consisted of cloths that had been destroyed because of the conflict or cloths worn by the victims of the conflict. Hung on a rope as one would display their laundry, Kodi’s theme was confrontational and a way to challenge the taboo that this issue should not be talked about within the Sudanese population or government (Kodi, “Darfur”). His artwork on Darfur has been widely exhibited in the United States and internationally. Dr. Nada Mustafa Ali, a Sudanese academic and activist, wrote that in his drawings on Darfur, Kodi “has tried to capture the trauma of the children of Darfur, the baby boys and girls with looks in their eyes that contain a suffering of a lifetime! Eyes and looks that are so shocking...so wounding and criminalizing...” (Kodi, Personal).
Kodi has received a number of awards for his art work, including: Artist for Social Change Award, Community Works, Boston (2001); the Two Dimensional Fine Art Graduate Award, Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, (1993); First Place in Creativity at the First Annual African American Show, New England School of Art & Design, Boston (1992); a General Exhibition Award, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (1990); and the Sudanese Cultural Foundation Festival Award, Khartoum, Sudan (1985). He also participated in a number of residencies, including ArtOmi, International Art Colony, New York (2002), and has been an Artist in Residence and Vice-Chair/Exhibitions at Northeastern University African American Artist in Residency Program from 1994 to the present.

Kodi currently lives and works in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, where he teaches art at Boston College. He is also a musician and sometimes plays the lute at the openings of his exhibits.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Kodi’s Work


The Artwork of Khalid Kodi: http://www2.bc.edu/~kodi/.


The Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Goethe Institute, Khartoum, Sudan.

Khartoum School of Fine and Applied Art, Khartoum, Sudan.

Massachusetts College of Art, Boston.

Museum of the National Center of African American Artists, Boston.

Northeastern University, Boston, MA Renaissance Art & Design Gallery, Boston.

Skoto Gallery, New York.

Tehraga Hall, Alexandria, Egypt.

University of Vermont, McCrorey Gallery, Bailey/Howe Library, Burlington, Vermont.

United Arab Emirates Artist Society, Sharjah, UAE.
Leila Kubba (b. 1945), Painter and Mixed Media Artist

Leila Kubba was born in Amara, a city southwest of Baghdad, Iraq, to an Iraqi father and an American mother. She grew up and received her early education in Baghdad, and she was influenced by the colorful and ornate geometric art and architecture around her (Ludden). Kubba received a National Diploma of Art and Design from the Manchester College of Art and Architecture in 1966, and then returned to Iraq. She moved to the United Arab Emirates in 1971, and then to Greece in 1982. She finally settled in the United States in 1989, where she attended the Corcoran College of Art and Design, Washington, D.C.

Kubba is considered one of the most distinguished contemporary Iraqi artists (Nashashibi, 30). In her paintings, Kubba explores many issues, including the early Mesopotamian civilization, and the current Iraq as a war-torn country. In a series of mixed media paintings, *Spoken Shadows* (2000-2001), Kubba was inspired by the Sumerian goddess Inanna, a primary deity of ancient Mesopotamia who dates back over four thousand years. As Kubba stated, Inanna only exists in archaeological fragments of clay tablets, the eroded face of an old statue, or expired glory of an old Sumerian shrine or temple (Kubba, “Artist’s”). On the story of Inanna, Kubba also wrote:

The story of Inanna, as deciphered by Sumerian scholars, tells of her journey from girlhood to womanhood, from queen of heaven and earth to a long time inhabitant of the underworld. As a young girl she planted a tree by the Euphrates River, a symbol of life and birth. When evil spirits came to deter her, the heroic king Gilgamesh joined with her to fight against evil, later carving a crown and throne from the wood of the tree she planted as a girl. At the height of her sovereignty she was mysteriously persuaded to descend into the underworld, where she suffered in the dark kingdom and finally emerged humbled and wreathed by symbols of death. (Kubba, “Artist’s”)

Working mostly in series, Kubba uses acrylic and collage on canvas and paper. In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Kubba created a series called *Changes* (2002), in which she painted the World Trade Center towers with juxtaposed text that said “the day the world changed” (Kubba, “Artists”). In another series, *Windows of Light* (2004), she used acrylic paint on paper to reflect her “impressions of the essence of Andalusia, its architecture, mosaics and calligraphy” (Kubba, “Artist’s”). In some of her paintings, Kubba also uses Arabic script, abstraction, and figurative and architectural forms in multiple layers of paint and collage to create depth and richness.

Kubba’s recent work includes a number of series that explore the issue of her homeland, Iraq. In *Out of Iraq* (2005-2006), she explores “the Iraq she once knew and the difficulty of facing the dramatic changes that have been unfolding since the war” (Kubba, “Artists”). The *Out of Iraq* series also became the title of an exhibit, “Out of Iraq: Meditations on the Homeland,” which Kubba curated at the Pomegranate Gallery in New York in 2006. In this series, Kubba paints in multiple layers of vibrant colors and varying textures to address war and occupation, focusing on the women of Iraq. The portrayal of dark figures of Iraqi women “depicts the resilience of Iraqi women” and “their will to survive, preserve their families and cope with death and war” (*Out of Iraq*).

In another series, *New Beginnings* (2004-2005), Kubba was inspired by her visit to Iraq after more than two decades. In this series, she painted *Gilgamesh*, the Babylonian hero, and *Inanna*, the Sumerian Goddess. The *New Beginnings* series was exhibited in 2005 at the Jerusalem Fund gallery, Washington, D.C. In reviewing the exhibit, Courtney Radsch wrote:

In her most outspoken piece on the effects of the American invasion, titled “Superpower,” she tried to “layer the civilizations” by depicting the contact between Inanna, the Mesopotamian goddess of life and of the morning star and evening star, and real-world women who cope with everyday problems. It wasn’t until a woman asked her if the painting portrayed the prison abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib that Ms. Kubba discovered this dimension in her work. One of the figures seems to be posed like the hooded prisoner of the now infamous prison abuse photos.
Having lived and worked in various countries, Kubba feels that each one of them has had an enriching effect on her work. She describes her art as the work of “the archeologist who is essentially the assembler of what is ruined or missing, the unifier of the broken or lost pieces of time” (Kubba, “Artist’s”). Kubba currently lives and works in Washington, D.C.

**Resources**


**Web Site and Places to See Kubba’s Work**

Abu Dhabi Cultural Center, United Arab Emirates.
Ayagallery, London.
The British Museum, London.
Jordan National Gallery, Amman, Jordan.
Ilham Badreddine Mahfouz (b. 1956), Painter and Ceramist

Born in Damascus, Syria, and immigrating to the United States in 1972, Ilham Badreddine Mahfouz is a spiritual and humanitarian artist. In 1979, Mahfouz received a certificate in interior design from LaSalle University in Chicago. She also went to study art history in Spain for a semester, and in 1992, she received a B.F.A. in painting and ceramics with a minor in art history from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti.

Mahfouz’s art deals with architectural elements combining mixed media designs, colors, and textures. Her puzzle-like and color-sensitive images represent different levels of energy and reflect her emotions and reactions (Dede). Mahfouz defines art and its purpose as:

...an emotional transcendence that takes both the artist and the viewer into a higher intellectual level. Art speaks to me of passion. Art takes me throughout the universe in a journey filled with exciting discoveries. Art is soothing to the spirit. Art is a love affair between both the art form and the artist. Art is infinite, just like love is infinite. Art is Universal Love without borders or boundaries. (Mahfouz “Artist’s”)

Influenced by a combination of the conservative culture of the Middle East and the liberal society of the United States, Mahfouz mentions that she is fortunate to have the best of the two cultures, Arab and American. Both cultures serve as guidelines for her daily life. With mostly abstract paintings, Mahfouz says that her work resurfaces with her upbringing, and that she works freely to express herself in art. She also describes the release of colors and storm of lines into the canvas as “an expression of freedom” (Mahfouz, Personal).

As a spiritual artist, Mahfouz’s starting point is her faith in God. She sometimes uses verses from the Qur’an, or quotations from the Prophet Muhammad in her paintings. Mahfouz finds strength in religion because it is part of her life. In an interview with Mehmet Dede, she notes that her art does not have a conflict with any religion of God. Mahfouz’s Meditation in Peace with God (1991), an oil on canvas abstract painting with Arabic writing about love, won her a First Prize Award at the McKenny Union Art Show at Eastern Michigan University.
The use of Arabic writing in free form (free from the geometric rules of Arabic calligraphy) has become part of the paintings of many Arab and Arab American artists, including Mahfouz. In its form and content, Arabic writing serves two purposes: an artistic identity, and a spiritual connection to a sacred language. Whether the Arabic writing is a poem, a proverb, a Qur’anic verse, or a Hadith (sayings and traditions of Prophet Muhammad), the content enhances the visual components of the artwork. This was clear in Mahfouz’s painting Meditation in Peace with God, as she chose an Arabic poem about love and harmony that complemented her abstract images.

In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Mahfouz organized “Visions of Peace: Arab American Artists” (2002), a group exhibit showing the work of eight Arab American artists. The exhibit was held in a gallery at the Hispanic Art and Education Center of Ste. Anne de Detroit, Detroit, Michigan. It was the first exhibit in the country to explore Arab Americans’ artistic reactions to September 11. Mahfouz wrote in the exhibit catalogue that the exhibit was an expression of love for humanity. Mahfouz created a triptych of circular abstract paintings with warm swirls of bright colors, punctuated with delicate writing in English and Arabic about peace, love, and joy (Askari).

Mahfouz’s work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions around the country. She participated in “Diversity in Harmony” (2003), a national exhibit by artists of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage. The exhibit was curated by Hashim Al-Tawil and was sponsored by the Center for Arab American Studies at the University of Michigan, Dearborn. In her statement for “Diversity in Harmony,” Mahfouz wrote:

In my paintings, I try to capture the texture of my life experiences as well as my outlook on life. I try to convey emotions and reactions in my work through several layers of paint—because beneath the many layers of paint may lay the subconscious….I enjoy the various emotions revealed to me from colors storming toward each other. Diverse lines and shapes can ease the tension and help balance the painting harmoniously. (Diversity, 15)

In her ceramic sculptures, Mahfouz also uses abstract forms. In a series of ceramic artworks titled Shelters and Identity (2004), she expresses the constant search for home through caves and mountains. Describing one of
these sculptures, Mahfouz sees her shelter identified with her memories of Syria’s great mountains and the memories of cafe houses. As she puts it, “those memories are carved in stone” (“Guest’). In 2007, Mahfouz participated in a group exhibition at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

In addition to her Islamic spirituality, Mahfouz has been influenced by her ceramic teacher Robert Piepenberg and by Suzan Stephenson for their ceramic work and abstract style. The paintings of professor Barry Avedan have also influenced her. Like many Arab American artists, Mahfouz finds it difficult to find gallery representatives and shows to exhibit art work. She also feels that Arab American artists need to be recognized for their efforts and contributions in America’s art scene, and for their struggle to survive in a world of discrimination against the Arab people in general (Mahfouz, Personal).

Since 1989, Mahfouz has received many awards for her art work, including a First Prize Award at the Earth and Art Gallery in Milford, Michigan (1990). Mahfouz currently lives in Detroit, Michigan, where she continues to paint, conduct ceramic workshops, and also teach Arabic language and culture at the University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit. She is an active member of several artists’ and community organizations, including serving as a president of IMAN-International Artists’ Network. Mahfouz was also a co-founder and is an active member of Alternative Artists’ Group. She also participates in the Annual Arab Art festival in Dearborn, Michigan.

Resources

“Artist Ilham Badreddine Mahfouz.” Arab American Journal 3, 54 (September 15, 2000).
Web Sites and Places to See Mahfouz’s Work

Alternative Artists’ Space Galleries, Southfield, Michigan.
Arab American and Chaldean Council, Lathrup Village, Michigan.
Intermedia Gallery, Eastern Michigan University.
University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, Michigan.

Sam Maloof (b. 1916), Wood Maker and Furniture designer

Born in Chico, California, to Lebanese parents, Samuel Solomon Maloof has become one of the world’s most celebrated craftsmen and the only woodworker to receive a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship “Genius Award” (1985) in the “crafts and design” category. In the same year, he was also declared a “living treasure” by the California legislature (Azar, 11). Maloof’s parents, Nasif Soliman Maloof and Anise Nader Maloof, emigrated from the mountain village of Douma, Lebanon, in 1905. They were among the first Arab immigrants to settle in California in 1905 (Adamson, 1). Maloof is a pioneer in the American craft movement, and he is best known for his chair design work, especially his signature rocking chair designs. One of Maloof’s rocking chairs became the first piece of contemporary furniture in the White House collection during the presidency of Ronald Reagan (Maloof, 47). Another rocker, in addition to other furniture, was also acquired by one of Maloof’s best friends, former President Jimmy Carter (Adamson, 229). Maloof is a self-taught craftsman who refuses to call himself an artist.

With no formal education, Maloof received two honorary doctorates: one from the celebrated Rhode Island School of Design, and a second from Aurora College in Aurora, Illinois. Maloof began his artistic career as a graphic designer after finishing high school in 1934. After serving with the U.S. armed forces between 1941 and 1945, he switched his career to woodworking and in 1948 established a small workshop in Ontario, California. In the same year, Maloof had his first exhibit at the Los Angeles County Fair (Maloof, 219).

In 1951, Maloof’s first major project was commissioned by Henry Dreyfuss, the famous American industrial designer (1929-1972), to construct an entire houseful of furniture, 25 pieces, for Dreyfuss’s new home (“Master,” 12).

In 1953, Maloof purchased a property in Alta Loma, California, where he build his workshop and a 22-room house that became a historical landmark. He crafted the home one room at a time. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Maloof was involved with U.S. State Department projects in Iran, Lebanon, and El Salvador. During the 1970s, Maloof’s popularity grew. He was featured in a number of important exhibitions, including a California Design exhibition in Pasadena (1970), the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (1976), the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1977), and the Vatican in Rome (1978). Maloof’s work is among the collections of many museums in the United States, including the Dallas Art Museum, Los Angeles County Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian Institution.
During the 50 plus years of his artistic career, Maloof has participated in over 100 exhibits nationwide.

Besides his signature rocking chairs, Maloof also crafts benches, chests, tables, music stands, and cradles using black walnut, rosewood, ebony, and teak. Maloof’s handcrafted furniture combines aesthetic and functionality with perfection. On perfecting his designs, Maloof notes:

I didn’t engineer it or anything, I just did it by feel and by the way the curve looked. I know there are formulas for how to do it and all, but a lot of times formulas don’t work. It’s a process of trial and error really. Working towards perfection has to be a part of anything one does. You’ve got to put yourself into it. (Azar, 11)

Maloof’s distinctive style and traditional way of working with wood has earned him a unique place among America’s contemporary craft movement. When People magazine ran a feature article about Maloof in 1986, he was described as a “king of rockers” and a “Hemingway of hardwood” (Adamson, 203). Walt Harrington describes Maloof’s chairs as living creatures, having “the curving grace of a parabola, the embracing comfort of loving arms and the tactile sensuality of supple skin.” In an introduction to The Furniture of Sam Maloof, Jeremy Adamson commented on the styles of Maloof’s chairs:

...a Maloof chair can be seen to artistic advantage from any point of view. Right-angle joints become rounded, parts flow into one another, resulting in great fluidity. The organic character of Maloof’s chairs is heightened by his use of signature-style “hard lines”—clean ridges that rise out of smooth forms to emphasize contours. (xiv)

Serving as a fellow with the American Craft Council (ACC) for over 25 years, Maloof was awarded ACC’s prestigious Gold Medal in 1988. In 1994, Maloof and his wife Freda, who worked closely with him and passed away in 1998, established the Sam and Alfreda Maloof Foundation, dedicated to fostering the role of craft in society. His home in California, which he designed, built,
and furnished, is registered as a historic monument and landmark. Among the many pieces of furniture and wood creations in the Maloof residence is the unique spiral staircase, which is made of triangular treads with rounded-over edges, a vertebrate-like center post, and an organically shaped handrail that defies architectural logic (“Masterm” 9).

In 2001, Maloof held an exhibit of his work called “A Tribute to Freda” at the Oceanside Museum, Oceanside, California. The exhibition opened simultaneously with a full-scale retrospective of Maloof’s furniture during his 50-year career at the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Maloof has received over 35 awards in recognition of his achievements and innovations, including the Californian Award (2003), a lifelong achievement award given by the California Historical Society. The Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, which opened in 2005, has also honored Maloof’s contributions to American crafts, and a display of one of his chairs is part of the documentations and artifacts of the museum’s records of the achievements of Arab Americans. The Sam and Alfreda Maloof Foundation has constructed an Arts and Crafts Educational Center on the six-acre Maloof compound. The center was opened in 2007 in celebration of Maloof’s 91st birthday.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Maloof’s Work

Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, California.
Dallas Art Museum, Dallas, Texas.
The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, California.
Los Angeles County Art Museum, Los Angeles, California.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Sam and Alfreda Maloof Foundation for Arts and Crafts: http://www.malooffoundation.org/.
“Sam Maloof” at Oceanside Museum: http://www.oma-online.org/maloof_exhibit.html.
“Sam Maloof” at the Smithsonian American Art Museum: http://www.americanart.si.edu/collections/exhibits/maloof/.
The Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri.

**Amina Mansour** (b. 1972), Conceptual and Installation Artist

Born in Fairhope, Alabama, to Egyptian parents, Amina Mansour is a member of a new generation of conceptual visual artists who explores the relationship between gender and economics and whose work is actively challenging previous modes of representation within Egyptian culture (Zurbrigg, 62). Mansour did not have any formal training in art, but during the early 1990s, she was inspired by Farouk Waghba, an Egyptian artist, who invited a number of young people to work in his studio in Alexandria, Egypt, to explore a conceptual approach to the arts (“Amina”).

Mansour uses a wide range of media, including wood, cotton, porcelain, bronze, and glass. Her work is presented in *Chapters*, which explore the two sides of her family’s background. She creates intricate sculptures with bouquets of flowers constructed from raw cotton. These bouquets are displayed in plexiglass boxes. Mansour was attracted to the use of cotton in her art installations, but she wanted to explain that usage:

I felt it needed something to conceptually explain the use of the material and to also explain the sensibility within the work…. I had been thinking about the idea of the union between the Egyptian aristocracy before the fall of the monarchy in 1952 and the antebellum period in the American Deep South, where the wealth of both elites depended on cotton trading, and so the works began to be recreated based upon the image of that union, of the Egyptian cotton traders descending onto Southern plantation lands. (“Lyrical”)

The *Chapters* also examine United States-Middle East relations, inviting viewers to reconsider their standard narratives about these relations. Jessica Winegar, writing a review of Mansour’s *Chapters* for Arte East, says that each chapter, or chapter set, is revealed at different times and in no particular order, spanning two centuries and two continents (Winegar). Basem El Barooni sees an ambiguity in Mansour’s *Chapters*, and notes that what ties these pieces together is a “hyperreal metanarrative” that is never revealed or directly mentioned in her work (15).

Since 1993, Mansour has exhibited in Italy, Egypt, and the United States. She participated in “Wasla,” an art project in the Sinai Peninsula in 2002. One of her

When ArteEast, a New York based organization, decided to launch its Virtual Gallery in 2005, the organization’s advisory board selected Mansour to be the first featured artist. ArteEast was established in 2003 by a group of film programmers, filmmakers, artists, and educators to promote the visibility of the arts and culture of the Middle East in the United States. In its press release, ArteEast’s decision was based on Mansour’s work, as “it embodies the spirit of ArteEast’s interest in the intersection of different histories and cultures within and through the Middle East” (“ArteEast”).

Mansour participated in the inauguration exhibit “In/Visible” at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, in 2005. The sculpted cotton bouquet in a glass vitrine, Chapters 1-5: Vitrine 1 (1998-1999), is a symbolic representation of Mansour’s background living between two cultures. The cotton metaphor in the installation focuses on two historical periods in two different regions: the southern part of the United States in the pre-civil war era, and Egypt before the nationalization of the cotton industry in 1952 (In/Visible, 18). In describing the symbolism and metaphor in Mansour’s installation, Mikdadi wrote:

Mansour’s delicately sculpted cotton bouquet is set in a protective Plexiglass vitrine—a metaphor for the sheltered life of women in both cultures, which contrasts with the harsh conditions endured by slaves in America, and conversely, Egyptian workers in Egypt’s cotton field. (In/Visible, 19)

Mansour’s work is not autobiographical, but it relates to her background. To her, the work is a fantasy which becomes a metaphor for an identity that is “fleeting, or for a failure to find an identity” (“Lyrical”). In her artist’s statement for In/Visible, Mansour describes this fantasy as a union/reunion of two cultures:

...a union which is based on similarities as opposed to differences. The fantasy becomes a space in which cultural difference is not referenced, but where a third identity, which is spawned by the union/reunion, is potentially explored through a construction that allows for the deconstruction and transference of meaning and expression. The fantasy becomes a complex structure in which a fluidity of thought and expression occurs effortlessly, a space in which hybridization and ambiguity become the norm. (In/Visible, 50)

Cotton continues to play a major role in the sculptures of Mansour. She uses it to narrate past times and shared cultures, while creating works of art that do not use mainstream media and materials. Mansour now splits her time
between Alexandria, Egypt, and Alabama. She is represented by the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, Egypt.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to see Mansour’s Work**

Akhenaton Gallery, Cairo, Egypt.

“Amina Mansour” at Cairo Art Index: http://www.cairoartindex.org/.


Greek Consulate General, Alexandria, Egypt.


**Samar Megdadi (b. 1972), Painter, Ceramist, and Calligraphy Artist**

Samar Megdadi was born and grew up in Irbid, a city in northern Jordan. Before moving to the United States in 1995, Megdadi attended Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan and received her B.S. degree in computer science. In 2003, she received her second B.S. in civil engineering from Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. Megdadi is a self-taught artist who combines engineering and architectural knowledge with Arabic calligraphy, Islamic designs, and western techniques to create art pieces that are creative and unique.

Megdadi uses different techniques and materials in her artwork, including oil and acrylic painting, ceramics, Arabic calligraphy, and Islamic geometrical and floral patterns. Most of her work is directly influenced by Islamic art and architecture, utilizing different styles of Arabic calligraphy. She is also inspired by the landscape designs and architectural details in the paintings of her friend Layla Elshair, an Arab American artist who lives in Chicago, Illinois.
All of Megdadi’s ceramic work, including vases, plates, and boxes, is decorated with Arabic calligraphy and Arabesque or geometric patterns. She uses verses from the Qur’an to decorate these pieces. For example, a ceramic vase (2005) is decorated with the Qur’anic Arabic verse that can be translated as “Verily in the remembrance of God do hearts find satisfaction” (Qur’an 13.28). The piece is rendered in a traditional Arabic calligraphic style called Thuluth, a cursive and ornamental script. The calligraphy is enclosed from top and bottom within two bands of geometric borders. The use of this verse is very common in Arabic and Islamic cultures as a way for remembering God. On another piece, a ceramic plate (2005), Megdadi uses the word Allah (God in Arabic) rendered in a geometric calligraphic style called Kufic, copied five times and rotated to form a geometric star shape. Another common spiritual Qur’anic phrase, “God is the light of Heavens and Earth,” decorates a ceramic bottle and is rendered in a symmetrical kufic style with gold colors on a blue background.

Megdadi’s calligraphic pieces and paintings also use common spiritual prayers and Qur’anic verses. Using acrylic and oil on canvas, she painted a large 40” x 30” piece, La elah ela allah (2005), which included the text known as the Shahada, the declaration of faith by the Muslims that says “no god but God.” Megdadi used a square kufic style to paint the text and created a mirror image of the text, resulting in a well-balanced and harmonic design. Using the same square kufic style, she also created another piece on wood, Allah (2005), in which she repeated the word “Allah” eight different times, each at a different angle, resulting in another well-balanced design.

In addition to calligraphic and Islamic designs, Megdadi uses oil on canvas to paint abstract forms capturing the essence of modernism and abstractness (Megdadi, “Artist’s”). One of her abstract paintings, Sun Set (2006), clearly shows her talents in mixing different shades of red and yellow to capture the effect of the sun on water during the sunset.

Megdadi’s work has been shown locally in cultural and community events. She shows her ceramic pieces annually at a gala in support of Avicenna Academy, an Islamic school in Merrillville, Indiana, where her children go to learn the Arabic language and the religion of Islam. As an engineer, Megdadi is a member of several professional organizations including the Arab American Engineers and Architects in the Chicago area, and she was a

recipient of a scholarship award in 2003. Megdadi currently lives and works in Schererville, Indiana, with her physician husband and four children. She is a busy mother, but she finds the time to paint and create art pieces.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Megdadi’s Work**


**Aisha Mershani** (b. 1978), Photography Artist

Aisha Mershani was born in Las Vegas, Nevada, to a Moroccan Muslim father and an American Jewish mother. Mershani holds a Bachelor’s degree in sociology and anthropology from the University of Redlands in California, and a Master’s from the UNESCO program in peace and development studies from the Universitat Jaume I in Castello de la Plana, Spain. Mershani is a photography artist, and since 2003 the subject of her photographs has been the Palestine/Israel conflict. She had photographed military checkpoints, demonstrations, house demolitions, destroyed villages, and the daily lives of Palestinians living under the occupation. Mershani’s approach to this conflict is a humanistic one; in one of her statements; Mershani stated how she approached this issue:

> Not as an Arab, nor a Jew, yet as a human being concerned of another experiencing injustice. The expression of everyday life the primary objective of this photographic work, what life under occupation looks like in living, and resisting… With the extreme injustices occurring on a daily basis, showing the world this reality is a priority (Web site).

Mershani exhibited a collection of her photographs at the Arab Cultural Festival in San Francisco in 2006. These photographs, which cannot be seen in mainstream media, “expose the reality of life in the West Bank by highlighting the Palestinian nonviolent resistance movement, Israel’s violations of international law, and the steadfastness of the Palestinian people who struggle daily to remain on their land” (Mershani, “Artist’s”). In these photographs, such as *Surviving the Battle Zone* (2004), Mershani captures the suffering of ordinary Palestinian people under occupation. The photo shows two Palestinian women trying to escape what looks like the firing of a tear gas bomb, and with Israeli military vehicles in the background. This photograph, along with another one, *Resist* (2004), was exhibited at “Prologue and Epilogue: Arab Feminism Past and Present,” San Francisco (2006).
In Resist, (2004), Mershani captured a powerful scene in the town of Budrus, Ramallah, Palestine, with an angry Israeli soldier holding his club and about to hit a Palestinian woman. The woman is resisting with her bare hands and trying to stop the soldier from hitting her. On this photograph, Mershani wrote, “Palestine is a battle zone yet one side has no weapons, no mobility, no land; survival their only form of resistance” (Prologue). This photograph and many others were also exhibited in June 2006 at the first AMWAJ (Arab Movement of Women Arising for Justice) gathering in Chicago, Illinois.

In a major exhibit, “Hope Under Siege” (2006) at Michelle O’Connor Gallery in San Francisco, Mershani collaborated with Lisa Nessan, a Jewish American activist and photographer from the Bay Area. The exhibit featured photographs that were taken between 2002 and 2006 in different parts of the West Bank, and they focus on the daily lives of ordinary Palestinians. The primary objective of the exhibit was to offer a lens into Palestinian life and resistance under Israeli occupation. As expressed in their artists’ statement, the “images tell the stories that are silenced by the mainstream media which defines news according to United States foreign policy interests.” (Hope Under Siege).

For her photographic series Lifta (2005), Mershani visited what remained of Lifta, one of the largest Palestinian towns destroyed in 1948. The events of 1948 and the creation of the state of Israel are remembered by the Palestinians
as al-nakba, which means “catastrophe” in Arabic. In this event, over 450 towns and villages were destroyed and over 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homes. The Lifta series captured the old houses, the streets, and the current situation of the town as an abandoned town. This series is a “memory frozen in time, it represents what the country was, and how far the occupation has taken it” (Mershani, “Lifta”).

One of the subjects of Mershani’s photographs is the “wall,” which is being built in the West Bank and has divided the Palestinians from their lands. In her frequent trips to the occupied territories, Mershani has experienced the non-violent demonstrations against the “wall” that take place on a regular basis. She captured these demonstrations in a number of her photographs. Mershani describes these activities:

These demos typically include a march towards the land where the construction is occurring, and are always led by the village, yet most of the time the location is not reached due to the reaction of the army. Tear gas and sound bombs are an obvious aspect of the demo, rubber bullets are shot as well, a one sided war zone against unarmed people trying to live, and resisting in order to do so. (Mershani, “Non Violent”)

Mershani’s work has been used in a number of publications, including Walls and Bridges (2005) published by AIC (Alternative Information Center), a joint Palestinian-Israeli organization that works on political advocacy and the sharing of information on the Palestinian and Israeli societies as well as on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Mershani’s photographs were also featured in the AIC monthly magazine News From Within and informational booklets. One of her photographs was on the cover of Nerve House Magazine (June 2006). Mershani currently lives and works in San Francisco and continues to participate in events that support the Palestinian struggle for peace, justice, and freedom.

Biography


Web Site

Nabil Nahas (b. 1949), Painter

Nabil Nahas was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and spent some of his childhood years in Cairo, Egypt. Before coming to the United States in 1969 to do his undergraduate studies, he educated himself in art history by buying art books with the money he collected selling some of his grandmother’s art collections. In the United States, Nahas attended Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, where he received his B.F.A. in 1971. He then continued his studies at Yale University and received an M.F.A. in 1973. Nahas has received several awards and fellowships, including the National Endowment for the Arts fellowship in 1980. In 1978, Nahas held his first show at Robert Miller in New York, which made him give up a teaching position at Yale and the State University of New York at Purchase, to devote his time to painting (Wilson-Goldie). As a painter who has developed his own way and techniques, Nahas has been described as “fundamentally an innovator” (Kernan).

In the beginning of his artistic career, Nahas focused on a “depiction of pictorial space marked by a Baroque tendency before shifting to a geometric style influenced by Islamic art” (“Artist”). During the 1980s, he returned to his baroque style and started to emphasize and use nature in his artwork. With evocative colors and textures, Nahas explores his relationship with nature, especially the sea. Even though his work is in abstract and geometric forms, Nahas does not think of himself as an abstract painter. As Nathan Kernan stated in an exhibition catalogue published by the Sperone Westwater Gallery for Nahas’s exhibit “Opium and Candy” (2005):

... he encourages a reading of his paintings as landscapes for a time in which our concept of “landscape” has been expanded to include not only scientific, macro and micro visions and non-optically-based “imaging”, but also new ideas about how the brain sees and processes visual information. His scintillating, radiantly colorful surfaces might equally be actual depictions of “closed-eye vision on the beach” or metaphors for the synapses of visual pleasure.

In his artwork, Nahas explores a number of issues and concepts, such as nature and artifice, materiality and immateriality, East and West, and a wide
range of earlier civilizations (Kernan). Many influences have suggested themselves in Nahas’s work. His Lebanese origins and his Phoenician relationship to the sea, Byzantine and Islamic architecture, and, as Donald Kuspit wonders, maybe the Lebanese tragedy and civil war, has also informed his work:

Nahas’s paintings are not simply beautiful, but morbidly so. Trauma is built into their surface, suggesting that their look of luxury is ironic, the result of pestilence, and their rich colors those of putrescence. One can’t help wondering if the tragedy of his native Lebanon informs his work. Their uncanny beauty, tense with emotional turbulence and passive fatalism, makes Nahas one of the more intriguing painters working today. (154)

Nahas’s painting style relies on the use of canvases as foundations for multiple layers of color and crushed pumice. He also uses actual starfish and casts of starfish as beds for his paintings that look like coral reefs. In reviewing his exhibit at the Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York (1997), Vincent Katz wrote in *Art in America*:

Inspired, it would seem, by the maritime origins of the starfish, Nahas has attempted to create analogues for the ocean floor. Repeating combinations of bright colors painted on the sculptural pumice gives an aura of bravura excitement, yet there is something sad about the forms themselves; they suggest an array of detritus, decayed organic matter or even feces. There is a poignant nostalgia to these new works, different from the sophisticated grandeur of his earlier gold-toned abstract paintings. (125)

While some of Nahas’s paintings are in small formats, he also paints large canvases measuring tens of feet in size. In reviewing one of his large paintings (96” by 180 1/2”), *Mars and Venus* (1997), Vincent Katz stated that the starfish can actually be seen in the painting (125). Katz also describes the forms that were painted in bright red, bordered in yellow, and set in a sea of blues. According to Carter Ratcliff, a leading art critic and contributing editor of *Art in America*, “For Nahas, color is not coloring. It is the substance of his forms … By turning color into forms—or making forms of sheer color—Nahas has narrowed dramatically the gap between what an abstract image is, in physical fact, and what it becomes as we follow its allusions into the realm of the imaginary.”

in San Francisco, Galerie Tanit in Munich, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York. His work has been also reviewed in numerous publications, including the *New York Times*, *Art Forum*, and *New York Magazine*.

Nahas currently lives in New York, and he is represented by one of the world’s most prestigious galleries, New York’s Sperone Westwater. After he returned to Beirut, Lebanon, for a short visit in 1996, Nahas now frequently goes back to Lebanon, where he is planning on renovating a family factory in Lebanon and converting it into a cultural center (Wilson-Goldie).

**Resources**

“Artist Nabil Nahas Reflects on His Work.” *Main Gate, American University of Beirut Quarterly Magazine* II, no. 3 (Summer 2004).


Kuspit, Donald. “Nabil Nahas.” *Artforum* XXXVII, no. 10 (Summer 1999).


**Web Sites and Places to See Nahas’s Work**

FAE, Musée d’art moderne, Pully-Lausanne, Switzerland.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.


Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

Vorhees Zimmerli Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

**Said Nuseibeh (b. 1957), Architectural Photography Artist**

Born in San Francisco, California, to a displaced Palestinian father and an American mother, Said Nuseibeh is an accomplished photography artist specializing in architecture and “illuminating the metaphoric and human structures that bridge mankind with the sublime” (Nuseibeh, “Biography”).
Nuseibeh’s father came from a Jerusalem-Muslim family that for centuries has been the “key keepers” of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. Nuseibeh grew up in a multicultural and a diverse environment, which he describes as:

a variously Sunni, Episcopal, Unitarian, Quaker, humanist, Pentecostal, Catholic, Shia, Presbyterian, Jewish, Baha’i, secular, Lutheran, atheist, pagan, secular, and meditative environment. I take great pride and sustenance in having become acquainted with my paternal heritage from Palestine. (Nuseibeh Web Site)

Nuseibeh obtained a B.A. degree in photography from Reed College in Portland, Oregon in 1981. He also attended Bir Zeit University in Palestine, and in 1981, he won a T.J. Watson Fellowship, Providence, Rhode Island, to photograph the desert of Wadi Rum, Jordan. Nuseibeh’s photographs are in both color and black and white, capturing architectural elements and landscape and sometimes transforming them into abstractions. His photographs include American Landscapes (1975-2002), the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (1978-2000), Desert of Wadi Rum in Jordan (1980-1982), Convivencia: Islamic Architecture in Andalucia, Spain (2002), the San Francisco conservatory (2002), a series on the reflection of light on liquid (2002), and Illuminating the Umayyad Legacy (2005 to present).

The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, built in 692 AD, is considered the first masterpiece of Islamic architecture, and it became one of the subjects of Nuseibeh’s photographs in 1996. The photographs were published in two books with world-renowned Islamic art historian Oleg Grabar. In The Dome of the Rock (Rizzoli, 1996), Nuseibeh’s photographs of the interior and the exterior of this mosque are comprehensive documents of Islamic art and architectural elements including geometrical patterns, floral motifs, and Arabic inscriptions that date back to the seventh century. Nuseibeh writes about the purpose of this project:

...to document these arts and crafts in order to enable more people to enjoy them, to encourage artisans working in the tradition today, and to assist the work of students, scholars, artists, and those design professionals who derive inspiration from Islamic sources (Nuseibeh and Grabar, 159).

In 2002, Nuseibeh spent over eight months in southern Spain photographing Islamic architectural monuments. The result of the project was a large group of images that explored the architectural, historical, metaphorical, and spiritual legacy of Muslims in *al-Andalus*. He photographed synagogues, cathedrals, mosques, and palaces, exploring “themes of fusion and *Convivencia*, or ‘living-together’ that address the peculiarly Islamic manifestation of tolerance and coexistence in pre-Inquisition Spain” (Nuseibeh, “Convivencia”). Nuseibeh’s photographic portfolio *Convivencia: Islamic Architecture in Andalucia* was
My photography is about connectedness. I seek communion with the private whispers and charged exultations of radiant energy. In the process, I love to creatively engage the real worlds of culture, identity, craft, and tradition. Because I am connected both to the brave new world of North America and the old world of biblical Palestine, my inspirations enjoy a wide compass ("Convivencia")

Most of the photographs in the Convivencia portfolio capture the geometric patterns, polygons, and stars that are common in Islamic architecture. Whether the subject is a mosque, a cathedral, a synagogue, or a palace, the Islamic architectural elements are evident in the design.

In 2003, Nuseibeh, Khalil Bendib, and Fayeq Oweis designed, painted, and led a community mural project for the Arab Cultural and Community Center in San Francisco. Measuring 54 feet wide by 30 feet high, the mural is located on a façade that faces Market Street in downtown San Francisco. The mural, the first of its kind in the United States that celebrates Arabic and Islamic culture, consists of a garden scene with mirroring irrigation pools, inspired by the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain, and arcades that include Arabic calligraphy, horseshoe arches, arabesque motifs, and geometric patterns (Oweis, 49).

Since 1979, Nuseibeh has held numerous exhibitions throughout the United States, Europe, and the Arab world, including the following venues: Euphrat Museum of Art, De Anza College, Cupertino, California (2005); Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco (2003-2004); McAuley Art Gallery, San Francisco (2003); Darat al-Funun, Amman (1997, 2003); Le Ponte Gallery, Aleppo, Syria (2001); Longview Museum, Longview, Texas (2000); Rizzoli Gallery, San Francisco (1999); Hallie Ford Museum of Art, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon (1997); and L’Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (1997). The handcrafted process of Nuseibeh’s photographs and his artistic traditions have been compared with those of Edward Weston and Ansel Adams:

Artistically, Nuseibeh follows what he calls the “f-64 handcrafted tradition” of photographers like Edward Weston and Ansel Adams, with their attention to elegant tonal quality in their studious processing of final prints. Nuseibeh shares Weston’s delight in sensuous forms, and dramatic controls of light and shadows. And like Weston, he plays off a documentary style of photography, using the camera and darkroom to reveal metaphorical and metaphysical aspects of the visible world. ("Spotlight” 106)

Nuseibeh was awarded a two-year Fulbright scholarship grant in 2005 to work on photographing Arab and Islamic architecture, focusing on the Umayyad legacy in the Levant (Palestine, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon). The Umayyads were the first Muslim dynasty that ruled from Damascus, Syria, from 663-749 AD. The Umayyads built some of the finest Islamic monuments,
including the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and the Umayyad Great Mosque of Damascus, Syria.

Nuseibeh currently lives and works in San Francisco in his private studio and continues his cultural activism within the Arab and Muslim American communities in the Bay Area. He has been an active member of the Arab Cultural and Community Center in San Francisco and other community organizations. He was a recipient of the Arab Cultural Center Millenium Award in 2000.

Resources


Web Site and Places to See Nuseibeh’s Work

Arab American Cultural Foundation, Washington, D.C.
Darat Al Funun, Amman, Jordan.
Hallie Ford Museum of Art; Harvard University.
Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.
Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco, California.
University of Texas, Austin.

OTHER: Arab Artists Collective—Detroit is a group of Arab American artists in Detroit, Michigan, that came together in 2004 to work on two main projects: a film called Detroit Unleaded, directed by one of its members, and a permanent installation at the Arab American National Museum. After the success of those two projects, the group continued to collaborate on other projects and participated in a number of exhibits and events. The collective was founded by six young artists “to create a supportive organization that provides a collaborative environment for aspiring artists of Arab heritage” (“Mission Statement”). In their mission statement, the group envisions their collective as “a vibrant, community-engaged, multi-faceted arts and media organization that promotes self-representation of artists by inspiring and supporting social movement and youthful creativity” (“Mission Statement”).

The six founding members of OTHER: Arab Artists Collective—Detroit are:

- Radfan Alqirsh, a multimedia artist with a degree in film. Alqirsh was born in Detroit, Michigan, and he also works in classrooms with high school art students.
- Mohamad Bazzi, who was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and immigrated to the United States in 1978. Bazzi is a painter and a digital artist. He holds a B.S. in art education from Wayne State University, Detroit, and he is a high school art and design teacher. Bazzi was the recipient of a “Community Service Award” by the Art Education Department at Wayne State University in 2007.
- Imad Hassan, who was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and immigrated to the United States in 1973. Hassan specializes in film, video, and digital art. He holds a B.A. in Journalism from Wayne State University, Detroit, and a B.S. in Radio/TV/Film from Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti. Hassan is a producer/director with Comcast Cablevision.
- Joe Namy, who was born in Lansing, Michigan, and has a B.F.A. from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is a multimedia artist and a teacher of music and multimedia arts.
- Rola Nashef, who was born in Saida, Lebanon, and immigrated to the United States in 1978. She is a filmmaker and a graduate of the Motion Picture Institute of Michigan.
Lana Rahme, who was also born in Saida, Lebanon, and immigrated to the United States in 1994. She has a B.F.A. from the College for Creative Studies, Detroit, and works as a clay modeler at General Motors.

The group was able to establish a studio of its own in Detroit’s Russell Industrial Center, which evolved into an artists’ forum and working space for a variety of Detroit-based artists who were previously deprived the exposure, opportunity, or facility to collaborate. The studio has “become a nucleus of inspiration for creative discourse, stimulating intellectual, political and artistic activity among numerous artists from the Detroit area” (“Mission Statement”). Individually and collectively, the members of OTHER have been active in the community through many events, including art exhibits, murals, lectures, music, teaching, and promoting a positive image of the Arab American community.

When the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan was established in 2005, OTHER was selected to create a permanent installation on Arab stereotyping in the media. The installation, Facing Identity (2005), consisting of five wall murals and a video projection, is housed in the Living in America section of the museum, which “focuses on the life of Arab Americans in the United States at different time periods, and examines such topics as family life, religion, activism and political involvement, institution-building, work, and leisure” (“Exhibits”).

The Facing Identity installation presents images of stereotypes from popular media, juxtaposed with murals that explore images of a more real identity of Arab Americans. On one of the wall murals, an 8’ x 9’ section portrays images of Arabs within popular American media, starting from “orientalist” views of the Arabs in the last century through the tragic events of September 11, 2001. A second wall section portrays images of Arabs within popular media from September 11, 2001, to the present. The remaining sections of the mural (an 8’ x 9’ wall and two 4’ x 9’ walls) show positive images of Arab American families and OTHER’s direct response to the negative portrayals. As OTHER...
puts it, they want these positive images to be “calling on Arabs to reclaim their image” (“Facing”).

In September 2005, OTHER collaborated on a successful multimedia art exhibit, “Journeys and Distances,” which was presented at the Padzieski Art Gallery in Dearborn, Michigan, in commemoration of the opening of the Arab American National Museum. The exhibit included photography, video, digital, and traditional media artwork, and a mural that was painted over the duration of the exhibit. “Journeys and Distances” focused on the concept of immigrants specially the experiences of Arab Americans. In the exhibit, OTHER also collaborated with a number of Arab American artists, including Hassan Algassid, Adnan Charara, Christina Dennaoui, Sarah Khazem, Jackie Salloum, and Michael Mansour, a designer who later joined the collective. In a press release for the Dearborn Community Arts Council, the following words described the exhibit:

Through emigration, displacement, or the search for a better existence, people’s lives become linked to the old and the new. They live in a state of transformation resulting from the hybrid merging of cultures, values and places, physically and emotionally migrating back and forth in search of their identities. While engaging the public through the arts, the mission of this installation is to explore these distances and define the universally shared psychological, emotional and social experiences of these journeys. (“Journey” Press Release)

Members of OTHER live in the Detroit area, and they continue to participate in group exhibits, performances, and presentations in galleries, universities, and art festivals throughout Michigan, as well as in other cities, including Chicago and New York. Individually and collectively, members of OTHER have been participating in the events sponsored by the Arab American National Museum, including the inaugural arts symposium Exploring New Forms and Meanings: the Intersection of Audience, Ideas, & Art, held at the Arab American National Museum in May of 2005. OTHER members were also very active in DIWAN: Forum for the Arts, the first forum on Arab American art, held

**Resources**


Jost, Erica. “Neither Here Nor There: Dennaoui’s Art and Life between Cultures.” *Kalamazoo College Index*, 2005.


**Web Sites and Places to see OTHER’s Work**

The Collective Studio, Russell Industrial Center, Detroit, Michigan.
Walid Raad (b. 1967), Video and Multimedia Artist

Walid Raad (sometimes spelled Ra’ad) was born and grew up in Lebanon. His work includes textual analysis, video, performance, and photography projects through the Atlas Group, a non-profit research foundation established in New York in 1999. Raad leads the foundation, which documents the contemporary history of Lebanon, focusing on the Lebanese civil war, which started when Raad was eight years old. After the Israeli invasion of Beirut, Raad moved to the United States in 1983, where he received his B.F.A. from the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1989, and his Ph.D. in visual and cultural studies from the University of Rochester in 1996.

Raad is a multi-disciplinary artist working with documentary film, video, photography, installation, and performance. His research on the Lebanese civil war was presented in a number of exhibitions. Through his projects, Raad has been “questioning the relation between the available and the obliterated memories and images of his own past and of the Lebanese civil wars” (“Walid”). Much of Raad’s work also deals with “Displacement of one kind or another—the embrace of documents at some remove from the action itself, invention of imagined characters, evidence supporting mistaken notions, memories rooted in fantasy” (Kaplan). Raad’s work involved a number of techniques, media, and resources. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie describes the environment of a typical production of Raad and the Atlas Group:

An Atlas Group production typically involves the following: press photographs, news clippings, interview transcripts, video footage, graphics, images, and text along with elements of performance, collage, digital photography, and video art, all rolled into the physical framework of an artist’s talk or academic lecture—a table, a microphone, a few lights, a stack of papers, a screen behind, an audience in front, a presenter in between. It is a rather sterile and austere environment, though packed to the gills with material.

Among Raad’s video projects is The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs (1999), a three-part video that focused on the “physical manifestations and effects of traumatic events” of the Lebanese civil war from 1975 to 1991. The video was
a fake documentary presenting imaginary events constructed out of everyday materials including photographs, household items, home movies, and video footage. The subjects of the video range from car bombing to hostage taking, and it ask the big question: “How do we make sense of war?” The project was screened in 2000 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (“Cinematic”). Raad also exhibited this project at the Kitchen in New York in early 2006.

Another successful project that Raad worked on was My Neck is Thinner than a Hair (1986), which is an experimental documentary that deals with the history of car bombing in Beirut during the civil war. Through research, interviews, press reports, television news footage, and radio programs, Raad reconstructed a particular car bombing event that happened in a Beirut neighborhood in 1986. As he describes the project, “it has always involved material that existed in the historical world, and imagining the universe in which that material exists” (Wilson-Goldie, “Atlas”).

In another documentary project, Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (2001), Raad tells the story of “Western Hostage Crises” in Lebanon during the 1980s. The project is a multimedia work that included video and photography, and it tells the story and the experience of Soheil Bachar, a conceptual character who was held hostage in Lebanon along with five Americans during the western hostage crises in the 1980s (“Walid”). The project addresses “various dimensions of the crisis, like writing the experience of captivity and how Arab and Western masculinity is figured in the writing” (Smith). This project was screened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2005.

In collaboration with Jayce Salloum, an Arab American artist, Raad produced Talaeen a Junuub [Up to the south] (1993), which dealt with the complex situation in south Lebanon during the Israeli occupation. It focused on the difficult living conditions, the histories of the inhabitants, and the political and economic background of the region. The video has been described as “a new trend in artistic creativity in the Arab World” (“Talaeen”). With the above mentioned projects and many others, Ra’ad examines the Lebanese civil war through “an abstraction constituted by various discourses.” As Raad describes his work regarding the war, he says that

it is constituted by and through various actions, situations, people, and accounts. Not attempting to situate the war in this or that event, person, space or time, I ask and attempt to answer the following question: How does one write a history of “The Lebanese Civil War?” (“Walid”)

Raad’s work has been exhibited or screened widely in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, including at the Venice Biennale (2003); Documenta IX, Kassel, Germany (2002); the “Whitney Biennial” at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2000, 2002); Margaret Mead Film Festival, New York (2001); New York Video Festival (1999, 2001); European Festival of Mediterranean Cinema, Beirut, Lebanon (2000); and the San Francisco Cinematheque, San Francisco, California (1999). Raad has won numerous awards and fellowships for his work, including ZKM Media Award,
Karlsruhe, Germany (2002); First Prize, Video Ex, Zurich, Switzerland (2001); Best Short Film, Beirut Film Festival (1999); and Grand Prize at Biennial of the Moving Image, Switzerland (1999). Raad was selected in 2005 by the Arabic version of Newsweek magazine as one of 43 creative people who are making a difference in the Arab world.

Raad is also a founding member of the Arab Image Foundation, a foundation started in 1996 in Beirut, Lebanon, to promote historical research on the visual culture of the Arab world, and to promote experimental video production in the region. In 2005, Raad exhibited Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography (2001), at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery. The exhibit was an installation about twentieth century Arab portrait photography conceived with artist Akra Zaatari. The installation consisted of archival images of the Arab world, including “snapshots of Egyptian prisoners, Egyptian midwife certificates, Lebanese passport photos, group portraits of Jordanian army units, schools, families, and sports teams” (Smith).

Raad served as an assistant professor in media and cultural studies at Queens College and the University of New York. He now lives in New York, where he has been an assistant professor of art at Cooper Union, New York, since 2002.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Raad’s Work


Naziha Rashid was born in Baghdad, Iraq. She received her B.A. in Arabic language and literature from the College of High School Teachers in Baghdad in 1952, and a Graduate Diploma in drawing and painting from the Fine Arts Institute, Baghdad, in 1955. Rashid received a scholarship and studied painting from 1961 to 1963 at the Chelsea School of Arts in London. In 1967, Rashid earned a Master’s degree in creative arts from the University of Maryland. She returned to Iraq and served as a professor of fine arts at the University of Baghdad from 1970 to 1984. After working in different Arab countries, she finally settled in New York in 1994.

Rashid is a painter who had an important role in the Iraqi arts movement. She was influenced by and proud of being a student of well-known Iraqi artists Fayeq Hasan and Jawad Salim (Rashid). During her studies in England, she was also influenced by European culture, and later was influenced by American art and culture when she completed her thesis in creative arts in United States (Kacimi). Her paintings focus on Iraqi women, especially those from the villages, the peasants, the farmers, and the working class. Rashid paints portraits of these women in traditional dresses against colorful backgrounds of palm trees and scenes of Iraqi rural areas. Adnan Salim describes how she depicts the faces of her subjects:

She studies the people of her time to create a series of paintings wherein each face expresses a perfect inner form of the individual, revealing the salient aspects of her subject’s character. She paints with grace, breadth, and maturity. Faces are not simply depicted in her paintings; rather, they seem to carry with them the entire life of the persons she has portrayed—their pains, their joys, their exuberance, their heroism, and their love. When alone with one of these paintings I hear the voices of those they contain. This artist has a deep and powerful sense of her subjects and expresses her feelings about them boldly and harmoniously. (Salim, 20)

The paintings of Rashid are vivid, bright, and full of nature. They are full of excitement and happiness. In one of her paintings, *Untitled* (1996), Rashid paints an Iraqi woman with a child in her lap, riding a donkey and carrying some belongings. The face of the woman clearly shows her feelings and emotions. With a background consisting of tall palm trees and garden scenes, the woman looks tired, maybe from the trip or from working all day in the fields. In another *Untitled* painting (1999), Rashid paints a portrait of two young Iraqi women with beautiful features and colorful dresses carrying fruit and vegetable baskets on their heads. Rashid’s paintings are full of life, and as Salim stated, when people look at Rashid’s paintings, they want to sail down the middle of the Tigris River to listen to the singing of young women and to the laughter of the Iraqi children (20).

Rashid has exhibited widely throughout the world. From 1954 to 1959, she participated in many group exhibitions held at the Gallery of the Fine Arts
Institute in Baghdad, Iraq. During the 1960s, she held solo exhibits in London, Moscow, New York, and San Francisco. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, she held solo exhibits and participated in group exhibits at a number of galleries and museums in Baghdad, including the National Museum of Arts and exhibits sponsored by the Iraqi Ministry of Education and Information. She was an active member in the Iraqi Artists Union and the Society of Iraqi Artists. In the early 1990s, Rashid’s paintings were exhibited in Morocco, where she worked as an Art and Exhibition Consultant for the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), office of the Arab League in Rabat, Morocco, from 1990 to 1994.

In 2002, and as a response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Rashid participated in a musical, poetic, and artistic event of American Muslim Artists at the Synod Hall of the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York City. The exhibit, “Reflections at a Time of Transformation—American Muslim Artists Reach Out to New Yorkers in Aftermath of September 11,” was organized by ASMA Society, a non-profit educational and cultural organization dedicated to creating bridges between the American public and American Muslims. The purpose of the exhibit was a testament against the division and destruction of September 11 and a bond of unity (Ali). In 2006, her paintings were included in “Iraq: Contemporary Viewpoints,” an exhibition at Pomegranate Gallery in New York.

Rashid received a number of awards, including an Honorary Certificate at the United Arab Emirates International Exhibition, Al-Shariqa, UAE (1990); and an Honorary Certificate from Central Artist’s Guild in 1987. She has donated a number of paintings to be auctioned by community organizations for good causes. She currently lives in New York and continues to paint, and as Adnan Salim puts it: “She seeks to contribute her treasures to the future, through paintings that laud the Earth and all those thereon” (21).

Resources


Web Sites and Places to see Rashid’s Work

Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad, Iraq.
Fawzia A. Reda was born in Egypt to a half-Lebanese, half-Palestinian father and a Turkish mother. Reda holds academic degrees in architecture from the College of Fine Arts, Cairo University, in graphic arts and design from the University of Minnesota, and in theatre arts from the American University in Cairo, where she also taught. Reda is the founding and creative director of Cultural Connexion, a non-profit organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with liaisons in Jerusalem, Paris, and Cairo. Cultural Connexion aspires to promote and preserve the Arabic and Islamic arts and culture and foster a conciliatory dialogue in the West with the Arab and Muslim communities. In one of her artist’s statements, Reda describes the purpose of this organization:

...far from nostalgia, a better knowledge of history is the basis for closer interchange and hopeful dialogue: it is essential to open a respectful exchange of views, based on mutual appraisal proceeding from ample and precise information. That understanding can only come from a recognition and acceptance of differences. (“Artist’s”)

As theatre artist, Fawzia contributed to numerous productions and worked with internationally acclaimed directors and choreographers, originating concepts, stage, and costume designs. Her works are recognized at the Opera and Ballet House in Cairo; in collaborations with the Royal Ballet of Tokyo, Japan; and La Scala Opera and Ballet House, Milan, Italy. In the United States, her work was presented at the Ford Performing Arts Center, Michigan; Theater In The Round, Minnesota Dance Theater, O’Shaughnessy, Minnesota.

Reda’s paintings combine Arabic calligraphy and sacred geometric patterns. Her works are part of permanent collections at the University of St Thomas, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, United Church Of Christ, the Islamic Center of Minnesota, Miriam Jaberg Oriental Arts Gallery, Landmark Center/St Paul Historical Society, University of Michigan/Museum of Art, University of Pittsburgh/Center for International Relations, Pitt’s Asian Studies Center, the Consortium for Educational Resources on Islamic Studies, A.W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust Fund, University of Ohio, among other cultural and educational institutions.

In 2002, Reda was the recipient of a grant from the Henry Luce and Rockefeller Foundations in New York as part of the Arts and Religion Project in the Twin Cities. The grant funded a series of art exhibits, lectures, presentations, and workshops focused on Islamic arts and Arabic calligraphy. The exhibit, “LOOK! This is Love, Islam: A Cultural Experience,” curated and organized by Reda, featured the work of Hajji Noor Deen Jiang, a Chinese calligrapher who specializes in Islamic Calligraphy; Mouneer Sharaani, A Syrian and an internationally recognized master calligrapher; and Fayeq Oweis, an Arab American artist.

The exhibit was held at Spencer Library and Classrooms Galleries at the United Theological Seminary, New Brighton, Minnesota (2003); Landmark
Center, Ramsey County Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota (2003), Kimbo Art Gallery in the William Pitt Union of the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2004); and BOTTLE WORKS Ethnic Arts Center, Cambria City, Johnstown, Pennsylvania (2004). Reda describes the richness and variety in the exhibition’s works as a reflection of the diversity and freedom of artistic expression that characterize Islamic culture (LOOK). During the exhibit, Reda presented lectures on the spirituality of Islamic calligraphy and its connection to the revelation of the Qur’an.

In addition to the exhibits, lectures, and presentations in “LOOK! This is Love,” Reda conceptualized a contemporary dance production, Close to Silence (2007), inspired by Arabic letters and the poems of a thirteenth century mystic. She designed the Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterns/animations, scenery, costumes, and musical and lighting concepts for the production, which premiered at the Southern Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in June 2007 (“Southern”). Reda also worked as a cultural advisor to choreographer Wynn Fricke. During the performances of Close To Silence, the Southern hosted a calligraphy exhibit organized by Reda, displaying the works of master calligraphers Fayeq Oweis, Khaled Al-Saaii, and Mouneer Sharaani. Reda describes the production:

Close To Silence is a dance and multimedia concert based on an original idea: animation of Arabic calligraphy and sacred geometric patterns. Drawing on the spiritual symbolism found in the movements of Arabic calligraphy and sacred geometric patterns, and inspired by the spiritual dances of the Whirling Dervishes, the poetry of 13th century Muslim theologian and mystic, Muhammad Jalaluddin Rumi, and incorporating contemporary interpretations of classical Islamic songs and music, Close To Silence is an attempt to delve into the mystical dimension of these artistic expressions, allowing us a glimpse into Divine Knowledge and Grace which make the manifestation of their inner realities in form and space and time possible. (“Southern”)

Reda has served as a member of the curatorial committees of two major exhibits: “Three Cities Against the Wall: Ramallah, Tel Aviv, New York” (2005); and “Artists Against the Wall,” Paris, France (2006). “Three Cities Against the Wall” was an exhibit that protested the separation wall that Israel is building in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In addition to serving as one of the organizers for the exhibit, Reda also participated in the exhibit Writing on the Wall (2005), which is a photograph of images of resistance drawn on the wall by Palestinian youth of the West Bank. The apartheid wall, as the Palestinians call it, serves as a place where hundreds of artists from around the world have been painting images to protest it and calling for dismantling it because it is a symbol of Israeli oppression against the Palestinians (“Three,” 4).

The exhibit was opened at Al-Halla j Gallery in Ramallah, Palestine; Beit Ha’omanim, Tel Aviv, Israel; and at ABC No Rio, New York. Reda’s piece, Writing on the Wall, is a drawing of a cartoon character and symbol of Palestinian resistance called Handala, which was created by late Palestinian artist
Naji al-Ali (1937-1987), who began drawing his cartoons on the walls of prisons in Lebanon, and was assassinated because of his widespread political cartoons. Handala, meaning bitter, become a Palestinian cultural icon that reminded the world of the unresolved Palestinian refugee problem and a symbol of the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland.

Reda established and headed creative departments for several prominent publishers, including Dar Al-Fata Al-Arabi, Beirut, and Cairo. She has also freelanced as a writer, graphic designer, and creative strategist with the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF. She currently lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and continues to work with international cultural and humanitarian organizations.

**Resources**


**Web Sites and Places to See Reda’s Work**

The Islamic Centre of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
The University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
The University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota.
Mamoun Sakkal (b. 1950), Painter, Designer, Calligrapher and Architect

Born in Aleppo, Syria, and immigrating to the United States in 1978, Mamoun Sakkal is an award-winning designer, illustrator, calligrapher, and architect. Sakkal studied painting and printmaking at the Aleppo Art Institute and then received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Aleppo in 1974. Sakkal got involved in the art scene at the age of nine years old. Due to his father's friendship with the artists who taught at the Aleppo Art Institute, Sakkal was able to attend art classes at a very young age. Remembering his early childhood education, he writes:

When I was about nine years old, the first institute for art instruction opened in Aleppo. My father was a friend of the artists who taught at the Art Institute, all trained in Italy, so I was accepted despite my young age in the twice a week evening painting courses, an activity I continued for the next ten years, with some interruptions, until I went to the University of Aleppo in 1969 to study architecture. During these years, I learned about print making, sculpting, and some calligraphy, in addition to drawing and painting. (Sakkal, "Artist’s")

After coming to the United States, Sakkal went to the University of Washington, Seattle, where he received his master's degree in architecture with urban design certificate in 1982. In 1999, he was admitted into a Ph.D. program in Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle. He received his interdisciplinary Ph.D. in 2003.

Sakkal’s architecture practice cannot be separated from his fine art, calligraphy, and design work. He combines the Islamic traditional art elements, including Arabic calligraphy, geometric patterns, and Arabesque, into the interior and exterior designs of his projects. Since 1984, he had designed a large number of residential homes, mosques, restaurants, hotels, and schools throughout Washington state. Some of his projects include Marrakesh Restaurant, Masjid Al Farooq, Evergreen Islamic Institute Mosque, and Alarqam School.

In regard to Sakkal’s fine art and design work, he began working in watercolors and later switched to utilizing computer technology. He creates calligraphic
compositions in the Kufic style, one of the earliest and most decorative styles of Arabic calligraphy. His original and colorful designs are based on Arabic calligraphy, which modifies Arabic letter forms into contemporary and abstract shapes (Ameri, 240).

A multi-talented artist, Sakkal is best known for his Arabic calligraphic compositions and typeface designs. He is the founder and principal of Sakkal Design in Bothell, Washington, a firm that has focused on Arabic calligraphy and typography since the early 1990s. Sakkal’s graphic designs combine his knowledge of traditional Arabic calligraphy with the latest technology utilizing digital media. Even though he had limited traditional calligraphy training in Aleppo, Syria, under master calligrapher Ibrahim Rifa’i, his interest in the study of Islamic arts in general, and calligraphy in particular, increased since he immigrated to the United States (Sakkal, “Muslim”).

Sakkal produced the first computer clip art collection of Arabic calligraphic designs and Islamic art in 1991. He has also won several international competitions for his calligraphic compositions and typeface designs. In 1993, Sakkal won the First Award in the Kufic style at the Third International Calligraphy Competition. The competition was organized by the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art, and Culture, in Istanbul, Turkey. Sakkal’s work featured a verse from the Qur’an that instructed Muslims to face Mecca when praying. Its translation is: “Turn your face towards the sacred mosque, and wherever you were, turn your faces towards it.” The text in the calligraphic composition was divided into two equal sections. The vertical letters were extended “to form a balanced pattern of braided lines and stylized arabesque floral shapes.” (Sakkal, “Muslim”)

Sakkal’s work provides an educational tool about the art of Arabic calligraphy, an artistic tradition of extraordinary beauty, richness and power. When asked about the cultural responsibility of his work, he responded:

As I become more aware of the widespread use of the Arabic script and how important it is to a significant portion of the world’s population,
I put more effort into making my own typefaces more responsive to the perceived needs and aspiration of these populations. While my work is a very personal affair of self-fulfillment, it is at the same time imbued with significance beyond my own and continues to reflect a tradition of which I am only one link in a long and significant chain. (Taylor)

Utilizing computer graphic technology, Sakkal has designed the covers for more than 100 books and magazines. He was a recipient of the First Place award in the Arab Human Development Report cover design competition for the United Nations Development Program (2003). Sakkal also designed several Arabic computer fonts that are included in software packages being sold by major companies such as Adobe and Microsoft. Sakkal has received a number of Awards of Excellence for the design of “Sakkal Seta” and Arabic Typesetting typefaces in the Type Director’s Club Type Design Competition in New York (2003-2004).

Sakkal’s artwork has been exhibited in several places throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. In 2003, he participated in “Diversity in Harmony,” a national exhibit by artists of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage. The exhibit was curated by Hashim Al-Tawil and was sponsored by the Center for Arab American Studies at the University of Michigan, Dearborn, Michigan. He also participates annually at the Arab Festival sponsored by the Arab Center of Washington and serves as an art director and a consultant for the festival. Sakkal also participated in Re-Interpreting the Middle East: Beyond the Historical Stereotype, an international print exchange portfolio of the work of 23 international artists. The portfolio commenced as a call for a thematic print exchange by Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Washington D.C., March 2005 (Re-Interpreting). Sakkal’s giclee print Resonance (2005) was a calligraphic composition of a common Arabic proverb, which is attributed to the second Muslim Caliph (successor to Prophet Muhammad) Omar who died in 640 AD. The proverb, which can be translated as “how can you enslave people whose mothers gave birth to them free?” was rendered in traditional Arab calligraphy style and was juxtaposed on the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. In this composition, Sakkal shows the similarity of the texts emphasizing the equality concept in both the Arabic and American cultures.

In 2005, Bitstream Inc., a leading software company that provides typographical solutions and computer fonts, made an agreement to partner with Sakkal to include his unique Arabic fonts into their solutions for developers. Sakkal currently lives in Bothell, Washington, where he continues to practice art and design, and also lecture on Islamic art and architecture at the University of Washington.

**Resources**


**Web Site and Places to See Sakkal’s Work**

The American Embassy, Damascus, Syria.
The Corcoran College of Art and Design, Washington, D.C.
The Culture Ministry of Syria, Damascus, Syria.
Sharjah Islamic Museum, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.
The University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

**Jacqueline (Jackie) Salloum, Multi-Media Artist and Filmmaker**

Jacqueline (Jackie) Salloum was born to Palestinian/Syrian-American parents in Dearborn, Michigan. She received a B.F.A. in photography and graphic design from Eastern Michigan University and received a M.F.A. from New York University in 2003. Salloum works with video, collage, flash cards, toys, gumball machines, and mixed media to explore political and social issues relating to Arab identities and misconceptions in Western media. Her collage works contain old photos of her family in Palestine, while her video/film projects challenge and helps break the stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in film and media:

My work focuses on documenting the histories of people unjustly served, that have been forgotten or ignored by the masses, altered and erased by those in power. Taking from various forms of pop culture, I repackage events and individuals into a palatable, easily digestible serving of “infotainment.” My work also serves as an outlet for my anger and frustration. Much of my determination comes from my own experiences and observations dealing with the distortion, misrepresentation and the vilification of Arabs through the U.S. media and cinema. At a time when there are so-called “evil-doers” all around, I hope to help humanize and
demystify political and ethnic issues plaguing our society and harming those around us. ("Disruption")

Salloum has directed two short videos exploring the issue of Arab identity. Her video, *Arabs A-go-go* (2003), featured, as Salloum stated: "footage of Arabs as you’ve never seen them before—unless you’re an Arab." The two-minute music video consisted of images from Arab dramas, musicals, and romantic comedies. A second video, *Planet of the Arabs* (2004), featured images from Hollywood showing the "relentless vilification and dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims" (Salloum, "Artist’s"). This video, which was inspired by Jack Shaheen’s book *Reel Bad Arabs* (Interlink Publishing Group, 2001), received the International Editing Award at the Cinema-texas Film festival and was an official selection in the Sundance Film Festival 2005. She is also working on a third film called *SlingShot Hip Hop* (2006), a feature documentary that focuses on the daily life of Palestinian rappers living in Gaza, the West Bank, and inside Israel. This new film aims to spotlight alternative voices of resistance within the Palestinian struggle and explore the role their music plays within their social, political and personal lives (Salloum, Personal).

Salloum’s mixed media projects include satirical political "toys" such as a *Caterrorpillar* bulldozer (2002), a toy bulldozer that she repackaged with messages that criticize the involvement of the Caterpillar corporation in "building illegal settlements on Palestinian lands, the uprooting of ancient olive trees, and the demolishing of Palestinian homes" (Salloum, "Artist’s"). The toy also includes slogans such as "Not Suitable for those concerned with human rights," and "we now run over and kill Americans with impunity," a reference to Rachel Corrie (1979-2003), a young American human rights activist with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), who was crushed by an Israeli Caterpillar bulldozer while trying to protect a Palestinian home from being demolished. On the back cover of the packaging, Salloum included a statement on social responsibility taken from Caterpillar corporation: "We are committed to enabling positive and responsible growth around the world, and we believe..."
in the value of social and environmental responsibility…” (Salloum, “Artist’s”).

The two “gumball machines” that Salloum has created feature two issues: one features capsules with magnets, stickers, or rings of her favorite revolutionaries from different cultures, and the other features dolls representing Palestinian refugees. The “revolutionaries” gumball machine, for example, features people such as Lucy Parsons, Emma Goldman, and Huey Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party. The “refugees” gumball machine has a message saying “collect all 5 million!” in reference to the population of Palestinian refugees. One refugee, for example, comes with the following message: “I come from Salamah, Palestine. The village isn’t there anymore because it was demolished in 1948. The 6,670 people who lived there were forced to leave. Now I live in a refugee camp in Jenin. You can go visit Salamah, except now it is a suburb of Tel Aviv called Kefar Shaem” (Salloum, “Artist’s”).

Salloum’s flash cards consist of mostly U.S. politicians and presidents such as Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Lyndon Johnson. Secretaries of State flashcards include Madeline Albright and Colin Powell. Each flashcard shows a photo of the person on the front and a question with multiple answers on the back. On Secretary of State Madeline Albright’s flashcard, Salloum uses a quotation made by Albright on 60 Minutes when she was asked “if the price was worth it” in reference to the half million Iraqi children who died because of the U.S. economic sanctions during the 1990s. Albright’s answer was “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it.” This was the correct answer from the three choices given, as Salloum points out on the card (Salloum, “Artist’s”).

Since 2002, Salloum’s videos and multimedia installation works were exhibited widely throughout the United States and internationally, including these venues: Ripit Birlin, Berlin, Germany (2006); Center For Book Arts, New York (2006); Nova Art Fair, Chicago (2006); Freud Museum, London (2006); Sundance Film Festival, Park City, Utah (2005); Germany International Media Art Festival, Berlin (2005); Istanbul Film Festival, Turkey (2005); National
Geographic Film Festival, Los Angeles (2005); Void Gallery, Derry, Ireland (2005); New York Underground Film Festival, New York (2005); Santa Fe Film Festival, Santa Fe, New Mexico (2005); Bronx Museum (2004); Wallspace Gallery, New York (2004); Israeli Center for Digital Art, Helon, Israel (2004); Havana Biennial, Cuba (2003); and in numerous film festivals such as the Arab Film Festival in San Francisco, and the Palestinian Film Festival in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Gaza.

Salloum has received grants from the Jerusalem Fund and the Chicago Palestine Film Festival, among others, and lectures frequently at universities and high schools around the country. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Salloum’s Work

Charles Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles.
University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Adelia Malouf Samaha (b. 1929), Painter and Mixed Media Artist

Adelia Malouf Samaha was born in Alfredo-Guedes, Brazil, to a well-known Lebanese family, the Malouf family (also spelled Maloof and Mallouf). The youngest of ten children, she was brought to the United States in 1940 by her uncle who lived in Boston to be raised there because her father and brother were murdered in Brazil. After arriving in Boston with her siblings, her uncle and his family enrolled her in art school almost immediately, which she enjoyed immensely, and drawing occupied all her spare time. She spent so much time drawing that the family used to call her khutyara (“old lady”) because she never enjoyed anything else but drawing. (Samaha, Personal).

Coming from the Malouf family that was well rooted in arts and literatures with many well-known scholars in both Lebanon and the United States, it was
natural for Samaha to be interested in art. For example, her great
granduncle was the polyglot
Nassif Mallouf, who wrote lan-
guage, history, and geography
books in seven languages, and
served with the British Army dur-
ing the Crimean War as an inter-
preter. He also served as First
Dragoman (an interpreter or a
guide in countries where Arabic,
Turkish, or Persian is spoken) to
the British Consulate at Izmir,
western Turkey, and was awarded
medals for his services by the
Ottoman Sultan and Persian Shah.

Once she arrived in Boston in
1940, Samaha began taking art
lessons and won a three year
scholarship that allowed her, as
an honor student, to continue her
classes through high school and
study art at the Boston Museum
School of Fine Arts. In 1952 she
got married to Harvard graduate,
John N. Samaha, and never com-
pleted the final year of college
at the Boston Museum School of
Fine Arts. In 1957, the family
moved to Beirut and then to
Saudi Arabia, because her husband obtained a job with TransArabian Pipe
Line (subsidiary of ARAMCO) in Saudi Arabia. The family returned to live in

Samaha is a painter who specializes in portraits and nature using oil, pastel,
and mixed media. Her art is realist, influenced by her natural surroundings,
and it captures “everyday objects illustrating life’s joy in her paint” (Harris,
16). She has also worked in stained glass, petit point, painting on fabrics, silk
screening, and pottery. Her main influence for portraits was Ritchie Cooper,
with whom she trained after arriving in St. Petersburg in 1965. She had
exhibited her work in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia; Beirut, Lebanon; Boston,
Massachusetts; and St. Petersburg, Florida. Her art is found in numerous
private collections, as she has been commissioned to do portraits and other
projects for over 40 years.

Ranging from painting family and commissioned portraits to painting flow-
ers, fruits, and vegetables, Samaha uses trompe l’oeil technique to capture
more realistic images. Her paintings of flowers are very colorful, vibrant, and
full of life. In one of her oil paintings done while she was in art school, Samaha
captures realistic objects of vases, jars, a book, a candle, and a medical scale. The medical scale belonged to her grandfather, who was a doctor and used it to measure medicine. She has created many portraits of her family, especially those of her children, capturing the different times in their lives. Breanna Harris describes one of these portraits that “...depicts the heart and spirit of her four young children playing jacks, it is done in pastel with coarse strokes sketched to life” (16).

When Samaha lived in the Boston Area until 1957, she worked in a linen shop. Later on, she owned a successful clothing line and painted on fabric and sold her designs and wearable art to many department stores, including Saks Fifth Avenue and Bonwit Tellers (Samaha, Personal).

In 1974, Samaha was asked to do a portrait of St. Peter for St. Peter’s Cathedral in St. Petersburg, Florida. As she recalled, she thought about it for a year because “I wanted it a certain way. I wanted it to look old, as if it had been in the church always and not just noticed” (Caffery, B). When she finally decided to paint the portrait of St. Peter, she selected her uncle, Joseph Malouf, because he was an archbishop of Baalbek, Lebanon, an impressive figure who she looked up to (Caffery B). Using oil and gold leaf, the final portrait, 42” x 67”, which has been hanging in the church since 1974, looks very antique, and it depicts a man with a beard holding a key in one hand and wearing a blue gown.

Samaha was one of the organizers of the Mainsail Arts Festival started in St. Petersburg around 1981, which continues annually in downtown St. Petersburg’s waterfront. She also participates in a number of shows in Florida including “Angels After Dark” and other shows at Tampa and St. Petersburg Yacht Clubs (Harris, 16). Samaha has also volunteered thousands of hours of her time to the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg. Her home gallery is full of objects including vases, glasses, cupboards, plates, and many other objects that are painted with flowers. Samaha currently lives in St. Petersburg, Florida, and continues to paint for enjoyment, surrounded by her husband, their children, and grandchildren.

Resources

Web Sites and Places to See Samaha’s Work
Pinellas Park Library, Pinellas Park, Florida.
Raymond James, St. Petersburg, Florida.
St. Peter’s Cathedral, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Sumayyah Samaha (b. 1939), Painter, Sculptor, and Mixed Media Artist

Sumayyah Samaha was born in Shweir, a village northeast of Beirut, Lebanon. She studied at the American University of Beirut, where she received her B.A. in fine arts in 1960. After moving to the United States, Samaha obtained her M.A. from the University of Pittsburgh in 1965. She works in a variety of media, including oil on canvas, ceramics, and mixed media. Her abstract paintings of landscapes and nature are full of colors and organic forms.

In 1978, Samaha co-founded 22 Wooster Gallery in New York and was an active member until 1988. Samaha has had several solo exhibitions, including those at the Blink Gallery in Andes, New York (2004); Denise Bibro Fine Art in New York (1992-2004); Farleigh Dickinson University in Hackensack, New Jersey (1998); Kenkelaba Gallery in New York (1993); and at Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art in Loretto, Pennsylvania. (1994). She has also participated in group exhibitions at the Viridian Gallery (2004); Albert Knox Museum in Buffalo, New York (2002, 2003); and other group exhibits in Beirut and London.

In her solo exhibits at Denise Bibro Fine Art Gallery in New York (1992-2004), Samaha presented very colorful, dynamic, and intimate abstract oil paintings that were luscious and sensuous in color and filled with organic shapes and forms. In “Forbidden Fruit” (2002), Samaha’s colors took darker tones, which were influenced by the plant life and the natural environs where she often stays and experiences—the Hamptons out in Long Island, the Catskills in upper New York state, and the mountains of her homeland in Lebanon (“Forbidden”).

The Middle Eastern conflicts, including the war in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian issue, have been a turning point in the artwork of Samaha. Since 2001, she has been creating work that “mourns the loss of life and destruction of homelands that have resulted from the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the American occupation of Iraq” (Farhat). As Samaha explains, this is an important work that has engaged her both artistically and emotionally, and led her to other works that relate to issues that she feels very strongly about (Samaha). Samaha’s new political work is a “reflection of her emotional state and of the feelings of alienation she experienced for the first time since arriving to the U.S. in the late 1960s” (In/Visible 24).

In addition to her abstract oil paintings, Samaha creates ceramic and mixed media sculptures. In her series Mausoleum (2001), Samaha created small ceramic mausoleums in tribute to the Palestinian children killed during the second intifada (Palestinian uprising). The mausoleums are painted with dark colors to convey grievance and sadness for the loss of lives. Other recent political projects include Fifth Crusade (2003), a model of a castle tower of the
Crusades, made of ceramic with sharp nails and pins sticking out of its sides and windows. The piece was Samaha’s protest against the war in Iraq and President George Bush’s use of the word “crusade” when the war started.

For the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Samaha participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. Samaha’s work for the exhibit, *Israel/Palestine Fence* (2003-2004), a series of 9” x 16” mono prints and mixed media watercolors, was one of her first projects that incorporated political issues dealing with the issue of Palestine. The series, which incorporated poetry by Arab and Arab American poets such as Etel Adnan, contained strokes “symbolizing the dead” and sewing strokes symbolizing “mothers, grandmothers, and wives, anxious, patiently waiting for relief” (*In/Visible*, 52). The series was displayed forming a symbolic wall that, as Samaha explains it, is

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**Sumayyah Samaha**

...in protest against the apartheid wall Israel is building on Palestinian land separating Palestinians from their work, farms, schools and extended families. Although the question of Palestine has been part of my life since I was born, I had not incorporated this issue in my work until the past two years when I began building small mausoleums in ceramics as a tribute to murdered Palestinian Children. (In/Visible, 52)

Focusing her recent work on political issues, Samaha participated in an art exhibit with a primary focus on issues of political ideology and radical social thought. The aim of the exhibit was to address the question: Does radical political thought still have a place in American society? In the exhibit “Real Compared to What; Artistic Expression As a Wrench in the System—Not a Cog in the Wheel” (2005) at Gallery Onetwentyeight in New York, Samaha showed her anti-war mixed media pieces. Her series of charcoal drawings made of spiral images, Portrait of Iraq (2003-2004), was meant to evoke a feeling of a cemetery. In the exhibit, she also included Island of Goree (2005), a 31” x 12” mixed media including wires and nails that resembles a prison fence addressing racism and slavery (Samaha). The name of this piece is taken from the infamous Island of Goree in Africa where a large number of Africans were put into slavery and shipped to the American continent. Samaha’s work was inspired by a song of the same name by Brazilian singer Gilberto Gil. The lyrics of the song were also part of the art piece.

Samaha currently lives and works in New York, where she continues to create artwork that deals with political issues, the environment, and racism. She is represented by Denise Bibro Fine Art Gallery, New York.

Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Samaha’s Work
American Collection, Centrum Sztuki, Warsaw, Poland.
Denise Bibro Fine Art, New York Kenkelaba House, New York City.
New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation, New York.
Linda Dalal Sawaya (b. 1947), Painter, illustrator, and photographer

Linda Dalal Sawaya was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. As the youngest of five daughters of Lebanese immigrants, she grew up learning cooking, baking, gardening, and crafts, which became her great passions in life. Members of Sawaya’s family were among the early Lebanese immigrants and were very active in the community. One of her father’s uncles founded St. Anne Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Los Angeles in 1908. Almost everyone in her family had made an impact on Sawaya’s artistic development:

My father, Elias, who was an amateur photographer and filmmaker; my mother, Alice, who continued making art and cooking until the ripe age of 96, and began at the age of 5; my grandmother, Dalal, an excellent cook and artist of handwork; my grandfather, Anton, who taught me at the age of 5 to read and to love books. (Sawaya, Personal)

Sawaya studied photography, ceramics, and design at UCLA, where she received a B.A. degree in environmental design in 1969. She also studied painting at Pacific NW College of Art and Oregon School of Arts and Crafts. Sawaya is a painter, book illustrator, photographer, graphic designer, and writer. Sawaya works with a variety of art forms and media, including paint with acrylic, watercolor, gouache, oil, egg tempera, collage, photography, and ceramics.

In 1986, Sawaya started painting and integrating photography and ceramics in her work. Her artwork and illustrations have been published on the covers of numerous books, including Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American Feminists (South End Press, 1994), Khalil Gibran: His Life and World (Interlink Publishing Group, 1998), and Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East (Indiana University Press, 1993), among many other titles. She also designed and illustrated two children’s books. One of the books, How to Get Famous in Brooklyn (Simon & Schuster, 1995), was selected as one of the best children’s books of the year for exhibition in New York by the New York Society of Illustrators. The other book, The Little Ant/La Hormiga Chiquita (Rizzoli International, 1995), a delightful bilingual Mexican folktale, was selected as one of the best children’s books of the year by Bank Street Books (Sawaya, “Memories”).

In 1996, Sawaya received a small travel grant from the Regional Arts Commission, which allowed her to return to Lebanon 25 years after her first visit there to research food, art, and family. A joyous and stimulating trip reunited her with family and provided an opportunity for her to gather photographs, recipes, and more inspiration for her internationally well-received Lebanese family cookbook Alice’s Kitchen: Traditional Lebanese Cooking, which she designed and published in 1997. In 1998, she visited Lebanon again with her mother Alice and used photos and family stories from that trip in her newly
revised and expanded 4th edition of Alice’s Kitchen, published in 2005 (Sawaya, Personal). In an article for the Saudi Aramco World, Sawaya wrote about how she got involved in traditional Lebanese cooking:

In the late 1800’s, my grandmother, Dalai Hage Ganamey—whom we affectionately called by the Arabic Sitto—was sent to school as a child in her Lebanese mountain village of Douma. There she was taken not into the classroom to study but into the kitchen to help. As a result, she didn’t learn to read or write; instead, she became a wonderful cook. Alice, my mother, learned from Sitto first in Douma and then in Detroit, where the family immigrated in 1926. When Mother married my father, Elias, in 1934, they continued west to Los Angeles. Sitto and Jiddo, my grandfather, joined them a few years later. By the time I was a child, Mother and Sitto had become renowned throughout the community for their cooking. And I had the good fortune to be their assistant. (16)

For Sawaya, painting is a spiritual act, a meditation, and a healing process as well (Sawaya, Personal). Her imagery is spiritual, including images of Buddha and Madonna. They are also playful, including invented flowers, gypsies, people, and places. In 1992, Sawaya participated in a 14-panel multicultural mural, We Speak, which was exhibited at the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, Portland, Oregon. She designed and painted a panel on Arab-American experience. In 2000, Sawaya began studying Eastern Catholic iconography, an art form integral to her Lebanese spiritual tradition. Each one of her works tells a story that is influenced by her cultures. Some of her paintings include geometric and floral designs influenced by Arabic and Islamic arts. In one of her series, for example, Sawaya used acrylic on paper to paint images of the Madonna, as a representative of the Divine Feminine.
In another series, *Mother of God* (2002-2005), Sawaya painted traditional icons on wooden panels that were prepared with handmade gesso and painted with natural pigments and egg yolk as they were done in the ancient tradition.

In addition to illustrating and painting, Sawaya also learned and used a photo emulsion transfer technique, in which the images are created through a unique process beginning with a 35 mm slide. The image is then projected onto Polaroid paper, and the emulsion is then transferred in a one-of-a-kind print process onto watercolor paper. She also paints women’s portraits on clay.

Sawaya’s work has been exhibited in a number of galleries in Oregon, California, Washington, and New York, including: De Nada Gallery, Portland, Oregon (1991); Culture Shock Gallery, Portland, Oregon (1992); Willamette University, Salem, Oregon (1993); Third World Art Exchange, Los Angeles, California (1994); New York Society of Illustrators, New York (1995); Fetterly Art Gallery, Vallejo, California (2002); Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon (2006); and at Washington State University (2006).

Sawaya’s travels to the Middle East fostered a deep concern for the plight of the Palestinians and brought her to participate as much as possible in the Middle East peace movement and dialogue groups with Jews and Arabs. She became a peace activist and designed a T-shirt and button to promote peace that read: *JUST PEACE, Salaam, Shalom*, with calligraphy in Arabic and Hebrew. She also volunteered with the Interreligious Committee on Peace in the Middle East, Oregon Peace Institute, and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Sawaya is also an art teacher, and she gives art classes, residencies, and presentations at her studio or in schools. Topics for these classes include how to illustrate a story, painting, collage, self portraits, mural painting, ceramics, Islamic tile painting, mosaics, photographic processes, and book making. She also gives classes on Mandala paintings, a creative process of healing and integrating the conscious with the unconscious mind. In 2003, Sawaya became a *SoulCollage* facilitator and a teacher of a process in which students learn how to make their own tarot cards using collage technique, and creating a deck of personal cards that may be used for inspiration, guidance, and personal readings. Sawaya currently lives and works in Portland, Oregon.
Resources


Web Sites and Places to See Sawaya’s Work


Washington State University, Vancouver, Washington.

Adnan Shati (b. 1954), Painter, Muralist, Cartoonist, and Calligraphy Artist

Adnan Shati was born in Nasiriyyah, a city in southern Iraq. Shati was encouraged at the age of 12 by his father to practice the art of Arabic calligraphy. He left Iraq at age 23 to study in Florence, Italy, and returned to Iraq after three years, where he taught junior high school students and served in the Iraqi army for about six years (Miller). As Shati explains, his time in Florence, Italy, was the most rewarding experience, especially when he was doing caricature and portrait drawings at the Uffizi Museum and the Piazzale di Michelangelo in Florence, Italy (Shati, “Biography”).

Due to his activism against the late government of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and fearing for his life, Shati fled to neighboring Iran in 1986, where he worked for human rights organizations and helping Iraqi refugees. Shati is a calligrapher, painter, muralist, and accomplished cartoonist. While in the Khoy Refugee Camp in Iran, which housed thousands of Iraqi refugees, Shati created an exhibition of 32 oil paintings depicting methods of torture used in Iraq. The paintings and pictures of them were circulated in 13 countries, which lead to Shati being “Most Wanted” by the Iraqi government (Miller). After living in the refugee camp for a few years, Shati crossed to Pakistan illegally and was arrested. As Miller writes in the Star Tribune:

Just over the Pakistan border, they were arrested. After spending eight months in jail, 50 Iraqis were taken to the airport for deportation to Baghdad, facing almost certain execution. Shati became their spokesman, convincing a United Nations official that they were political refugees.
When Shati came to the United States as a political refugee in 1990, he settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he received a Master’s Degree in special education from the University of Minnesota.

Shati uses a number of media and techniques in his art work. His naturalistic landscape paintings, including scenes of Iraqi landscapes, combine pastels, oils, and acrylics. Shati is also a muralist and has created a number of large murals in Minnesota for restaurants and private homes. His large murals at Heartland Café, downtown Minneapolis, and Heartland Express in Bloomington, Minnesota, show his fine work in combining landscape scenes of gardens, houses, and seashores with food products. In his design work, Shati also uses Islamic art elements, such as Arabesque and geometric patterns, in creating lighting decorations and illustration projects.

Shati is a member of the National Caricaturists Network (NCN) and the Minnesota Artists Association (MAA). He won a third-place honor as Caricaturist of the Year for “Best in Black & White Techniques” at the 11th annual National Caricaturist Network convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2002 (“NCN News”). As a political cartoonist, Shati created a series of cartoons satirizing Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party that ruled Iraq for over 35 years. These cartoons were published in Iraqi newspapers in exile. In one of his cartoons, just before the war on Iraq, Shati drew Saddam wearing dirty clothes, locked into a box and making a pledge to President George Bush:

Dear Mr. Bush,

My sincere greetings...I had a very good and special relationship with your father, and with Reagan, and with your respected Party. You know what I mean...Please give my sincere greetings to your kind father. I would also like to ask you for a second chance, so I can prove to you how sincere I am in our friendship and past agreements....I beg you, for the sake of the food we shared together...I am willing to kiss your hands, your feet, and...as I did with the Shah of Iran before. Goodbye for now. Signed, Saddam Hussein. (Shati “Saddam,” Translated by Fayeq Oweis)

Shati has also created a number of cartoons after the capture of Saddam Hussein depicting Hussein in prison. These cartoons are published on the Internet through many Web sites, including nasiriyeh.net, which Shati manages and serves as an online editor.

As a calligrapher, Shati’s Arabic calligraphy decorates several mosques in the Midwest (“Primary”). At the inaugural event of the Arab-American Cultural Institute (AACI), which was held at the Minneapolis College in 2003, Shati was an active participant, and he gave a presentation on “The Art of Arabic Calligraphy” as a cultural and artistic identity that unified Arabic and Islamic art. Shati’s landscape and figurative drawings and illustrations were featured in the first issue of Mizna (1999), a journal by a Minnesota-based organization that promotes “Arab-American culture that values diversity in the Arab community” (“About Mizna”). Shati has also participated in “Mideast in the Midwest,” an annual event and exhibition of contemporary art by Arab artists living in the Twin Cities, Minnesota.
In 2005, Shati was able to visit his native country of Iraq after 19 years of exile. Shati currently lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He participates in most cultural and art festivals in Minnesota, especially those that promote Arab culture. He is a special education teacher and works with children with special needs, using visual arts as another way to promote learning. He also runs his own business, called Artistic Expeditions, where he does gift-caricatures and party caricature drawings at corporate and cultural events.

Resources

Text translated from Arabic by Fayeq Oweis.

Web Sites and Places to See Shati’s Work (Murals)

Heartland Cafe, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Heartland Express, Bloomington, Minnesota.
Sindbad Bakery and Deli, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Nida Sinnokrot (b. 1971), Video, Film, and Installation Artist

Nida Sinnokrot is a Palestinian American artist who was born and grew up in Algeria. In 1980, his family left Algeria and settled in Austin, Texas. This move had an impact on Sinnokrot: “I found myself in Texas, removed from all the familiar sensations of North Africa, with only a dislocated sense of grammar to guide me. I missed the feeling of speaking and being understood in a personal and unique way” (Sinnokrot). In 1995, Sinnokrot obtained his undergraduate degree in radio, television, and film from the University of Texas, Austin. After moving to New York, Sinnokrot obtained his M.F.A. in 2000, majoring in film, electronic arts, and sculpture from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Brad College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. He also completed the independent studies program at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2002.

Sinnokrot works with film, installations, and sculptures that focus on the formation of identity for immigrants and refugees. He also explores “complex
notions of time and place, in a phenomenological investigation of Diaspora consciousness” (“Visual”). As he states in his artist’s statement, Sinnokrot sees bipedal navigation through time and space as being as fundamental to his being as is his heartbeat (Sinnokrot). In his work, Sinnokrot also addresses the issues of propaganda and surveillance in the media and how they portray foreign policy. In exploring the issue of identity, Sinnokrot retraces his own steps in a short film Bridge: 60 sec Suspension (1999), which is made of 60 photographs with a camera pointing downward to his steps. Sinnokrot describes this project:

I built a 120-ft. long suspension bridge that leads to nowhere. It extends westwards from a hilltop, towards the horizon, ending at a point fifteen feet above the ground. This impassable foot-walk is made of photographs printed onto rectangular steel tiles, threaded together with steel cables... The photo-tiles depict a pair of feet, the ground as it appears directly beneath the tile, and the exact time of day the picture was taken. However, these images become less visible as the bridge recedes into the horizon. Walking towards them only draws you down the hill and into their shadows. (Sinnokrot)

Sinnokrot has had a number of solo exhibits throughout the United States, including: Tri-Ex Studio, Annandale, New York (1999); Stone Roe Hill, Annandale, New York (1999); Chocolate Factory, Annandale, New York (1999); Cinematexas International-Terra Cognita, The Hideout Gallery, Austin, Texas (2000); Green Belt Park, Austin, Texas (2001); Mexican American Cultural Council, Austin, Texas (2001); and Cinematexas International-Parallax, The Hideout Gallery, Austin, Texas (2002). He also participated in a number of group exhibitions, including: Cinematexas International Film Festival, Austin, Texas (1999); Whitney Museum of American Art ISP Studio Program Exhibition, New York, New York (2002); Chapter V, Art Resources Transfer, New York, New York (2003); Stone, Centro Cultural de Mexico, Miami, Florida (2003); Darat Al Funun, Amman, Jordan (2004); Centro de la Imagen, Mexico City, Mexico (2004); and American Visions and Re-visions, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria (2004).

Sinnokrot participated in the “Made In Palestine” exhibit at the Station Museum, Houston, Texas (2003), which was also shown at Somart in San Francisco (2005), and The Bridge in New York (2006). For the exhibit, Sinnokrot displayed two installations: Rubber-Coated Rocks (2002), and CNN/AL JAZ (2002). The Rubber-Coated Rocks installation consisted of over 400 egg-shaped stones that were half-covered with different colors of rubber and were lined up against the wall of the gallery. Sinnokrot’s installation recalls the “rubber-coated bullets that Israeli soldiers regularly shoot at Palestinians” (Made in Palestine). In a review of the exhibit, Santiago Nasar wrote about Sinnokrot’s installation:

Sinnokrot’s Rubber-Coated Rocks is another installation that uses humor to point the finger at the hypocrisy of the world. After a short period of
coy protestation over the use of battlefield rifles to shoot children, the international community went back to its daily affairs after the Israeli army introduced rubber-coated bullets. Yet these bullets are not any less lethal when shot at the hearts, heads, or eyes of children. Sinnokrot’s piece could have an industrial application. All that it needs is an American investor to cash in on it and start marketing it to all the oppressed of the world. The advertisement could read, “for your next uprising, now introducing rubber-coated stones; the weapon of choice for the helpless…” (79)

The other installation, CNN/AL JAZ was made of two television monitors with live satellite feed from CNN and the Al-Jazeera Arabic channel. Sinnokrot developed this idea during his study at the Whitney Museum of Art. In the installation, the TV monitors face each other, allowing the viewers to compare the news and the biases of its handlers. The installation was previously featured at Cinematexas International-Parallax, Austin, Texas (2002), and it was described as a “simple but compelling spectacle” and “Clever, low-fi, internationalist, and politically sharp” (Halter).

For over three years, Sinnokrot worked on a documentary film about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict through tracing the construction of the Israeli apartheid wall, or “Security Fence” as it’s called by the Israeli military. The documentary, Palestine Blues (2006), follows the construction of the 400-mile concrete and barbed wire wall that goes through the West Bank. The film explores “the silent yet critical war over natural resources, the threat to peace posed by Israeli settlements, and the idea of “transfer” now openly discussed as a way to purge Palestinians from their ancestral land” (“Films”). Palestine Blues also explores other issues, such as the importance of the Israeli left and peace movements, the international solidarity with the Palestinians, and the emergence of a nonviolent resistance movement.

Sinnokrot now lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, and he is the director of Dulab Films.

Resources


**Web Sites and Places to See Sinnokrot’s Work**

Katherine Toukhy (b. 1976), Painter, Installation and Performance Artist

Katherine Toukhy is a first generation Egyptian American and was born and raised in a small suburb of Rhode Island with strong ties to the Egyptian immigrant community. After receiving her B.A. in philosophy and psychology from Boston College in 1998, Toukhy enrolled in the Massachusetts College of Art and obtained a B.F.A. in 2005 in painting with additional work in performance and video art. Her work is related to forming a hybrid Egyptian American identity while approaching the subject of female identity from the perspective of a person living between Egyptian and American cultures.

The majority of Toukhy’s work is based on the human figure, utilizing a variety of media including 2-D work made by printing the body onto a surface, then painting or drawing over it; installations using the live body and video; and documentation of interactions between the living body and life-size figurative “shadow portraits” (Toukhy, Personal). Through her engagement with various mediums, she seeks to create an experience—rather than an object—for the viewer. On forming her artistic identity and who influenced her work, Toukhy stated:

There is a dense net of memories that has formed in my mind as a result of the impressions Egypt has made on me. All of these are filtered into my work somehow: the light and colors of the desert, the sounds of Arabic and Coptic, an incredible tension between tradition and change, the changing roles of the different generations of women in my family, and many other facets of Egypt’s dynamic culture. Another driving force behind the work I make is the frustration I have felt growing up in an America that manipulates racial distinctions to create a sense of division among people rather than using them to form a broad-based and global discussion that confronts imperialism and racism. (Toukhy, Personal)

Toukhy’s purpose is to construct a multimedia autobiographical account of the challenges of forming an Egyptian American female identity. As she explains, this identity is “complicated by a limited binary language used to classify people” (Toukhy, Personal). She indicates that socially constructed categories such as “traditional/modern, developing/developed world,
Muslim/Christian, oppressed/liberated’’ are often used to reinforce Orientalist stereotypes of the Arab world and to justify a legacy of Western domination. Toukhy tries to express those dilemmas by using her body as the basis for her paintings or performances.

As an Arab American artist, Toukhy is influenced by the art of Mona Hatoum, a well-known Palestinian artist born in 1952, and the work of Nawal el Saadawi, a feminist Egyptian writer. She describes her role as a member of two distinct cultural groups: American and Egyptian:

This combination is unique in that it is underrepresented in the culture at large. However, my work is not only the result of cultural experiences but also of a set of individual skills, dispositions, tendencies, etc. While I wish to expose the inner truths of my experience as it relates to culture, I also fear that ethnic/racial labels—when taken on a shallow level—become reductive. Because the tendency in a consumer-driven society is to flatten the multidimensionality of individuals and groups, artists who deal with issues of identity also run the risk of feeding the stereotypes they wish to disrupt. (Toukhy, Personal)

Toukhy’s work has been presented primarily in local non-commercial spaces. These include college galleries, community centers such as the Community Church of Boston, alternative settings in conjunction with the local Esprit de Corps art collective, and Boston’s annual Open Studios. Her exhibits and art performances in Massachusetts include: “Flush” at the Zeitgeist Gallery, Cambridge (2002); Mass Art Student Life Gallery, Boston (2003); Esprit de Corps Group Show, Jamaica Plain Open Studios, Jamaica Plain (2004); MediaWeb: Workshop on the History of Feminist Art, YWCA, Cambridge (2004); Black Box Theater at Boston Center for the Arts (2004); Bakalar Gallery, Boston (2005); and La Rivolta!, Multimedia Work within a Feminist Context, Community Church of Boston (2006).
Toukhy also participated with artist Rashin Fahandej in *Inscribed* (2005), a video installation and performance that took place in the squash courts of MassArt in Boston.

For three hours, the two artists took part in the grueling task of writing fragments on a 15-foot scroll of paper that was placed on the floor in the center of a room. As the artists engaged in this action, three video pieces were projected onto the surrounding walls. In one, a body was covered with scratchy black ink marks; in another, it was covered with thick broad strokes of white paint; and in the last, dried paint cracked off the same body. The three part video installation and performance explores the concept of the female body as both an object and subject, and the role of the body in the video pieces is challenged by the role of the body in the live performance.

In other painting/performance series, such as *Interaction Series* (2005), Toukhy painted two life-size paintings of her distorted shadow and then interacted with the portraits, while photographer Anabel Vazquez recorded the interactions. While in *Untitled Performance* (2004) Toukhy recited words in Arabic and English while repeating simple expressive gestures, at the same time, a video projection was playing in which she wiped a thick black substance from her hands and a translucent reddish substance was superimposed over a blurred map of the Middle East region.

Toukhy’s paintings utilize watercolor, oil tempera, ink, and pencil on paper or canvas. Even though her paintings are based on the human figure, in some cases, the paintings become somewhat abstract, as can be seen in a series of body prints (2005-2006). For example, in *Body print, in blue* (2005), a 60’’ x 30’’ oil and tempera on un-stretched canvas, the body is no longer recognizable as a human figure. But in *Study 1* (2004), a 24’’ x 18’’ pencil and ink on paper, the strong brush strokes define the outline of a seated human body made recognizable.

Toukhy now lives in Boston and travels frequently to Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt, where most of her family still lives. She also works in outreach activities with the American-Arab Anti Discrimination Committee and with a group of Jewish and Arab Americans, presenting their recent experiences in the Palestinian occupied territories and Lebanon after its most recent invasion. Toukhy was also a co-founder of Esprit de Corps Art Collective, and worked from 2002-2005 curating multimedia shows in alternative settings—such as projecting film onto a U-Haul truck moving through the city. In 2007, Toukhy participated in *DIWAN: A Forum for the Arts* at the Arab American National Museum with a presentation titled *Orientalist Images of Arab Women*. She is currently establishing contact with other artists based in Egypt and hopes to someday bring her and her friends’ work there, strengthening intercultural artistic dialogue.

**Resources**

Mary Tuma (b. 1961), Textile and Installation Artist

Mary Tuma was born in Oakland, California, to a Palestinian father and American mother. She received a bachelor’s degree in costume and textile design from the University of California, Davis; and in 1994, she earned her M.F.A. in visual arts from the University of Arizona in Tucson. Tuma is a textile and installation artist and has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the United States and the Middle East.

Tuma was always urged to explore her Arab Palestinian heritage. In an interview with Ghassan Joha, Tuma commented on the influence of her two origins: “I think it was a good life. I really tried to make it fun. It was such a conflict for me to couple the Palestinian and American identities in myself, but it all went well.” In 1999 and for the first time in her life, Tuma visited her father’s hometown Kufr Yassif (now in Israel). During that short trip, Tuma was given the chance to have a close look at the house, which is still standing, but no longer belongs to her father. Since 1999, Tuma has visited Palestine many times and participated in exhibits in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Through the incorporation of textiles, costume design, and found objects in her installation works, Tuma addresses issues of the body, the spirit, and identity that articulate personal and communal journeys. Maymanah Farhat says that Tuma’s work conveys “spiritual transformations and is accompanied by insights on mortality, traumatic life changes, and humanity.”

In 1999, Tuma created an art installation called Dancing Girls, in which she used found tricycles covered with fabric, fur, and lace; they were hung from the ceiling of the gallery, imitating young girls dancing freely. The tricycles were hung so that their shadows reflect along the walls and floor of the gallery space, “evoking a sense of movement.” In her artist’s statement, Tuma affirmed that Dancing Girls is about the transformation that the body goes through with death and change (Farhat).

With the second intifada (the Palestinian uprising of 2000), Tuma created an art installation at the Queens College Art Gallery in Charlotte, North Carolina. The installation Passages (2000) covered the entire space of the gallery with the outlines of commercial clothing patterns. As Farhat describes the space, it was transformed to create what appears to be a gathering of departed souls. Tuma describes the work in Passages as “a memorial to those who lost their lives in this terrible conflict and a plea for a fair and just resolution that recognizes
international law and human rights” (Tuma). By covering the walls of the space with such patterns, Tuma expresses the

...wish to suggest a metaphorical connection between the land and the body. The clothing patterns, as evidence of human presence, are layered to recreate bodies of land. The passages or pages are records that describe and reinterpret the experiences and feelings of being in other worlds. (Tuma)

Tuma also included Passages during the 2002 Art and Humanities month at Michigan Council for Arts.

For the “Made in Palestine” exhibit (2002) at the Station Museum in Houston, Tuma participated with an installation called Homes for the Disembodied (2000), which consisted of five ten-foot translucent black silk dresses that were hung from the ceiling, touching the floor. The dresses were sewn from one continuous 48-meter length of fabric. The dresses make notice of the absence of the human form, and by so doing, “provide a metaphor for the status of a people who are known more for the shadow they cast on current events than for their own personalities and culture.” In Tuma’s statement for the exhibit, she describes the installation as “a tribute to Palestinian women who provide strength in terrible circumstances, but who receive little recognition” (Made in Palestine).

The “Made in Palestine” exhibit traveled to San Francisco in April 2005, and then to Montpelier, Vermont in October 2005. In reviewing the exhibit at the Montpelier campus of Vermont College, Kevin Kelley notes that because the work of Tuma and other Palestinian artists living in the diaspora reflects a profound identification with the lost lands, “Made in Palestine” can be understood as referring to a state of mind rather than a physical place. Tuma’s Homes for the Disembodied installation was featured at Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California (2007).

Tuma has shown her work and installations in various national and international venues, including a solo exhibition at the Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art in Augusta, Georgia (2005), and at the International Center in Bethlehem, Palestine (2004). For her exhibit in Bethlehem, Tuma’s installation Internal Power was especially created for Al-Kahf (the cave) Gallery at Dar Al-Nadwa, the International Center of Bethlehem. In the installation, she re-created the organ system in which all organs became much larger and all
Mary Tuma’s theme was that the piece “represents the inside of the body of Palestine” (“Portfolio”).

Tuma now lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. She is a professor of art at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, working with three-dimensional art. She frequently lectures on her artwork, which references clothing and cultural implications.

**Resources**


Web Sites and Places to see Tuma’s Work
“Mary Tuma” at Southern Arts Federation Web site: http://www.southernartistry.org/.
Palestinian installation by Mary Tuma at the International Center of Bethlehem: http://www.annadwa.org/cave/gallery_archive/mary.htm.
Madiha Umar (1908-2005), Painter and Calligraphy Artist

Madiha Umar (last name also spelled Omar) was a pioneer in the contemporary art movement of the Arab world, especially in Iraq, and was one of the first Arab American artists to hold a solo exhibit in the United States at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Mikdadi, “Arab,” 15). Umar was born in Aleppo, Syria, to a Circassian father and a Syrian mother; and the family moved to Iraq while she was a young child. As a child growing up in Baghdad, Umar was an admirer and later got influenced by the beautiful and intricate forms of Arabic calligraphy that borders the gates of mosques and their domes and minarets (Burnham). Umar received her secondary education in Beirut, Lebanon, and Istanbul, Turkey. She was one of the first women to receive a scholarship from the Iraqi government to study art in Europe (Ali, 201). In 1933, she graduated from Maria Grey Training College in England and then returned to Iraq to teach art at the Teachers Training College for Women, where she later became director of the Department of Arts.

In 1939, Umar got married to Iraqi diplomat Yasin Umar and then came to the United States in 1942, accompanying her husband to his new post in Washington, D.C. (Ali, 202). Umar continued her art training in Washington, D.C., where she studied art education at George Washington University, and in 1950 she received a master’s degree in fine arts from the Corcoran School of Art. In 1966, Umar returned to Iraq and became one of the leading Iraqi artists until she left Iraq in the 1980s.

One of the leading artistic schools in the Arab world is the “Calligraphic School of Art,” in which artists combine Arabic words and letters as graphic elements within their paintings (Ali, 151). This calligraphic school, in which the letters sometimes take abstract forms and do not conform to the rules of traditional Arabic calligraphy, is also called Huruufiya in Arabic. Umar is considered the pioneer of this modern use of Arabic calligraphy in abstract form. As Wijdan Ali states:

By holding the first-ever exhibition in Washington, D.C. in 1949, comprising strictly calligraphic works, accompanied by a written statement, Madiha Omar can be fairly assumed to be the first artist in the modern Islamic world to formally inaugurate the Calligraphic School of Art.
Furthermore, she became the first artist to display calligraphy in the Arab world during her exhibition in Baghdad in 1952. (158)

Umar’s exhibition at the Georgetown Public Library in Washington, D.C. in 1949 was the first exhibition of modern Islamic calligraphic works of art. As Ali explains: “it took place in a Western capital” (152). In her statement for the exhibit, which was acknowledged as a declaration for the use of Arabic letters in abstract paintings, Umar explained the significance of the graphic quality of individual Arabic letters in their shape and meanings.

Umar carried out research on the relationship between Arabic calligraphy and western art and was encouraged by Islamic art historian Richard Ettinghausen to continue exploring the use of Arabic letters in modern art (Mikdadi, 16). She held a number of solo exhibitions in the United States, including those at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington (1949); Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco (1950); and the Garden Gallery, Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C. (1958). She also held solo exhibits in Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq. Umar also participated in a number of group exhibits throughout the United States and the Middle East, including those at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Baghdad, Iraq (1968, 1971, 1981).

Umar was enchanted by the Arabic calligraphy of Baghdad’s monument. As Burnham explains, that enchantment led to a sustained interest in the form and expressive potential of individual Arabic letters that have been the cornerstone of her painting for more than 40 years. The style of Umar’s art is an abstract form in which Arabic characters serve as the main components, taking naturalistic shapes. The individual letters in Umar’s paintings swirl and curl, forming a free form not connected to words, compared to traditional calligraphy where the words and contents are the main concept. In her paintings, Umar used mainly four individual letters painted in free and abstract form. As Salwa Mikdadi writes, Umar’s work was “…an attempt to free the Arabic letter from its bondage, imprisoned within geometric designs, where it serves simply to fill the space” (“Forces,” 33). Using only four Arabic letters—‘ayn, meem, yaa, and lam—Umar allowed the letters to emerge in new forms, underscoring their elasticity through abstraction and creating a modern language that renders the inherent qualities of the Arabic script (Mikdadi, “West”).
Following Umar’s first exhibit in Baghdad, Iraq (1952), her work influenced many Arab artists in using Arabic letters within their paintings. An entire art movement was born in Iraq and spread to the rest of the Arab world. A number of Iraqi artists of the 1960s claimed to have pioneered al-Huruufiyya (abstract use of Arabic letters), and very little credit has been attributed to Umar (Al-Muhsin). From 1966 until the mid-1980s, Umar was an active artist in Iraq, and despite her pioneering an art movement, very little has been written about her by art historians, critics, and other artists. When Umar was asked about her relationship with other Iraqi artists and the lack of their acknowledgments to her work, she mentioned that it may have been because she was a woman (Al-Muhsin). Umar also mentioned that she had served the Iraqi fine arts movement through her teachings and work during an important period of Iraq’s history. She continued in her interview with Fatima Al-Muhsin to say that one day history will be fair to her contributions.

During the early 1990s, Umar lived in New York, and she was the subject of Ph.D. research by Mohammed Al-Sadoun. In an interview with Al-Sadoun, Umar explained her relationship to the Arabic letters:

I take each letter, not the word, not the verse by itself. I believe that the letter has personality—has something to contribute to art—on what does it depend? It depends on the artist, on his imagination and how he treats it and what he thinks—it is inspiration…. The letter by itself, I believe that each letter contributes to the design and meaning—what interests me is the design of the letter itself. Take for instance the letter ayn... what is ayn? It is a design, it has a strong personality; I am interested in its symbolic design. (131)

During the war in Iraq, which started in 2003, a number of museums were destroyed, burned, vandalized, or looted. Among these museums was the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Baghdad, Iraq, in which a number of Umar’s paintings were among the permanent collections of the museum. Over 600 paintings and works of art by contemporary Iraqi artists were destroyed or stolen, including four of Umar’s paintings (Al-Baghdadi). One of the paintings was recovered later and was included in an exhibit by the new Iraqi Cultural Ministry in 2005.

The last ten years of her life, Umar lived in Amman, Jordan, where she died in 2005 at the age of 97 years old.

Resources


**Web Site and Places to See Umar’s Work**


“Madiha Umar” at The World’s Women online: http://wwol.is.asu.edu/umar.html.

National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan.

National Museum of Contemporary Art in Baghdad, Iraq.

Turkish Cultural Center, Baghdad, Iraq.
Faisal Yousef (b. 1977), Painter

Faisal Yousef was born in Amman, Jordan, to a Palestinian family, and grew up in both Jordan and Saudi Arabia. A new immigrant who came to the United States in 2004, Yousef brings with him a traditional artistic training in figurative painting from the art studio of Husni Abu Krayyem in Amman, Jordan, and from Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, where he received his B.F.A. in drawing and painting in 1999. Yousef also studied at the Fine Art Institute at the Ministry of Culture in Amman, Jordan, and received a Diploma in studio arts in 1994. In 1999, Yousef joined the Fine Art Institute and taught studio arts until 2004.

Since 1995, Yousef has exhibited his work in Jordan, Libya, and the San Francisco Bay Area. His solo exhibitions include these venues: the Arab Cultural and Community Center, San Francisco (2007); the Armenian Cultural Center, San Francisco (2004); the French Cultural Center, Amman, Jordan (2002), and Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan (1997, 1998). He also participated in a number of group exhibits in Jordan, especially those sponsored by the Jordanian Ministry of Culture and the Plastic Art Association in Amman, Jordan. Yousef is a figurative painter working with oil and watercolors to capture subjects that include portraits, landscapes, still life, and architectural scenes.

Yousef was named the second top young painter in Jordan by the Ministry of Culture in 2002 and has won several awards, including: first place in the field of plastic arts all over Jordanian universities (1999); first place in the Graphic Art gallery at Yarmouk University (1998); and first place in the field of plastic arts in the eighth scientific competition for Arab students in Tripoli, Libya (1996). He also received the Golden Medal and the first place from the Sixth Arabic Exhibition for Arab Students in Kuwait (1991).

Inspired and influenced by the work of Russian painter Ilya Repin (1844-1930) and the work of his teacher Husni Abu Krayyem, Yousef tries to incorporate realistic representations of his subjects. He stated: “I enjoy capturing the look and mannerisms of each model that make their portrait instantly recognizable to those who know them” (Yousef, Personal communications). Yousef is also inspired by Middle Eastern culture and architectural scenes, such as Petra in Jordan and the monuments of Jerusalem. He stated:
I have found great inspiration from scenes of the Middle East. That part of the world has a unique beauty that is often overlooked. I enjoy bringing these heretofore undiscovered landscapes to new eyes. Equally satisfying is the reaction I see in those to whom these locations are familiar and special, and sometimes faraway. (Yousef, Personal communications)

Some of Yousef’s portraits include ordinary Arab people within cultural settings and wearing traditional costumes. In one of his paintings, *Man With a Horse* (2007), he captures a realistic scene of an Arab man in the desert, wearing traditional dress and standing proudly in front of his Arabian horse. In another watercolor painting, *The Hookah Man* (2004), Yousef also captures a scene of a man wearing Egyptian traditional dress holding the hookah pipe. His purpose in exploring Middle Eastern themes and subjects is to show the beauty and history of the homeland to people who have not seen it and to people who long for it.

In a series of watercolors and oil paintings, Yousef explores the city of Jerusalem with its monuments and beautiful landscape. In *Jerusalem I and II* (2005), he captures a landscape scene of the Dome of the Rock, one of the earliest masterpieces of Islamic architecture, which was built in the year 691 AD. The covered marketplace and portals of Jerusalem were also captured in other paintings. Even though Yousef visited Jerusalem once in his life for a short period of time, it is very dear to his heart, and he tries to capture the spirituality of this city from memories and from photographic resources (Yousef, Personal communications).

One of Yousef’s early art instructors is Dr. Husni Abu Krayyem from the Applied Science University in Amman, Jordan. In reviewing Yousef’s work, Dr. Abu Krayyem stated that Yousef does not simulate nature, but reaches deep into its spirit to capture its visual elements and beyond. He also stated that Yousef approaches his subjects in a relaxed and exciting way, staying away from the emotion, painting what he feels rather than what he sees (Abu Krayyem, Personal communications). Yousef is also consistent in approaching
his subjects, which makes his work easily understood and received by the viewers. Abu Krayyem also writes:

Yousef is an artist who has a good command since the beginning of his artistic career. I found in him a person who has a unique determination to achieve his objectives. To him, art is not seasonal, but it is a life in which he has a full view of the world and never hesitates to do everything that serves this life. (Abu Krayyem, Private communications)

In San Francisco, where Yousef currently lives, he started painting scenes of the city, the landscapes of the Bay Area, and portraits of its people. He has provided his artwork for community events and donated some of its sales for fundraising activities to promote Arab culture. He is now finishing his M.F.A. in figurative painting at the Academy of Art University.

Resources


Web Site and Places to See Yousef’s Work

Faisal Yousef’s Web site: http://www.faisalart.net.

Fine Art Institute Gallery, Ministry of Culture, Amman, Jordan.

Yarmouk University Museum, Irbid, Jordan.
Emna Zghal (b. 1970), Painter, Printmaker, and Mixed Media Artist

Emna Zghal was born in Sfax, Tunisia. She received her B.A. from Ecole des Beaux Arts in Tunis, Tunisia, in 1992. In the mid-1990s, Zghal came to the United States, where she received her M.F.A. from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, in 1999. Zghal has held several residencies and fellowships, including a residency at Cité internationale des Arts in Paris (1994-1995); a residency at the Centre des Arts Vivants in Tunisia (1993); and a fellowship at MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire (2002).

Zghal’s paintings of colored infinite wood patterns start as woodcut prints on paper, but unlike traditional printmaking, her images are not conceived on the woodblocks; they develop throughout the process. Zghal combines the print with rubbing, drawing, collage, and painting. At each step, as she writes in her statement, she interprets the pattern embedded in the woodgrain, and then mounts the paper on stretched canvas “so it floats in space without borders” (Zghal “Artist’s”). Through this process, Zghal creates abstract paintings that are “very emotive and highly textured” (Adra, 47). Nature plays a major role in Zghal’s work, and her colors carry the hues of Tunisia “in the true blue of the Mediterranean, the ochred coast, striated desert, manuscripts and tapestries, currents of desire, a map of the mind,” as Susan Canaday wrote in a review of Zghal’s work.

Since 1992, Zghal has had a number of solo exhibits and participated in numerous group exhibits in Tunisia, France, Germany, Italy, India, and throughout the United States. One of her solo exhibits was held in New York at Scene Gallery in 2002, another one at Lock Haven University, Pennsylvania (2000), and one at the Embassy of Tunisia in Washington, D.C. (1999). Zghal’s work received First Prize of the City of Tunis, Tunisia, in 1995.

Inspired by the poetry of Adonis, a contemporary Arab poet, Zghal created a series of 12” x 18” prints combining etching, woodcut, monotype, and paper-litho. The title of the series, The Prophet of Black Folk (2002), is from an Adonis poetry book about an African slave revolt that occurred in Basra, Iraq, in the ninth century. The Arabic poems, which are combined with images in Zghal paintings, refer to the leader of the revolt and a poet, Ali Ibn Muhammad. Zghal, in her statement for the exhibit that carried the same name as the series, which was held at Alwan for the Arts in New York (2003), wrote:
The Zanj revolt, as known to historians, is an astounding episode of history that has since inspired both defiance and empowerment. Groups of slaves were brought from East Africa to clear salt from Iraq southern marshes in order to allow cultivation. Ali Ibn Muhammad, an Arab poet and literary figure, took on the cause of the people of color and engaged in a military rebellion against the Abbasid Empire, one of the most powerful of the time. (Zghal “Artist’s”)

Zghal also mentioned the death of Edward Said, an Arab American writer, scholar, and philosopher who died in 2003. She parallels the death of Said to that of Ali, the leader of the revolt: “Said was a restless articulate voice speaking out in the face of injustice, cultural and material dispossession, and the dignity denied to his people: the Palestinians, the Arabs, the Muslims. The Natives” (Zghal “Artist’s”).

To complement the handwritten or computer generated Arabic text in her paintings, Zghal has translated the poems into English to aid audiences unfamiliar with written Arabic (Adra, 47). Her translation capitalizes on W.E.B. Du Bois’ phrase “Black Folk” to connect the struggle for dignity of peoples of African descent across centuries and continents (“Poetry”). In one of the paintings, a poem reads:

The Prophet of Black Folk said:
The World—this World is a pact
between a throne and oppression and I
am innocent of this pact (Zghal).

For Zghal, The Prophet of Black Folk series was the first time she felt that she was creating work with Arabic content (Adra, 47). While other artists focus on “confronting misunderstandings of Arab identity,” Zghal wanted to focus on the “empowering aspects” of that identity (Adra, 47).

In 2003, Zghal and Iraqi American artist Athir Shayota participated in a two-person show called “Contemporary Art From The Ancient World” at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in Morningside Heights, New York City. Zghal’s work for the exhibit consisted of paintings combined with woodblock technique, which created “shimmering, complex grids that suggests fabric patterns and mirage-like landscapes” (Cotter).

In 2005, Zghal participated in a two-person exhibit at Skoto Gallery, Chelsea, New York. One of her exhibited works was an accordion book, Cultures of War: An Essay, which consists of quotes assembled by Zghal of Americans such as James Baldwin, Mother Jones, and Susan Sontag speaking about values and aspects of culture that allow war. Unlike The Prophet of Black Folk, in which the text was written in Arabic, this series included the quotations in English combined with abstract images. In an interview at Skoto Gallery, Zghal talked about this series:

...what is very intriguing for me, as related to the subject of war, it’s not whatever war happens for is strategic influence—on the side of culture,
there’s a culture element and aspects of culture that allow propaganda to be infected. When you say, we are going to liberate them, why does that resonate at all? Because a lot of people don’t know what’s on the other side. It’s very easy to think of the other in a very patronizing way. There’s also a sense of, we’re going to help them, there’s a sense of charity. So I just tried to, through the words of Americans, to enumerate what I think. (“Let the Artist,” 3)

Zghal now lives and works in New York. Her current work now focuses on combining quotations within her paintings. She has been working on another art-book series about trees in literature, which was exhibited in a solo show, “The Tree Of My Mind” (2006), at M.Y. Art Prospects in New York. Her silkscreen, The Tree Of My Mind, was used on the cover of a book by the same title, which was published in an edition by the Women’s Studio Workshop, Rosendale, New York. Holdings of the book include: the New York Public Library; Yale University; the University of Indiana, Bloomington; and the University of Delaware. In an interview at Skoto Gallery, Zghal mentioned that she will select trees that are used in a metaphorical way. She said, “it’s a succession of quotes, and one aspect of it is the trees and language, and the other aspect is human beings, and trees and this notion of roots and are we really trees or are we not really trees?” (“Let the Artist,” 6).

Resources

**Web Site and Places to See Zghal’s Work**

Amen Bank, Tunis, Tunisia.
City of Tunis, Tunisia.
Lock Haven University, Pennsylvania.
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York.
Swicorp, Tunis, Tunisia.
Tunisian Ministry of Culture, Tunisia.

**Helen Zughaib (b. 1959), Painter and Mixed-Media Artist**

Helen Zughaib was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and came to the United States in 1977. In her paintings, Zughaib uses gouache and ink on board and canvas. She studied at the Northeast London Polytechnic School of Art in London, England, and in 1981, she received her B.F.A. from Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York. Influenced by her Middle Eastern culture, and later by the work of Matisse and Mondrian, Zughaib’s paintings create a dialogue with her viewers to open their minds to acceptance and understanding of the Arab world (Zughaib, Personal). The themes of Zughaib’s work include helpfulness, healing, and spirituality.

When asked about the problems facing Arab American artists, Zughaib stated that in addition to confronting stereotyping of Arabs, the environment of political and religious strife dominating the news from the Arab world is a major problem. She also stated that the problems are the same as those confronted by African American and Latin American artists (Zughaib, Personal). Zughaib believes that through visual arts, she can shape and foster positive ideas about the Middle East. In her statement, Zughaib writes that her paintings ask the viewer to re-examine their previously held stereotypes of the Arab world. (Zughaib, “Artist’s”).
Zughaib has had over 25 solo exhibitions at national and international venues, including the following venues in Washington, D.C.: International Visions Gallery (2005); Dadian Gallery (2005); Jerusalem Fund (2004 and 2000); Watergate Gallery (2003); Russell Rotunda, United States Capitol (1997); Alif Gallery (1990);; and the Arts Club of Washington, D.C. (1995 and 1987). She also participated in over 100 national and international group exhibitions, including at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (2005); National Arts Club (2002); the Library of Congress (2002); the United Nations (2002); the World Bank (2005); and the Bronx Museum of the Arts (1994). She was also a participant at art venues in Ireland, Germany, Slovakia, Turkey, and Albania (Zughaib, Personal).

In response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Zughaib was invited to participate in an international traveling exhibit organized by the Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C. Zughaib participated in the exhibit “True Colors, Meditation on the American Spirit” with Prayer Rug for America (2001), gouache and ink on board depicting the colors of the American flag in a design of a prayer rug motif. The original painting became part of the Library of Congress collection, and a giclee print became part of one of the first collections of the Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan. In her statement for that major exhibit that traveled throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, Zughaib stated:

I feel that my background in the Middle East allows me to approach the experience I have in America in a unique way. As an Arab American, I remain an observer of both cultures, as an outsider looking in. I hope through my work to encourage dialogue and bring understanding and
acceptance between the people of the Arab world and the United States. ("True Colors," 25)

In her statement for "In/Visible," the inaugural exhibit of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Zughaib described Prayer Rug for America as a combination of the "two sides," Arab and America, brought together through the pattern and color that rely on each other to form the painting (In/Visible, 56). In the same exhibit, Zughaib also participated with giclees prints of her series Stories My Father Told Me, 2003-2004, which were also acquired by the museum.

The series consisted of 14 gouache paintings in a folk art style. The series illustrates stories of her father’s childhood in Lebanon and his travels to the United States (In/Visible, 24). The series included titles such as The Walk to the Water Fountain (Mishwar ‘Al El-’Ayn); Mar Elias Festival (Eid Mar Elias); Planting Olive Trees; Feast of the Cross (Eid al-Salib); Making Kibbeh on Sunday Morning; and Coming to America. The Jerusalem Fund’s Gallery in Washington, D.C. held a reception in April 2004 to honor Zughaib and introduce Stories My Father Told Me. (Hanley, “Jerusalem,” 73). Another reception honoring Zughaib for the same art series was also held by the Arab Center of Seattle, Washington, during the annual Arab Heritage Month (August 2004).

In one of Zughaib’s paintings, Planting Olive Trees, she narrated a story that was told to her father by his father. The story, which deals with planting olive trees, is a common one taught to children in the Arab world. In the narrative, Zughaib’s father talks about a visit with her jiddu, or ‘grandfather,’ to the olive grove to plant new olive trees, which take many years to grow. After planting the trees, Zughaib’s father asked his father to come back next year to harvest the olive crop:

I asked him why we were bothering to plant olive trees if we would be dead before they would give us any fruit. He looked at me with a very serious expression and said: “Zara’u fa akalna, nazra’u fa ya’kulun” (They planted so we would eat; we plant so our descendants will eat). (Zughaib, “Planting,” 73)

Zughaib’s artwork and designs are part of a number of publications, including: the World Bank publications, Arab Artist Resource Guide, Honoring Our Ancestors, and Washington Woman. Her painting Via Capelli (1989-1990) was also published in The Space between Our Footsteps: Poems and Paintings from the Middle East (Nye, 28). Zughaib has received a number of awards for her work, including a First Place Award by Washington Gallery of Photography (2005), and the Bookbuilders of Boston, an award for her illustrations in Laila’s Wedding. She now lives and works in Washington, D.C., and continues to participate in events promoting Arab culture.

Resources

Web Site and Places to See Zughaib’s Work
Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, Washington, D.C.
International Visions Gallery, Washington, D.C.
The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Syracuse University Greenberg House, Washington, D.C.
The United States Consulate General, Vancouver, Canada.
The World Bank Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

Afaf Zurayk (b. 1948), Painter and Sculptor

Afaf Zurayk was born in Beirut, Lebanon, and graduated from the American University of Beirut with a B.A. in fine arts in 1970. After coming to the United States, Zurayk pursued graduate studies at Harvard University, obtaining an M.A. degree in 1972. After graduating from Harvard, Zurayk returned to Lebanon, where she taught studio art and art history at Beirut University College (now the Lebanese American University) for 10 years. When the Lebanese civil war escalated in 1983, she returned to the United States and served for two years as an art manager of Alif Gallery, a newly established gallery by the Arab American Cultural Foundation in Washington, DC. (In/Visible, 23).

The Lebanese civil war and the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, and her settling in the United States, had a major impact on Zurayk’s work. Her work during the war and for a number of years after moving to the United States was full of sadness, and vague figures with no physical features. As Helen Khal states, Zurayk’s work had passed through “a sequence of expression that moved from nostalgia to pain of loss to incipient rebirth” (“Residual,” 9). Zurayk acknowledged this issue:
I strongly felt the need to accommodate the demands of two worlds: the world of my childhood and the one I live in now. My painting has been, ultimately, an attempt to conquer dispersion, loss of home and self, abandonment and isolation. (Khal, “Residual,” 9)

Inspired by music and poetry, Zurayk’s painting style is expressionistic, full of depth and color. She explores the relationship between line and form to contemplate the human figure and in particular, the face. Through her artwork, Zurayk wants people to sense the true reason for what she creates, why she selects a subject, and how it affects her (“Profiles,” 6). As Zurayk explains, her paintings are both a diary and a passage that tell of fear:

...the fear of ending and of the resulting emptiness. I paint iconic faces and bodies using intense color contrasts and small active brushstrokes. I use black to punctuate the relationship of the terror within to the stillness without in the hope of conveying a state of submission to, and yet ultimate conquest of, separation. (Zurayk, “Artists”).

Using driftwood, painted with acrylic paint and china ink, Zurayk tries “to animate the wood by evoking the presence of beings” (Zurayk, “Artists”). The shapes of the painted driftwood sculptures become familiar animals “both real and mythical” such as a fish, a bird, or an amphibian; or they become fragments of a landscape. As Zurayk says in her statement, the finished sculptures
“reveal themselves slowly, in layers of understanding. Together they form a multi-part entity yet separately each stands alone” (Zurayk, “Artists”).


In 1993, Zurayk had a showing of her mixed media paintings at the Foundry Gallery in Washington, D.C. The exhibition was based on her own poems and was divided into two sections: Dream Doors and Recollections. The paintings, abstract and figurative, were rendered in ink, crayon, and watercolor. As described by Michael Clark, the exhibit was a reflection back into Zurayk’s past as a youth in Beirut. Clark also states that Zurayk’s work “has a fresh quality without the nostalgia that most people remember of times gone by” (21). One of Zurayk’s own poems in the Dream Doors series includes a reference to her house in Lebanon: “as a child, I lived in a house with no doors” (Wilson, B2). In reviewing Dream Doors (1993), Janet Wilson states that Zurayk’s exhibit “traces the difficult journey between two worlds” (B2). As for Recollections, Wilson also notes that despite the somber mood of the series that conveys Zurayk’s inner struggle, her brilliant colors bear witness to the brighter hope of tomorrow (B2).

For the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in May 2005 in Dearborn, Michigan, Zurayk participated in the exhibition “In/Visible,” contemporary art by first and second generation Americans of Arab heritage. In her series, Mahaba (Love, 2001-2004), which consist of nine small-scale abstract paintings (8” x 8”), Zurayk combined her own poems under layers of paint, making the text almost invisible (In/Visible, 23). In her statement for “In/Visible,” Zurayk states that the combination of words and images deals with “layers of understanding rather than instants of insights: shadow rather than shafts of light” (In/Visible, 58). Zurayk also wrote about her paintings:

They are more reflective than expressive and depend in large measure on the interplay of word, image and medium with underlying emotion to give shape to the experiences that inspired them. An atmospheric rhythm is achieved through the fluidity and subtlety of the simultaneous relationship of idea and image, life and art. (In/Visible, 58)

Zurayk now lives and works in Washington, D.C. She teaches abstract art in the continuing education program at the Corcoran College of Art and Design.

Resources


Web Site and Places to See Zurayk’s Work


Janine Rubeiz Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.
Resources on Arab American Artists and Arab Culture in the United States

This section lists a number of resources on Arab American artists and Arab culture in the United States, including art and cultural organizations, museums, galleries, publications, research centers, and Web sites. Organized alphabetically, this partial list was compiled from the Web sites indicated in each entry.

*Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts*
Los Angeles, California
http://www.aljadid.com
Launched by Elie Chalala in 1995, *Al Jadid* is a quarterly magazine published in English and features articles, interviews, translations, and contributions by many leading Arab writers, from both the United States and from the Arab world. The magazine also features artwork and original illustrations by Arab and Arab American artists.

*Al Jisser Group*
New York City
http://www.aljisser.org
Founded in 2001 by a group of Arab women based in New York and California, Al Jisser Group is a non-profit organization dedicated to building and creating a bridge between Arabic art and culture and the world by organizing exhibitions and events of visual art, music, film, and other media.

*Alif Institute*
Atlanta, Georgia
http://www.alifinstitute.org
Established by Arab-American Fund of Georgia, Inc., in 2003, the Alif Institute is an educational, cultural, arts, and enrichment center with a focus on Arab culture and Arab-Americans.
Alwan for the Arts
New York, Houston, and Washington, D.C.
http://www.alwan.org
A non-profit organization, Alwan for the Arts promotes arts and cultures of Iran and the Arab world through exhibitions and fundraising events.

Antiochian Heritage Museum
Bolivar, Pennsylvania
http://www.antiochianvillage.org/museum.html
Antiochian Heritage Museum has a permanent collection of hundreds of items related to Middle Eastern Ancestry of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, including elaborate textiles, ornate metal crafts, intricate jewelry, and historic icons.

Arab American Cultural and Community Center
Houston, Texas
http://www.acc-houston.com
The Arab-American Cultural and Community Center is a non-profit organization providing educational, cultural, social, and recreational activities. The center promotes appreciation and understanding of Arab culture and heritage and is dedicated to enhancing and promoting mutual understanding and collaboration with other communities and the society at large.

Arab American Cultural Institute (AACI)
Minneapolis, Minnesota
http://www.aaci-us.org
AACI is a non-political, non-sectarian, and non-partisan organization that seeks to foster understanding of Arab and Arab-American culture, inform the public of the societal contributions of Arabs and Arab-Americans, and promote tolerance and cultural diversity.

Arab American National Museum (AANM)
Dearborn, Michigan
http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org
Initiated by the Arab Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), the Arab American National Museum is a community history museum dedicated to collecting, preserving, and celebrating the rich history and diversity of the Arab communities in the United States. Along with their permanent and temporary exhibitions, the AANM hosts a range of arts programming, including art exhibits by Arab American artists.

Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative (AMED)
College of Ethnic Studies
San Francisco State University
San Francisco, California
http://www.sfsu.edu/~ethnicst/
Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Initiative (AMED) is an academic program established in 2007 with the aim to gather, preserve,
organize, and produce research drawn from key aspects of Arab diasporic experiences.

**Arab Artists Resources & Training (AART)**
http://www.aart.ws
Established by Koloud Tarapolsi in Seattle, Washington, Arab Artists Resources & Training (AART) is a Web-based resource on Arab and Arab American artists.

**Arab Center of Washington**
Seattle, Washington
http://www.arabcenter.net
Established in 1992, the Arab Center of Washington aims to promote Arab culture and heritage in the Pacific Northwest through an annual Arab Festival and a variety of social and cultural programs throughout the year.

**Arab Culture and Civilization**
National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLE)
http://arabworld.nitle.org/
A Web site intended to serve as a resource center for developing a better understanding of the Arab world. It is a collaborative effort between many scholars, technologists, and institutions.

**Arab Cultural and Community Center (ACCC)**
San Francisco, California
http://www.arabculturalcenter.org
Founded in 1973, ACCC is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Arab culture and a leading resource for services and referrals for Arab and Arab American communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. ACCC hosts cultural events and art exhibits featuring Arab American artists.

**ArteEast, Inc.**
New York City
http://www.arteeast.org
Established in 2003 by a group of film programmers, filmmakers, artists, and educators, ArteEast is a non-profit organization that promotes the visibility of the arts and cultures of the Middle East in the United States. ArteEast exhibits the works of artists and filmmakers from the Middle East and its diaspora.

**ASMA Society**
New York City
http://www.asmasociety.org
Founded in 1997, The ASMA Society is a non-profit Islamic cultural and educational organization dedicated to fostering an American-Muslim identity and building bridges between American Muslims and the American public.
Bidoun: Arts and Culture from the Middle East
Brooklyn, New York
http://www.bidoun.com
Launched in fall 2003, Bidoun is a quarterly cultural magazine that features contemporary arts, films, music, and fashion from Middle Eastern cultures and the diaspora.

Center for Arab American Studies (CAAS)
University of Michigan-Dearborn
http://casl.umd.umich.edu/caas/
CAAS is a college-wide academic program and research center that aims to produce scholarship that lies at the intersection of Arab/Middle East/Global South Studies, American Studies, Race/Ethnic Studies, and Critical Cultural Studies

Cultural and Visual Arts Resources/International Council for Women in the Arts (CVAR/ICWA)
Berkeley, California
http://www.icwa-cvar.org
Cultural and Visual Arts Resources/International Council for Women in the Arts (CVAR/ICWA) is a non-profit arts organization established by Salwa Mikdadi in 1989 to promote contemporary art from North Africa and the Near East through exhibits, symposiums, and educational programs. CVAR/ICWA organized one of the first exhibits on contemporary Arab art in Washington, D.C. in 1994.

Cultural Connexion
Minneapolis, Minnesota
http://www.culturalconnexion.org
Established by Fawzia Reda in 1992, Cultural Connexion is a non-profit, non-political, independent organization based in the United States, with liaisons in Europe and the Middle East. The organization aspires to promote and preserve the Arabic and Islamic arts and cultures and foster better dialogue in the West with the Arab and Muslim communities.

International Museum of Muslim Cultures
Jackson, Mississippi
http://www.muslimmuseum.org
The museum was founded in 2000 to educate the public about Islamic history and civilization and to help provide educational tools for teaching global consciousness, historical literacy, and multicultural appreciation. The museum is dedicated to research, collection, preservation, exhibition, and interpretation of objects that promote the understanding of Muslim culture.

International Network of Iraqi Contemporary Artists (iNCiA)
http://www.incia.co.uk/
iNCiA is an independent, non-political, non-profit, voluntary organization dedicated to advancing Iraqi art and the education of the public in Iraqi art
as an integral part of world art, in particular, through the provision and assistance in the provision of exhibitions, literature, workshops, Web sites, and advocacy.

**Jerusalem Fund Gallery**
Washington, D.C.
http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/

The Jerusalem Fund’s cultural program promotes the work of artists from Palestine as well as from the Arab and Islamic worlds through art exhibits, book signings, film screenings, and musical performances. The cultural activities at the Jerusalem Fund Gallery, located in Washington, D.C., are being made available to a wider audience through the organization’s Web site and through lesson plans for educators and students of all ages.

**Levantine Cultural Center**
Los Angeles, California
http://www.levantinecenter.org

The Levantine Cultural Center presents, produces, and co-sponsors educational seminars, art exhibitions, and performances that encourage cross-cultural and multidisciplinary collaborations that give voice to issues and experiences of underrepresented Middle Eastern communities.

**MIZNA**
Minneapolis, Minnesota
http://www.mizna.org

Founded in 1999, MIZNA is a center that promotes Arab American culture through literature and visual and performing arts events. MIZNA publishes a journal featuring prose, poetry, and art exploring Arab America, and it sponsors the annual Arab Film Festival in Minnesota.

**Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art**
http://www.nkajournal.org

*Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* is a biannual publication that was launched in 1994. The journal publishes scholarly work and resources on African-based artists. It is edited by two leading scholars: Salah Hassan, an art critic and curator who is also a professor of art history at Cornell University, and founding editor Okwui Enwezor, a New York based curator, art critic, and writer.

**Palestinian Heritage Foundation**
West Caldwell, New Jersey
http://www.palestineheritage.org

Established by Hanan and Farah Munayyer in 1992, Palestinian Heritage Foundation is a cultural and educational organization aimed at promoting awareness and understanding of Arab and, specifically, Palestinian culture and traditions through their large collection of Palestinian costumes and jewelry.
Paltel Virtual Gallery at Birzeit University  
Birzeit, Palestine  
http://virtualgallery.birzeit.edu/  
The Paltel Virtual Gallery offers an academic and educational window on contemporary Palestinian art including artists’ portfolios, exhibitions, projects, talks, and seminars. Artwork and profiles of a number of Palestinian American artists are included in the gallery.

Radius of Arab American Writers, Inc. (Rawi)  
http://www.rawi.org/CMS/  
Established in early 1990s, Rawi is a professional organization of Arab American writers and literary artists. The organization seeks to represent a progressive voice for justice in the United States and abroad and to encourage Arab youth to write and publish their work in mainstream publications.

Salaam Cultural Museum  
Seattle, Washington  
http://www.salaamculturalmuseum.org/  
Salaam Cultural Museum is a charitable non-profit organization that aims to preserve artifacts from the Middle East and North African traditional societies and to create a wide range of educational and cultural activities through exhibiting these artifacts.

Saudi Aramco World  
http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com  
Saudi Aramco World is a cultural magazine that was launched in 1949 as Aramco World, and changed names in 2000. Published from Houston, Texas, by the Oil Company Saudi Aramco, the magazine includes many articles and resources on Arabic arts and culture.

Shems, Arab American Life  
Norwalk, Connecticut  
http://www.shems.info  
Launched by Gourad Media Group, Shems magazine highlights the accomplishments of Arab Americans in arts, entertainment, and business. The magazine provides a “who’s who” of the Arab American community both historically and today.

Sudan Artists Gallery  
http://www.sudanartists.org  
Sudan Artists Gallery was established in 1999, to document and profile artists of Sudanese lineage; and to provide a virtual gallery for participating artists.

ZAWAYA  
San Francisco, California  
http://www.zawaya.org
Founded by Nabila Mango in 2001, Zawaya is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Arabic music, art, poetry, literature, theater, and culture through instruction and presentation. Zawaya provides a forum for exhibiting all forms of Arab culture and sponsors exhibits and events for Arab American artists. Zawaya is also an umbrella organization for ASWAT, a community choir that plays classical and contemporary Arabic music. In 2007, Fayeq Oweis served as the president of Zawaya.
Selected Bibliography


Chorbachi, Wasmia. “Arab Art Twenty Years Later,” Arab Studies Quarterly 11, nos. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 1989).


Rogers, Sarah. “Arab Art: Beyond Dichotomies.” Al Jadid: A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts 9, no. 45 (Fall 2003).

Many of the artists work with different materials and techniques. This is a general index that lists the artists’ main specialties. There is an overlap in this list due to the involvement of many artists in multidisciplinary and mixed media arts.

**Airbrush**
Abderrahim (Rahim) Ambari, Sari Ibrahim Khoury.

**Assemblage**

**Calligraphy Art**

**Cartoons**
Khalil Bendib, Adnan Shati.

**Ceramics**
Andrea Ali, Khalil Bendib, Wasmaw Khalid Chorbachi, Layla Zarour Elshair, Simone Fattal, Reem Hammad, Samar Megdadi.

**Collage**

**Conceptual Art**

**Digital Art**
Yasser Aggour, Rheim Alkadhi, Mohamad Bazzi, Aissa Deebi, Mariam Ghani, Samia Halaby, Imad Hassan.
Embroidery Art
Ghada Amer.

Etching
Mohammad Omer Khalil, Sari Ibrahim Khoury, Emna Zghal.

Found Objects
Abe Ajay, Rheim Alkadhi, Mohammed Al-Sadoun, Adnan Charara, Rajie “Roger” Cook, Mary Tuma, Afaf Zurayk.

Geometric Abstraction
Jocelyn M. Ajami, Abe Ajay, Kamal Boullata, Sari Ibrahim Khoury, Mamoun Sakkal.

Glass
Haifa Bint-Kadi, Saliba Douaihy, Jeanice Deeb.

Graphic Design/ Illustration

Installation

Islamic Art

Media Art (Film/Video)

Metal Arts:
OTHER: Arab Artists Collective—Detroit, Lana Rahme.

Mixed/ Multi-Media
Andrea Ali, Rheim Alkadhi, Hend Al-Mansour, Sama Alshaibii, Hashim Al-Tawil, Heba Amin, Halla Ayla, Nahda Alsalah Balaa, Doris Bittar, Huguette Caland, Adnan Charara, Carole Choucair-Oueijan, Joyce Dallal, Hanah Diab, Mona A. El-Bayoumi, Dahlia Elsayed, Hala Faisal, Simone rattal, Samia...

Mosaics  
Haifa Bint-Kadi, Carole Choucair-Oueijan, Father Farid Shoucair.

Murals  

Painting (Abstract)  

Painting (Figurative and Portraits)  

Painting (Landscape)  

Photography Art  

Print Making  
Hashim Al-Tawil, Kamal Boullata, Adnan Charara, Lalla A. Essaydi, Mohammad Omer Khalil, Mamoun Sakkal, Emna Zghal.
Public Art

Sculpture (Ceramic)
Andrea Ali, Khalil Bendib, Simone Fattal, Sumayyah Samaha.

Sculpture (Marble)
Sabah Al-Dhaher, Kahlil George Gibran.

Sculpture (Metal)
Khalil Bendib, Kahlil George Gibran.

Silkscreen
Kamal Boullata, Mohammad Omer Khalil, Emna Zghal.

Textile/ Silk
Etel Adnan, Nahda Alsalah Balaa, Doris Bittar, Huguette Caland, Adelia Malouf Samaha, Mary Tuma.

Wood
Abe Ajay, Hanah Diab, Sam (Samuel) Solomon Maloof, Emna Zghal, Afaf Zurayk.
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As an artist, he designed the exterior entranceway murals and the calligraphy of the interior dome of the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. He also co-designed and directed one of the first Arabic/Islamic Cultural Murals in the United States located on the main street of downtown San Francisco, and co-designed a Palestinian Cultural mural honoring Dr. Edward Said at San Francisco State University. He has also exhibited his Arabic calligraphic compositions throughout the United States, and was an artist-in-residence at the Art Institute of Chicago.

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