ISSUE 3.

SOURCE

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Contributors

Wafaa Abu Saadah is a visual artist and designer originating from Jaffa, Palestine. Born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1992, she holds a BA in Graphic Design from Dar Alhekma University. Her work is driven by the desire to explore the uncharted areas within history. With endless possibilities to explore different topics and techniques, she keeps her process fluid far from all definitions and restrictions.

Shawk Alani: Femme feminist. Grad student. Drunk on nightmares and Arabic literature. Founding member of the Iraqi Narratives Project.

Working on merging her literary and visual sides together, ***Rund Al-Arabi*** is a photographer and writer from Sudan.

Dina Albogammi: I'm a 24-year-old Saudi with a bachelor's degree in Marketing. Before painting became my main priority, I started as a photographer, aiming to capture meanings and emotions. I'm into sports, travel and reading books. I recently started writing and continued to do so along with painting.

Nayla Al-Khalifa's work focuses on the spirit, soul, home, human condition, afterlife, and the world around us.

Hawazin Alotaibi: A 24-year-old Saudi artist born and raised in the United States, studying painting at University of the Arts London. Most of my work seeks to express stories and feelings that are relevant to the human psychological connection and reaction to nature, music, technology and architecture. Currently, I make instillations of paintings with sound art and animation.

Amr Alngmah was born in 1982 and holds a Bachelor's degree in dental surgery. He is a self-taught artist who began painting at a young age and is increasingly interested in exploring new materials, from the traditional to the digital. He has a special interest in conceptual work, installation, and digital media that reflect the culture of the region and his personal vision. . He is driven by a desire to have a positive effect on people's lives by sharing contemporary art. His particular interest in expanding on conceptual frameworks reflects the cultural and regional context from which he is working.

Hamza Bilbeisi is a short fiction writer from Amman, Jordan. He explores an Arab futurism through concepts like localized mythologies, magical realism, and oral histories. He primarily distributes his work via Twitter (@ketabhamza) and *Medium*.

Tracy Chahwan was born in 1992. Her first graphic novel *Beirut Bloody Beirut* is published in France by Marabulles. Besides that, she has worked on multiple short comics, including *Stray Girls* (Beit Waraq, 2017), *Don't You know Who My Mother Is?* (Samandal, 2017), and *The Suicide*. In 2017, she co-founded the Lebanese comics collective Zeez along with five other illustrators. Her illustration work mainly focuses on posters and visuals for underground music venues and groups, like Yukunkun Club and The Beirut Groove Collective.

Andrea Deniz dedicates her time to understand the valuable lessons born of the Middle East and Latin America. The synthesis of these two regions within her blood is what drives her to challenge Turkish hegemonies, as the lasting diaries of Latinx revolutionaries pair boldly with the dry olives of Anatolia. You can find her daydreaming of intersectional feminist futures on any given day.

Hajer, aka ***Eclectic Yemeni*** is a female artist/illustrator, from the city of Sanaa, Yemen. Her work concentrates on women of her culture and society along with their struggles and strengths; and how that reflects on her own life. Her artwork varies from watercolor illustration to oil painting to digital animation. Her strength comes from the way she slowly tutors herself into new art mediums. As an artist, she is aiming to inspire Arab women; especially Yemeni aspiring artists to fight for their rights and to believe in their endowment.

Sandra Esmeralda De Anda is a local writer, stand up comedian, and cultural and political critic. A recent graduate of Reed College, she has returned home to Santa Ana to teach writing at a local high school and organize with her community around deportation defense and tenant evictions. Her writings on local immigration policies and local immigration organizing are occasionally featured on a weekly column in the OC Weekly.

Farrah Fray is a writer, activist and poet studying in London by way of Libya. She has written for *Feminal* and *Kinguistics* as well as *Letters Ly Libya* and translated for *Haawiyat*, a Syrian comic for refugees. Her work explores culture, displacement, feminism and identity with a focus on Libya and London. Her first poetry collection, *The Scent of my Skin*, was recently published.

Azmi Haroun is a Syrian-American writer and activist working on the Communications team for Open Society Foundations. While he has not returned to Syria since 2010, he has been writing ever since. He has previously lived in Paris, Dubai, and Morocco, and, now, New York City. A musically-inclined, soccer-obsessed socialist who believes that fries stay inside the shawarma...

Bergen Hendrickson is a writer and curator currently living in New York City. His recent work has centered on American outsider artists and the problematics of such contemporary art categories, and artists' peripheral activities. He is also currently working on curating a group show examining the legacy of European futurism and Boris Groys' theory of "rheology," slated to open in Spring, 2018.

Yousef Hilmy is an Egyptian-American artist and writer based in Southern California. He is the co-founder of Salafi Cowboy.

Knar Hovakimyan is an artist, born in Armenia, raised in Los Angeles, and currently residing in Boston. She grew up in a community of Armenian immigrant artists and studied art with them, both formally and casually. When she's not painting colorful abstract works, she's painting portraits.

Rawand Issa was born in 1992. She worked as a writer/journalist for five years in Lebanon. In 2015 she decided to make a switch in her career, and jumped to illustration and comic making. She published three publications, *Mish Men El Marikh/ Not from Mars, 22 August,* and *Aasiya.*

Maryam Jamal is a 21-year-old painter, illustrator, and visual design student from the heart of Bahrain. Known for her penchant for colourful abstractions, lush textures, conceptual experimentation and depth, every piece is a part of her. Maryam's intent is for the viewer to explore their own intentions, thoughts, and imagination through viewing her work, as it is a continuous process of give-and-take that fuels her artistic fire.

Shaikha Khalifa: A human being with an orange soul, who desires to write for that soul despite what it seeks from writing as much as it enjoys it, the validation.

Sara Khan was born in Birmingham, England in 1984 and raised in Lahore, Pakistan. She holds a BFA (with honours) from National College of Arts, Lahore (2008). Her works have been featured in several national and international group exhibitions. She was selected as one among 13 international artists for the Bag Art camp, an international art residency in Bergen, Norway (2012). She was also selected to be a part of the 13 Satellites of Lahore, a public art workshop held at the Annemarie Schimmel Haus, Lahore (2006). She lives and works in Vancouver, Canada.

As a DJ & producer, ***Maral Mahmoudi*** loves to take the listener on a journey through the musical ecosystem—focusing on the stories the sounds tell. She also works as the mix series coordinator for SISTER and is a music manager for forward-thinking acts.

Nadeen Shaker is a journalist covering global human rights. A native of Cairo, Egypt, Nadeen pursued her MA in both the Journalism and Middle East Studies programs at New York University and is currently associate editor at the *Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. Nadeen received her B.A. from the American University of Cairo in 2012. Her work has appeared in *Vice News, the Middle East Report, Mada Masr, Quartz, CNN, Muftah, Salon, Bedford & Bowery, The Postcolonialist, AlterNet, PRI's America Abroad, WNYU, Ahram Online*, and others. She is co-founder of Ehky Ya Masr, a podcast about life in Egypt.

Shady Shebak completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Michigan in Dearborn, where he graduated in 2008 with a major in psychology and a minor in biology. He went on to medical school at the American University of the Caribbean and received his Doctor of Medicine degree in 2013. He is currently a psychiatrist at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services and is appointed as a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Michigan State University. His interests include Arab and Muslim mental health as well as narrative learning theory, film, and literature.

Benjamin Stevenson: I am a writer and dancer from the US. I began writing confessional poetry first when I moved to Casablanca. Here, I began working on a research piece about gender and sexuality in the region. With time, this piece became more personal than I had originally expected. I returned to the states, finished my undergraduate studies at Emory University, and moved to Amman, Jordan. I don't think a lot of things about who I am, or really make much sense to most people. Still, I try and give people a glimpse as to why I am so seemingly melodramatic in the poetry and prose I write.

Shehana Udat is an artist born and raised in London. Through the use of classical tools and techniques she recreates traditional Islamic designs and patterns that can be found all over the Islamic world, these mainly include geometric and arabesque patterns. She has studied under Richard Henry and Adam Williamson, both leading specialists in Islamic pattern and has traveled across the Middle East and North Africa where she finds her inspiration. Alongside her art, she is a passionate advocate of human rights. She holds an MA in Human Rights from University College London (UCL) and currently works on social justice and global development issues.

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Editor's Note

As a kid, I often wondered what stories were contained in a dumpling. Hailing from St. Petersburg, my mother's mother made us pilmeni—boiled meat dumplings—when we visited her house outside of Tripoli, Lebanon. My father's mother made us manto—steamed meat dumplings—when we visited her house in Jeddah.

I've always known that my father's mother, a 'Bukhari' Saudi—a term that refers to the city of Bukhara, but encompasses most Central Asian Saudis—came from Uzbekistan. Escaping the Red Army's Muslim purge, my family found a smuggler, jumped into coffins in the Fergana Valley, and made its way to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Makkah, and finally, Medina. We don't have photos or belongings from that era. We were allegedly from a farming village called Ekin Tekin, which doesn't exist anymore—at least not on paper. Similar to my mother's mother's Siberian roots, that part of my heritage was always on the periphery, a distant and inaccessible past.

In March of this year, I became the first person in my family since the 1920s to visit Uzbekistan—and it was as if my two grandmothers shared the same kitchen. I had pilmeni as an appetizer and manto for the main dish. I had pirashki with my borscht and finished off with a juicy, sumac-sprinkled kibab. I had kasha for breakfast and baklava for dessert. I drank vodka with a mosque printed on the label, the word "Allah" clearly inscribed on its minarets. I saw Soviet-era apartment complexes towering over a dilapidated fourteenth-century mosque. My memories of St. Petersburg and Jeddah, which had occupied such distant portions of my mind, suddenly knit together as though they had always been of the same place.

SOURCE interrogates our overlapping roots, seeking to broaden our notions of the archive. Dynasties come and go, obscuring our access to the past. To ask questions, we often turn to libraries, museums, and monuments—which, unlike people, do not wander. But where can we look to find the wanderers? Which objects tell their stories?

The contributors to this fourth issue demonstrate our power to produce our own histories, unmarred by the legacy of empire. They study the composition of their soils: matriarchal face tattoos, listening to Mozart in Syria, cycles. They reclaim our identities from those who have exploited them: our hair, our narratives, and our alienation. And they remind us of a heritage of survival: prison reform and protest justice, skating and fishing, birthdays. Most importantly, they show that, wherever we are and whether or not we know it, we carry our stories with us.

CANNOT BE CONTAINED

NADEEN SHAKER

Hands Up by Sara Khan. Courtesy of Sara Khan.

**Warning: Violence, Torture*

The July 5, 1884, issue of *The British Medical Journal* contains an unsigned bulletin titled: Egyptian Prisons. The institutions were "habitations of horrid cruelty," beset by "shocking" physical conditions from filth collecting in the facilities, to bare grounds, which were "constantly damp from infiltration from the Nile. […] On this damp ground the prisoners had to sleep, without mats or boards. They were half starved, and imperfectly clothed." Typhoid fever often broke out.

The bulletin then describes how discipline was maintained inside prison walls. Despite earlier reforms abolishing corporal punishment, use of the stocks, heavy iron chains, and thumbscrews was common, in addition to starving, which meant withholding bread and water for 24 hours, and the bastinado or *korbaash*. The bastinado was a form of torture: "The prisoner was made to lie on the ground face downwards, and held in that position by a man sitting on his back, while another one held his arms; the ankles were then tightly fastened to the middle of a thick stick (*naboot*) about five feet long, which was twisted round once or twice, and then held well raised above the ground by two men whilst a warder, with a rhinoceros-hide whip, inflicted as many as 500 blows across the soles of the feet." This frequently led to death within a few hours, and if that could be avoided, the prisoner lost the ability to walk for weeks. Another torture method kept the prisoner standing for hours in the middle of the cell, with an iron chain fixed to an overhead beam around their neck. If the prisoner fainted or fell, they would be strangled.

A far cry from humane treatment, this was the state of Egyptian prisons when Harry Crookshank, later to be known as Crookshank Pacha, became the first 'Director-General of Prisons' of British-controlled Egypt. In the years to come, Crookshank would lead a series of reforms explicitly related to improving the health and sanitary conditions inside Egyptian prisons.

Yet this reform mandate would quickly change at the turn of the twentieth century, as Egypt's nationalist movement took shape.

…

As early as April 4, 1884, Harry Crookshank was celebrated in *The British Medical Journal* for bringing Egyptian

prisons "in line with British prisons." As a surgeon, Crookshank came to Egypt in 1883 and was in charge of a gendarmerie cholera camp at El-Wadan. He was then appointed 'Director-General of Prisons of Egypt,' serving in that position for fourteen years.

Major Arthur Griffiths, who visited Egypt in 1897 as His Majesty's inspector of prisons, extols Crookshank's contributions in an article published in *The North American Review*. Crookshank began to keep records of inmate admissions systematically. Newly admitted prisoners had a signed order from a judicial authority so that unlawful imprisonment would not take place. Crookshank put an end to the mixing of prisoners and prolonged pre-trial detentions, which lasted from six to nine months and sometimes up to one or two years. Other structural reforms included the creation of two departments, of Prison and of Public Health, under the control of the Ministry of Interior. A director for every prison was appointed and filled by an Egyptian, and the post of Inspector of Prisons was created.

Perhaps the most crucial series of reforms involved applying standards of cleanliness to places of detention and appointing doctors or medical men to every facility to make daily routines, prescribe medicine, and transfer the sick to the hospital. The daily average of sick prisoners dropped to one percent.

These so-called "humanitarian" measures reproduced hierarchies supporting the British colonial project. Hygiene was often associated with racial language about the uncleanliness of Egyptians, sometimes inflected with their lower class. On writing about the remarks of a certain Sir Charles Wilson's inspection of Cairo prisons, Thomas Archer notes that "it was stated… that the filthy conditions were attributable to the incorrigibly dirty habits of the lower class of Egyptians, and particularly the fellaheen," or farmers.

The mixing of British and Egyptian prisoners was often described as "undesirable." In one passionately worded letter, British Consul in Cairo T.C. Rapp complains that Europeans were confined in the same area with the natives in the city's Manshiyya Prison, where the water taps were only two yards apart, and the restrooms were not partitioned. He adds that it was "degrading" for European prisoners to associate and come into "such intimate contact with the dregs of the native populace." Perhaps the most derogatory descriptions are in Griffiths' account of labor in prisons such as Tourah, where he praises the convicts' employment in the quarries. He also refers to the convicts as Ishmaelites and Bedouins, which suggest brown skin. This is bound up with classed representations of uncleanliness, as he goes on to identify them as the "lowest scum of the cities."

By British measures, such reforms for improving conditions inside prisons were a success. In his account "England in Egypt," Lord Alfred Milner, who served as under-secretary of finance in the late 1880s, praises the transformation of provincial prisons into "clean, decent, and properly managed" places—"the greatest contrast to the hells they were in former times." He also ranks the Tourah and Giza convict prisons as "model establishments."

But these reputations would not last. British reaction to the growth of the nationalist movement in Egypt, while not necessarily upending these reforms, gave way to a visible deterioration in prison conditions with the rise of new prison troubles: namely, overcrowding and police brutality, as well as the criminalization of new forms of political dissidence.

…

At the turn of and during the early twentieth century, as the British sought to defend their position in Egypt, their style of rule marked an apparent shift away from the previous century of political and economic laissez-faire and indirect rule. As nationalism rose and local opposition grew, the British formed new conceptions of political dissidence. Anthony Gorman writes that British authorities realized the potential of the prison system to manage political dissent. He argues that throughout the rest of the century, the state and the colonial administration redefined the term "political prisoner," both widening and politicizing the scope of what constituted "offensive acts."

A series of laws were enacted to stifle opposition and dissent, which led to incarceration. Foremost, the 1909 Law of Police Supervision set prison terms for "notoriously dangerous persons." The Publication Law of 1881, reinstated in 1894, was the first press-related legislation to make imprisonment a penalty. Tagamhur law, a 1914 statute, criminalized and punished protest and the assembly of more than five persons by no less than six months in prison and a fine of 20 Egyptian Pounds. The prison sentence could be raised to two years (and the fine to 50 Egyptian Pounds) if a protestor was in possession of a weapon.

As more people were funneled into prisons, they became overcrowded. In 1899, British authorities responded by allocating £E 33,000 towards the construction of new prisons and an additional £E 26,000 at the end of the year. An expenditure of £E 33,000 was to be reserved for the following year. Lord Cromer, the famed British proconsul-general, added that after such contributions the "evils attendant to overcrowding will disappear." But they did not. According to Attia Mehanna, the holding capacity for prisons in Egypt in 1900—13,891 prisoners, including 13,340 men and 551 women—remained the same for fifteen years, despite increases in the prison population.

Criminal justice authorities in Egypt formed a complicated triangle consisting of the Mudirs (provincial authorities), the Police, and the Parquet (judicial officials), which the British increasingly sought to pit against each other. Starting in 1893, British authorities restricted the independence of the Parquet. At the time, it was investigating British authorities for a raft of allegations of torture, including a riot that took place in Tourah prison. A brigand convict was shot as he tried to escape the labor camp, and afterward, a court sentenced the *ghaffirs* (inspectors) and others to two years in prison. The incident sparked great uproar over actions of the British, who had placed their men as heads of the prison. In an effort to evade accountability, the British aligned with the Police to undermine the Parquet, a major critic of police abuse.

By 1895, the British and the Minister of Interior had ordered that a body oversee the work of the Parquet in cases where a police official was prosecuted for misconduct. Another decision put the Parquet under the supervision of mainly British inspectors. The British were also able to bring the Mudirs under their inspection. In April 1893, a circular sent to the Mudirs ordered them to communicate details of criminal cases to both the British Inspector-General of Police and the Egyptian Minister of the Interior, placing those officials on the same tier of authority.

This struggle between Egyptian and British authorities over the Ministry of Interior would prove detrimental to British rule in the country. Historian Harold H. Tollefson Jr. argues that the only way the British saw to fortify their rule was to increase control over the Ministry of Interior and the police. Aware of growing Egyptian opposition to British occupation, Lord Cromer used a deceitful strategy to place a powerful British Councilor within the Ministry of Interior—a plan that was unlikely to have been approved by Egypt's de jure rulers, Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Nubar Pasha and Ottoman viceroy Khedive Abbas II. Lord Cromer led them to believe that the position would have no executive, leaving the true, powerful nature of the role "intentionally ambiguous" and securing Eldon Gorst the top ministerial position. By 1896, according to Tollefson, the British had succeeded in taking over the Ministry of Interior.

The expansion of both the legal definition of a dissident and British institutional control escalated opposition between British authorities and Egyptian nationalists. The British clashed with the Parquet and defended the police in allegations of abuse, thereby avoiding responsibility for torture in prisons and abuse of lawbreakers. Tollefson concludes that British actions during this period "constituted a major step in the quasi-colonization of Egypt as well as a major blow to the Egyptian opposition to the British occupation, which did not recover for another decade."

…

The Denshawai incident of June 13, 1906, is often invoked as a notable precursor to the national liberation movement in Egypt. It began when some Egyptian peasants objected to British officers trampling their crops. After a scuffle in which a number of peasants were wounded and a British officer died of a sunstroke, the peasants were put to trial. Four were sentenced to death by hanging, nine to prison, and the rest to flogging. In response, protests swept the country. Vladimir Borisovich Lutsky writes that the Denshawai incident was so scandalous that the British were forced to make compromises: the peasants were pardoned in 1907, and in April of the same year, Cromer resigned.

Between 1909 and 1914, British crackdown on nationalists reached its climax with the passing of a number of emergency laws. One of these permitted authorities to send any person suspected of nationalist sympathies to exile without due process. In reaction, an extreme nationalist assassinated Prime Minister Butrus Ghali, who the nationalists viewed as a puppet of the British regime, in 1910.

According to Owen L. Sirrs, Ghali's murder marked "a new phase of political warfare against the British and their Egyptian allies." The assassination forced the British to re-examine Egypt's secret police apparatus. The old system, known as Mamur Zapt (secret police chiefs), was replaced with the Central Special Office (CSO)—the brainchild of senior British officials, including High Commissioner and Commandant of the Cairo City Police George W. Harvey, known as 'Harvey Pasha.' The new functions of the CSO were to collect information on secret political societies, including "individuals known, or believed to be, Political Agitators."

The CSO produced a report on secret organizations in 1911. Its scope of surveillance was extensive. It not only kept "thousands of files" on Egyptian students, nationalists, and foreign residents, but also conducted background checks on Egyptian civil servants, and handled espionage cases. Such cases were often investigated in liaison with European intelligence agencies. The CSO relied on plainclothes informants for their intelligence gathering, a method that was often fraught with falsities, since a financial reward was offered to informants who would sometimes fabricate information.

During World War I, the CSO greatly aided the British authorities, which relied heavily on its archives for intelligence on enemies to the Central Powers in Egypt. The office exposed many of these enemies, foreign and nationalist. However, the CSO failed to predict a decisive moment for the nationalist movement: the 1919 protests. Egyptian nationalist leader Saad Zaghlul and his colleagues were excluded from negotiating Egypt's independence at the Paris Peace Conference in January, arrested and jailed in Qasr Al-Nil prison, and subsequently exiled to Malta. The CSO anticipated a reaction. It detained activists, searched for bombs, and dispatched officers to power stations and depots to prevent sabotage. "But the security apparatus never caught up with events," writes Sirrs, and "On 3 April, an assistant Mamur Zapt was murdered and, by the middle of the month, Cairo was 'in the grip of mob violence.'"

Sydney Smith, who came to Egypt in 1917, served in the medico-legal section of the Parquet, and investigated a thousand murder cases, describes the macabre violence resulting from the 1919 demonstrations: "When the riots were at their worst my mortuary was in a dreadful mess. Dozens of bodies of persons killed by gunshot or otherwise lay piled on the floor, sometimes two or three deep." Most of the bodies he examined were of Egyptians who were shot by authorities in the security apparatus.

One of the cases Smith investigated was of Egyptians shot during a lecture of Zaghlul's in upper Egypt. The government had tried to frame the case as the fault of members of Zaghlul's party, but the investigation led by the Parquet showed that the bullets matched "the square-shaped slugs used by the Ghaffirs, an irregular force attached to the police." The case was eventually dropped. Examining other deaths from a riot in Alexandria, Smith similarly placed the blame on the military, although investigators built false evidence to the contrary.

Brutality on the part of the security apparatus also reached prisons. In one case, during an investigation of the whipping of a prisoner, Smith "put down the whip" on his own arm to prove that that was how the scars on the prisoner's body were produced. As in cases relating to deaths of protestors, the defense team, composed of two British medical men and four others, attempted in their report to show the opposite.

During this period, British authorities intensified their response to the nationalists. Their brutality through the police, criminal justice system, and institutionalized surveillance of the nationalists, however, could not seriously disrupt the Egyptian nationalist movement, and eventually hastened the demise of British rule. In February 1922, the British were forced to end the protectorate and declare Egypt an independent sovereign state. Yet this declaration, writes Smith, "did not end the political unrest, rioting, and murder."

Throughout their rule, the British elaborated a system of prison reform, beginning with early racialized and classed regimes of management and moving to the anti-nationalist expansion of policing and incarceration. The first period of reform focused on conditions inside the prison. In the later period, as competition escalated among institutions of the criminal justice system, reform focused on expanding what constituted criminal behavior and prisons were instrumentalized to punish dissent.

The reactions provoked by such changes—riots, protests, organizing—strengthened the fervor of the nationalist movement and destabilized British control. In today's Egypt, as thousands languish in prison, public gatherings of ten people or more can be shut down as illegal protests, and the government is pursuing a stricter security policy, we can indeed recognize the legacies the British have left behind.

SPIRIT OF NASR

SHADY SHEBAK

The spirit of Nasr was hovering over Egypt. It had been for some time, but it was getting ready to make its move. It was 1882 when the spirit of Nasr showed itself. Its been 20, 20, 20, 10, and 1 since the last time it made its move.

Liberate Egypt for Egyptians' sake
I commanded Ahmed Orabi, the Fallah, the peasant
The one who spoke as an Egyptian for the Egyptians
And he responded, with a revolt, short-lived
The Suez, filled with the sweat and blood
To be given to the Egyptians, in due time
British and French, a cycle or bombing
Orabi surrendered, and the defeat was harsh.

The spirit of Nasr knew that this was not the end, but it had planted a seed, to later grow, and the cycle to recycle, and it disappeared for 20, 20, 20, and 10, and in July of 1952.

Liberate Egypt for Egyptians' sake
Roared a revolution, of Fallahi, Egyptian peasantry origins
Born in Zagazig, in Port Said, and Alex and Cairo
The Pharaoh tombs came open
Egypt is for Egypt, the revolution roared
Nasr became the Free Officers, and became Nasser himself
The Suez, filled with the sweat and blood
To be taken by the Egyptians, now and forever
British and French, and a third, a cycle of bombing
Angst, but the revolution roared
1956, Egypt was Egypt.

The spirit of Nasr, faded and soon was to be forgotten. Defeated in war after war, as society decayed. Our artists, music, and above all, Oum Kalthoum and Abdel Nasser were to become a distant memory. But Nasr was ready to come back, after a hiatus of 20, 20, 20, and 9.

Liberate Egypt for Egyptians' sake
It was back, after 70 years, and Egypt heeded the call
Bread, freedom, and social justice chants
Tahrir filled, and clashes ensued
No cycle of French or British bombs
In a flash, he resigned, *Mubrook* and Baraka
Turmoil, conspiracy, inadequate end, but
Nasr planted the seeds, that will be cropped
Maybe in another 20, 20, 20, and 10 or maybe sooner
The Pharaoh tombs will spring open, and Egypt will...

BN3EED NAFSANA

WAFAA ABU SAADAH

Bn3eed Nafsana is a project I started in 2013 during the peak of the so-called “Arab Spring.” I noticed how contemporary news titles were identical to those I found while flipping through a stack of my father’s vintage magazines from the 80s and 90s.

Throughout these years, it never became less shocking—whenever a major event happened in the world—to find a similar, and sometimes indistinguishable, news already documented in those magazines.

The purpose of the project is to document the repetition of events we live and witness, and to invite people to understand and analyze how history affects our life today. As George Santayana writes, “Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

Bn3eed Nafsana recalls the old, unlearned lessons from history to emphasize the necessity of, first, pausing and recognizing those lessons and, second, to change our approach in order to get new outcomes. Moreover, it strips bare the fact that repetition of the same actions brings the same results. Seeing the same set of solutions causing more of the same issues over and over again calls us to let go of our compulsion, break the vicious cycle, and come up with new solutions using an unconventional mindset.

What makes it interesting visually, regardless of having different dates, names, and images, is that at first glance those news titles have the power to fiercely freeze time and throw you into an era where both times, the present and the past, seem to merge as one. Only a few seconds later can you get back to the sense of time where you are reliving the news and raising the same questions.

Questioning the Palestinian state since 1979. Courtesy of Wafaa Abu Saadah.

The Arab oil and American battle of power, 1980.

The Turkish revolution in 1980, reoccurring in 2016.

What Lies Beyond the Shore by Rund Al-Arabi.

A MUSEUM IN EVERY HOME

RUND AL-ARABI

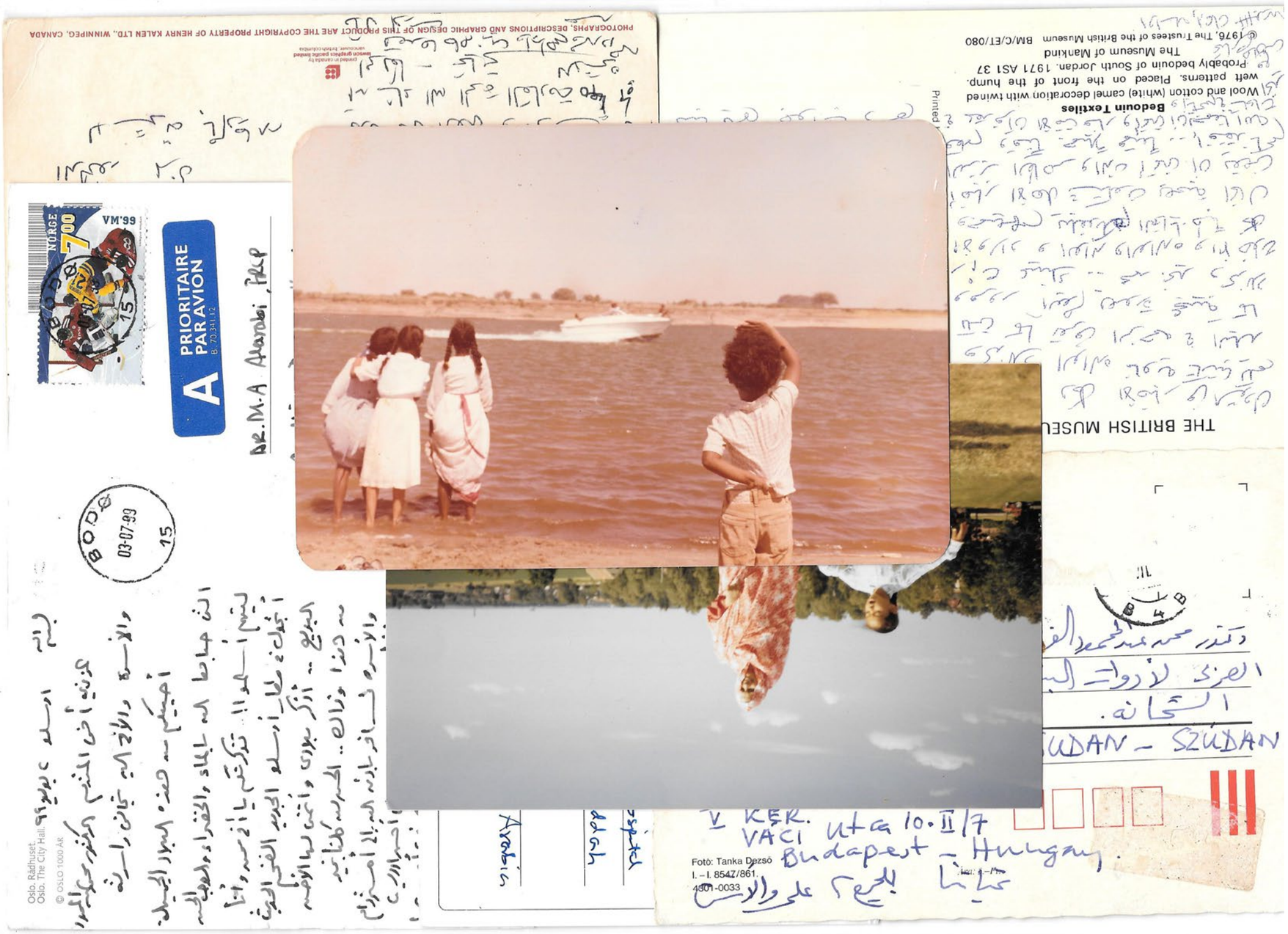
I never saw my grandfather, but I know what he looked like. I saw him not with my own eyes but someone else's. Someone who may not have thought about themselves as a messenger at that moment, as a portal for many upcoming generations in the future. Someone that simply took a photograph.

I made these photo collages in an attempt to explore the juxtaposition of different eras in Sudanese lives as well as the similarities remaining, which leads to the birth of a dimension that isn't a complete present nor a complete past.

The lack of documentation and inclusive representation of the past, as well as how things are currently seeping through our hands, generates a concern. People in the future will struggle to understand this country and its people. Which leads me to ask: what would you do with the amount of history that is in your hands?

Looking past the nostalgic elements in photographs rearranges the past, and in this rearrangement, one gets to see beyond the usual visual patterns and discover stark differences as well.

I hope to remind people, through my work, that they too are their own historians and that there's a museum in every home that's waiting to be conserved for the rest to witness.



Postcards, Rund Al-Arabi.

GASTROENTEROLOGY UNIT

Dr. Anthony Axon
Dr. Douglas Chalmers

The General Infirmary
Great George Street
Leeds LS1 3EX
Direct Line (0532) 437197
Switchboard (0532) 432799 Ext. 7197

الى المدير العام

The Director,
Saudi Health C
119 Harley St
London W1N

8th July 1

Dear Sir,

Re

Ap
M

enterology,

I would be gra ion for the above post.
I have been in ural medicine since
1974 when I u erology Department &
the Central Midd return to my
Home county th y and endoscopy
Unit in Omd Since then I updated
my knowledg by taking various
postgraduate privilage &
working for Liver Unit, Kings
College Hosp

Since October 1990 and up to now I have been working at the Gastroenterology Unit, Leeds General Infirmary, U.K., as a visiting Honorary Consultant on various aspects of digestive endoscopy, focusing on endoscopic retrograde cholangio pancreatography 'ERCP' and colonoscopic procedures. I am now a well trained gastroenterologist and a mature physician in general medicine.

I attach my C.V. and some relevant copies of my qualifications and expens.

Sincerely yours,
Dr Mohamed A. AL ARABI, MBBS, FRCP (London).

Stamp Letter, Rund Al-Arabi.

THE BIRTHDAY

SHAWK ALANI

Image courtesy of R.K. and the Iraqi Narratives Project.

The blue sky blew up with American aerial bombardment to celebrate my birthday on the night of the 17th of January 1991. My brother's face yellowed up, my mother held him and cooed. We did not remember to celebrate until my uncle's family showed up three moons later from out of the sunrise-red smog encompassing Baghdad from the distance. Two cans of Pepsi were distributed into nine glass cups raised to the life I breathed eleven years ago, and more accurately to the life of the five perplexed, ghostly faces that came to tell us the rest of our family was alive. Iraq's electricity grid was bombed to nihility. My mother made a cake on the *choola*: a rusty, dusty portable propane gas cooker. She poured the creamy cake mixture into a deep tray and covered it with a shallow, dented one, masterfully flipped it over like *dolma* and put it down to cook slowly on the small stove. It looked like a contraption you might see in black and white Egyptian movies, or like the kerosene cooker my grandmother insisted on making rice on because of its really low, prudent heat. Even the Pepsi cans were the last that we would see before the sanctions ended all foreign import into the country.

In the construction of memory, exact dates become indecipherable, but I think it all started in August 1990. I was passed out, wedged between the warm limbs and torsos of my also sleeping brothers on my parent's white linen sheets. A long silky strand of jet black dyed hair slipped across my itchy cheek as my mother's closest friend crawled out to the calling of my mother's voice. We had all slept huddled together that night in my parents' bed under the safety of the stars. My mom opened the bedroom door and the two women's bodies morphed into a singled creature attached by the ear and the mouth. "Saddam has invaded Kuwait", the anxious whispers flowing in the air between them mixed with the sound of the humming birds and the morning breeze.

My little brothers whimpered weakly as the buzz of confusion and questions woke us up one by one. The television broadcast stated that Kuwait, the 19th province of Iraq, would be "liberated". That morning felt far more suffocated than liberated. My dad got stuck abroad because of the travel ban and I could only communicate with him by closing my eyes at night and imagining

that he was safe under the same stars. Our neighbours talked of evacuating Baghdad, and my mother finally put us all in the Toyota Corona and drove to her sister-in-law in Tikrit. I imagined the streets of Baghdad empty and quiet; no school kids chasing soccer balls in alleyways, no passengers waiting to get on red double-decker buses, no mother cats fending to feed their kittens under a jasmine bush in somebody's front yard. I wondered how this huge city could be evacuated and if there were enough airplanes to carry all the people, buildings, houses, trees and the giant sun. My mother stared straight ahead as she drove the interstate highways by herself for the first time. The sun was glowing through the right side windows and she said: "What do you think we should do?" She might have been talking to the three of us sitting upright in the backseat, or to a reflection of my dad that she caught in the afternoon stars, or maybe interrogating the miserable fate that seemed to haunt this land we were cutting across.

We stayed in Tikrit for a while but eventually the intimate disruption of displacement bore its weight on us. My father had finally reached Jordan and crossed the land borders back into Iraq. He was a mechanical engineer who specialized in helicopters. He was posted by the government at a military compound in Al-Suwaira, in Kut. It's a small city in the South, on the west bank of the Tigris River. My mother refused to abandon him, and so we all left Baghdad together. My aunt and her kids came with us in the beginning. Her husband worked at the Ministry of Oil in Baghdad and could not leave his job. In retrospect, that was the beginning of the breaking apart of families, neighbours, and all established social networks we had known all our lives.

Luscious palm orchards surrounded the compound, and a busy pool always filled with children was at the center of the forty or so identical mobile homes. It was winter by then; but the sun was always out, and always warm. It did not look like a regular January. It was beautiful and serene and felt like a vacation. Then it happened: the night of the 17th. I woke up to my father's heartbeat pounding in sync with the areal bombardment and the backdrop of airplanes soaring in a terrified, purple sky. We escaped to a cold, concrete-laden shelter made for airplanes, but now housing families with sleeping children underground. We stayed there for two nights before being carried under the safety of the afternoon stars to a house in the city - outside the military compound, which was targeted by the assault. My mother was comforting my timid, sensitive brother with her right hands as her left arm held on to her own brother in disbelief. Her body tensed as she held both and could not shed a healing tear at the sight of her brother and his family alive. That's when we celebrated my birthday; the beginning of my life, and the beginning of my awareness of it.

This story is based on an oral history interview with R. K., from the archives of the Iraqi Narratives Project. The interview was recorded on May 2nd, 2016 in Hamilton, Ontario in the first year this project was founded. Since then, we have documented and archived stories of 13 Iraqis in the diaspora – in Canada and America. We particularly want to document the journey of Iraqis from Iraq to their place of settlement and document how they lived through major political events in the history of Iraq.

LIBYA IS BLUE

FARRAH FRAY

Gaddafi was captured
mid siesta,

he tried to escape in a Peugeot
truck the colour of the sky

with a faulty indicator light-

shouting "Those damn rats,"
when he stepped outside

but we wanted to be

like Omar Mukhtar

Etched into the azure of ten
dinars

Instead, we buy oil for ten
times its cost

And dance to Shakira, our
shirts embossed

"MILANO"

All we have are our scars, racing cars

And coins that jiggle like children's giggles,

for the timid young guy who sells dates out of the back of his Peugeot truck
on the corner of the squares and streets

We were told not to protest on

Squares which now hold more than one purpose,

crisscrossed roads,

An obituary to many, and a lifeline for some

Learning to be free;

Searching for Libya.

LA FAMILIA

DINA ALBOGAMMI

Family is the most important thing for many. For me, family has been a constant support—always there to back me through my creative career. I am a middle child. I am a sister, my sibling's best friend, and their secret keeper. I have a different relationship with each one of them, and the paintings represent who they are. I wanted to link their personalities with their physical characters and preserve them through paint and canvas. My work is influenced by names and their meanings.

Adalia means nobility and beauty.

In a family, there is the younger sister that always wants to feel beautiful since she is the youngest of the other sisters. Adalia has a very pretty face with beautiful colored hair and an expressive style.

Miguel has power and control.

Miguel is the youngest brother in the family. As we all know, that means that he controls everything, and he is open to ask for whatever he wants. He is basically the 'prince' of the family; with sleek hair, an unimpressed look in his eyes, with accents of emerald green on his face and the collar of a confident powerful young man.

Dolores takes it all.

She is the older sister, who has the biggest heart in the family. Everyone goes to her when they have a problem. In our families, we always run to the eldest when we are in trouble. The painting is a portrait of Dolores, a vibrant personality with a heart shaped face.

Original artwork by Adnan Samman.

THE BEETLE

SHAIKHA KHALIFA

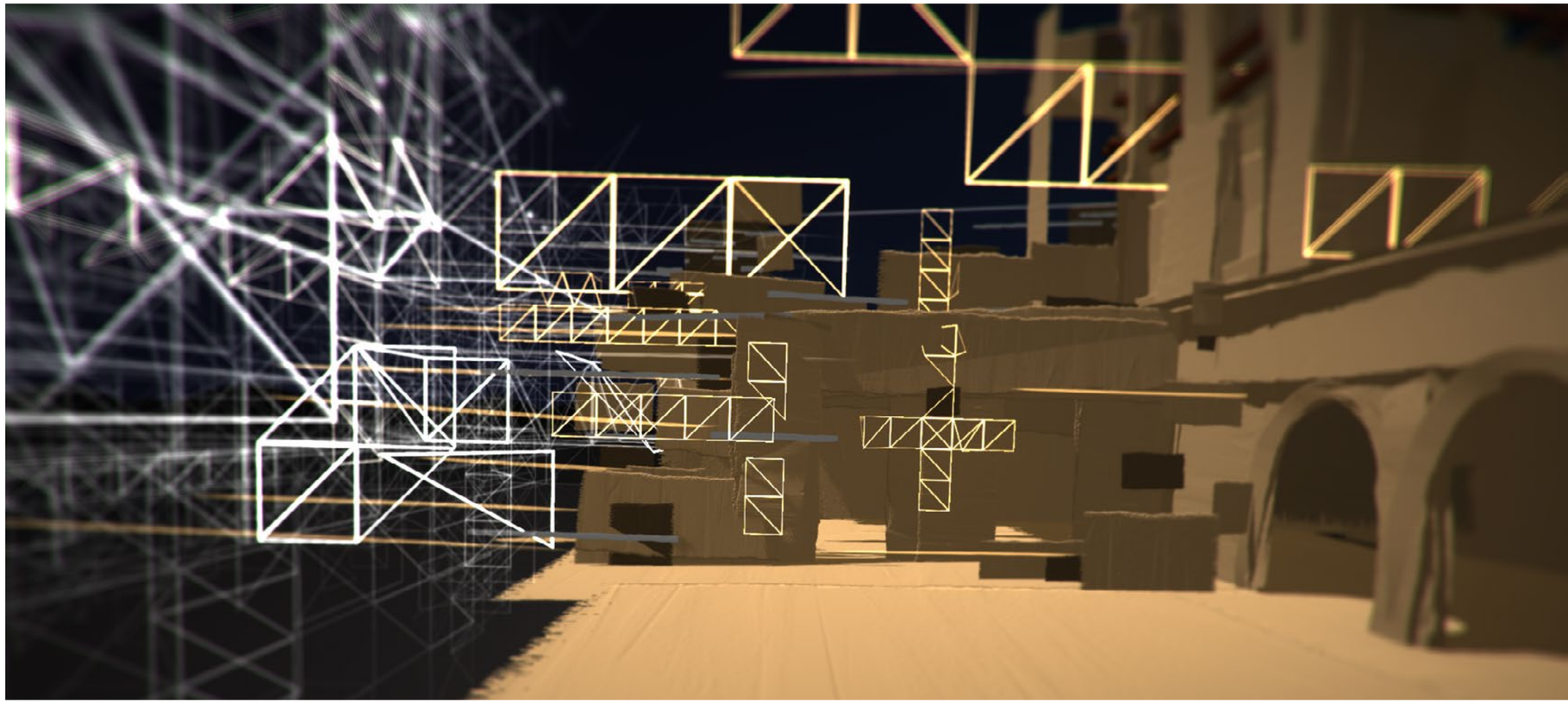
The act of being is sickening. Disgust like an overdue stench trapped in the skin. Self-imposed isolation from all that resembles my reality. Naturally, the distancing occurs, from culture and geography and all that is physical and sentimental. A composition of that and a nerve to think I can construct my own for reality was simply irrelevant.

At twenty-four, my vanity caught up with me. My world became unbearable, shrunken, as tight as skin, even smaller at times. An ill-fitting turtleneck, closing the throat up on itself, is how suffocating it all became. Reality was very present, books and films hard to enjoy. Habits of discarding my geography for a visually striking sequence in a film is an unacceptable mental state. I wake up some mornings longing to talk to Francis Abernathy or Alyosha Karamazov. Our conversations only last until the final pages, and I am forced to look elsewhere for solace. Escape is hard to realize.

Agony came at the claws of a beetle making its way to who knows where on my living room couch, a cozy room with dark wooden floors and a glass door that takes you to a modest but beloved indoor garden. My beloved tends to occasionally invite tiny unwanted guests and usually my annoyance would be immediately resolved with a flick of a finger or a tissue box. Lately however, I have been aware of my tendency to disconnect. Burdened by the inability to sympathize or relate. Suddenly a reddish-brown beetle was walking on that dusty yellow couch I am so familiar with, and all was realized. I realized why my humanity does not feel whole.

That red dot unraveled a huge sense of suppressed obligation towards my own geography. I do not know the nature I inhabit. I do not know the types of moths that visit my living room at night through my garden. I do not know the names of the flowers I enjoy, for I am uninterested. The seething desert, the soft yellow sand and the tall, lean palm trees in my environment do not form or alter my character. Instead I sit behind screens, consuming endlessly, composing and assembling a character from all that I consume. Not making an effort to understand or engage with nature is where that rotten part of my soul springs. I understand this now. Deliberately ignoring all that is physical and non-human-made because it's not modern enough. Not comfortable enough. Not compliant enough.

So here I am writing this part in my garden, trying to connect, but the grass is green and stubborn. Silent and uninterested. I play music to it; some Lionel Richie. His voice awakens some urges, like the need to write letters to the seasons before the arrival of each one. Thoughts I would like to speak of to the sea next time we meet, about coping with the Abu Dhabi summer heat, and apologize if the process of evaporation happens to be painful. But even I know all these are romanticized ideas of the relationship I want to establish. So I decided to consume more vegetables instead. And as for the beetle on my couch, it saw the back of a tissue box.



GL1TCH

NAYLA AL-KHALIFA

With all doors open, all needs are met
The home was made to gather
The home was made to flow
The home was a unit
A unit among units
In the thriving ecosystem of family neighborhoods
That runs on love and trust
A system update was made available
A promising standard of living
A faster life
We left our units
And the system error overwhelmed the tradition
We disrupted the ecosystem
For progress.

LIMINAL BELONGING

BERGEN HENDRICKSON

The Al-Sawaber apartment complex was conceived as one of the Gulf region's first grand utopian housing complexes, designed in 1977 by a Canadian architect during a wave of new construction projects in Kuwait. As just fewer than 500 of the more than 900 apartments were ever built, the project was deemed a failure, and the complex is now slated for demolition. Among the reasons attributed to this failure was the designers' lack of accommodation for communal spaces within the complex. Notably, according to an essay on the project by Kevin Mitchell, the structure's plan failed in a few critical respects:

"Beyond the compromises made during the initial implementation of Al-Sawaber, the fact that the space provided in the apartments was only one-third of that provided in single-family homes and the lack of a designated *diwaniya*—or even the possibility of adapting the dwelling to create a male-only social space to be used periodically—imposed significant constraints. The limited space, at least relative to single-family homes, and the absence of a diwaniya not only affected usability, but also likely impacted the resident's perception of how they may be viewed within their broader social networks." (Mitchell)

Nevertheless, Tarek Al-Ghoussein sees the estate as a site that is more significant to Kuwait's landscape than a mere failed experiment.

Tarek Al Ghoussein's, Al Sawaber, Wallpapers 2015-2017, Digital print, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy of The Third Line.

In his latest show at The Third Line Gallery in Dubai, curated by Salwa Mikdadi, Al-Ghoussein photographically indexed some of the archeology of the empty structure. Rather than entombing the past lives of the many apartments he explored as ruinous or overtly civil-political, the spaces are treated as testimony to coexistence and the ways in which people adapt to spaces that suit them poorly. The photographs are devoid of figures, but they attest to life in an active, present-progressive sense: these are demonstrations of the making of a home.

For Al-Ghoussein, it is clear that the home, even when vacant, is a potent symbol for self. Some recent writing has perhaps insisted too much on the existential, Beckettian eeriness of his work, understandable enough given the apparently increasing emptiness of his compositions. This latest development in his practice, however, suggests that Al-Ghoussein's work has been in an ongoing process of focal-distance shifts, dancing nimbly between the intimacy of portraiture, anonymous human figure, and vast allegorical landscape.

This simultaneity of focus is encapsulated in single photos within this exhibition, such as one work showing a wall with a peeling fresco of some swallow-like birds, a tilted oil painting reproduction, and, subtly tucked at the far left of the photo, an electrical socket. While the architectural surveys in black and white convey the sheer empty magnitude of the complex, every color photograph feels intimate.

Al-Ghoussein's work is held in the collections of institutions such as The Guggenheim, The Smithsonian, and The British Museum, and he was chosen as Kuwait's Representative in the 55th Venice Biennale. In his series of photographs in which his figure appears small and anonymous, dwarfed in scale by spacious and empty environments, he straddles the boundary between landscape and portraiture. Not quite abstraction, the figure acts more as a mythical stand-in for the individual, and it is in this sense that these photographs feel more like performance than portraiture. While the kaffiyeh that the figure wears both forces some viewers to rethink their immediate associations and identifies a Palestinian heritage, walls and other physical barriers block out access to this heritage. In these photos, Al-Ghoussein acts out an inherited myth of a solitary figure powerlessly struggling for a freedom in relation to home. Al-Ghoussein's parents were exiles of Palestine, and Al-Ghoussein, born in Kuwait, has reportedly never been able to visit Palestine. Al-Ghoussein's most recent body of work documenting the derelict Al-Sawaber complex suggests a more subdued, tender continuation of his continued exploration of the space and poetry of a relation to 'home' that remains elusive.

Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Al Sawaber, 2017, The Third Line, Installation view.

Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Al Sawaber, 2017, The Third Line, Installation view.

Image courtesy of Ahmad Sahli.

ZULAJEH

AHMAD SAHLI & YOUSEF HILMY

On November 18th, 2017 Yousef Hilmy of Salafi Cowboy & Abou Naddara, in collaboration with Khabar Keslan, interviewed Ahmad Sahli—a Palestinian-American skater who helped build one of the first skateparks in Palestine. In a conversation that happened between Los Angeles and Dubai, the two talked about Ahmad's upbringing, the origins of skating in Jordan and Palestine, and his volunteer work with SkatePal, an NGO that just built a skatepark in the West Bank. This is an excerpt from that interview, which can be found on KhabarKeslan.com

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Yousif Hilmy: ...Can you speak on any influence or interactions the Israeli government and/or the Palestinian authorities had on this project?

Ahmad Sahli: The Jayyous municipality, that being a part of the Palestinian government, was very receptive to the project. They were certainly excited about it and were very generous. They provided houses for the volunteers to stay at; they gave us this massive lot to build on. I'm sure there are so many other small things they had to facilitate for us. Realistically, there isn't nearly as much bureaucratic red tape in the West Bank as there would be elsewhere, so I can't imagine there were too many massive hurdles they had to jump. At the end of the day, it was a charitable project, like, "Hey we're going to build you a skatepark, can you give us somewhere to do it?"—so I can't imagine there was much lobbying effort that went into it.

Especially when compared to the original lobbying effort, I'm sure, before SkatePal had built any skateparks in Palestine period and had to make a case for it.

Exactly. As far as the Israeli government goes, pretty much no complications, really. They definitely interrogated a few of the volunteers as they were entering the country through the Israeli airport. I didn't happen to go through there, though; I went through the land border that it shares with Jordan so I didn't have to deal with that. Some of the volunteers I know were definitely questioned; others I know had a pretty easy time getting through. And then beyond that… I mean, a few times when we were in town the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) would enter Jayyous, do their usual thing: show up, throw a few smoke grenades, take a kid or two in the middle of the night, apprehend them, you know, jail them basically. I mean that happened a lot, at least 5 times during that month. It probably happened more often.

Did you guys do anything to combat that?

It would happen at odd hours during the night. I know some of the volunteers witnessed it upfront on the street. But personally, I didn't. You know, a lot of our friends in the town were directly affected by it. Some of their brothers were arrested while we were there.

And last thing: the IDF showed up at the opening, which there's footage of. They were just like, "What's going on here?" etc. This is a few days after I left. I don't think they closed the opening event, but they certainly caused a ruckus just by being there.

You mentioned this briefly earlier, but can you elaborate on how local Palestinians responded to the skatepark, and skating in general?

I can't really typify the average Palestinian's perception of skating, but I can say that

people who were already interested in skateboarding were super excited about it! They were on the site, helping us, digging up dirt, doing all that kind of stuff.

Tight, but what if I asked like a random *teita* how they felt about skating?

That mirrored the same reaction you'd probably get anywhere else: you're going to hurt yourself, etc. When we'd go street skating in Ramallah… I can recall off the top of my head a few people, grandparents, would be like, "What are you doing? You're going to break the marble," or, "You're going to break your back." And as far as people in the community who weren't skaters nor were senior citizens, they definitely received it pretty warmly. They were really grateful for the project. They certainly commended the volunteers' philanthropy. Whenever I'd go into the little grocery store near the skatepark, you know the guys that worked there… First of all, they all thought I was foreign, which was pretty annoying. But they'd be like, "Honestly what the foreigners are doing is pretty tight," they were psyched on it! You know, "They're better than people from here." That kind of attitude.

Can you share any details about the origins of skating in Palestine—who the pioneers are, etc?

Someone I know filmed a documentary about this called "Epicly Palestine'd." Well, there's two documentaries actually: there's "Epicly Palestine'd" by Theo Krish and Phil Joa, and "Kickflips Over Occupation," by Maen Hammad. They both detail the origins and history of skateboarding in Palestine. If

Courtesy of Ahmad Sahli.

I'm not mistaken, four dudes by the names of Majd Ramadan, Aram Sabbah, Abdullah Milhem, and Adham Tamimi were the first skateboarders. These documentaries are definitely worth checking out. There have also been a few skate teams who've been there, like Isle Skateboards from England. They recently filmed a skate video entirely in the West Bank called "Pieces of Palestine."

Are there any pro skaters in the MENA region?

Let's put it this way: back in the day, when I was in high school in the Middle East, there was definitely an upper-echelon of skateboarders who were going on tours, going on filming trips, going to contests internationally. That was an actual thing. There was a skate scene like that in the Middle East. Maysam Faraj, Evan Collisson, Tanner Lostan, Colm Noonan—these guys were insane rippers, they were so good. And they were all sponsored by this skate shop in Dubai called Rage. Evan created a regional zine at the time, and put it out through Rage.

Nowadays, I'm sure Rage has another team, I'm just not that tuned into what that's like. Whatever exists today is probably more or less an extension of that type of scene. There are certainly kids in the UAE who get free gear from some companies. From what I've seen on IG, there's a Karim and a Lawrence here who rip.

I wouldn't say there are like any pro skateboarders [as such], but people have certainly come out of the Middle East who are sponsored. They just don't still live here anymore necessarily.

Are there any Arabic terms you guys use? Do you call Ollies "Ali's?"

I think the most noteworthy word is *tazulluj/zulajeh*, which literally translates to "slide/slider". We used to use that word jokingly in Amman, but in Palestine it's actually what a lot of people call skateboarding/skateboards. I've certainly gotten more used to using that term and I'd like to see it be adopted for what we call it in Arabic in the future. It's not unreasonable.

Where does everyone get their gear from? You mentioned some skate shops in Dubai? Is there a skate shop in Palestine?

No skate shop in Palestine but SkatePal has been doing an awesome job of providing skateboards. Through SkatePal, skateboards are made available to anyone who has an interest in skateboarding. There's a skateboard distribution program, whereby anyone that wants a skateboard can buy one at-cost or borrow one for the course of the session they're attending.

How does something as liberating as skateboarding add to the daily resistance of a Palestinian youth? Is it experienced as part of a type of resistance? Or would you say that skateboarding is seen as more of a sport, an activity?

I think it's mostly perceived as a novel, "Western", pastime. But it's also an exciting break from the mundanities of the day-to-day. Within the context of the occupation and whatnot, the very concept of living is a decision to live and not wallow in incapacitation. In that sense, skateboarding is an expression of the will to be...

BEFORE WE WERE BANNED

AZMI HAROUN

Kiana Pirouz (left) and Mahya Soltani (right). Photo by Jack Newton.

Before We Were Banned was an independently organized art exhibition featuring artists connected to countries included in Trump's Muslim ban 1.0. The exhibition took place in NYC from January 26-28, 2018, and featured over ten artists—Mays Albeik, Layali Alsadah, Asiya Al-Sharabi, Farhad Bahram with Tom Lundberg, Carmen Daneshmandi, Ibi Ibrahim with Hosam Omran, Rhonda Khalifeh, Soraya Majd, Gina Malek, Ifrah Mansour, Tandis Shoushtary—with heritage from Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Iran, Syria, Yemen and Iraq. The curators, Brooklyn-based Iranian duo Mahya Soltani and Kiana Pirouz, joined forces to celebrate these communities and repudiate these nations' antagonistic image in the United States. These days, they are planning to take the show on the road to a few cities on the west coast. They've also built a community of Iranians in NYC that they plan to keep growing. Khabar Keslan is proud to present six interviews with the curators and artists alongside this review.

Seeing shared struggles in the wake of the Trump administration's series of "Muslim Bans," Kiana Pirouz slid into Mahya Soltani's DMs. Kiana is an artist and marketing executive who moved to the US from Tehran at a young age, and promptly showed up to JFK to protest the initial ban on January 27th 2017. Mahya, a graphic designer and MFA student at the School of Visual Arts, had moved to the US from Tehran just four months before the executive order was signed.

For Kiana, the order was a continuous reminder that she "didn't have any Iranian or diasporic friends to relate to." Mahya felt the same way, and, once the two women met, they realized that they shared similar goals to foster a sense of community. Shortly after connecting, they organized a Persian New Year feast and saw potential for broader restorative projects through friendship and collaboration.

In a twist of irony, their shared "familiarity of feeling alienated in the United States and in our home countries" brought them together. Drawing on her expertize from the media industry, Kiana grew concerned as to who was telling immigrants' stories. Who owns the narrative? Who helps heal these terrified communities? This suffocating uncertainty led Kiana and Mahya to the idea for a "Before We Were Banned" group art show. "We wanted to highlight that these communities have been oppressed and marginalized long before this ban was imposed," Mahya told me. They sought to foster "a community or a collective that not only exhibits work together, but can connect through their experiences."

Although this venture was Mahya and Kiana's first in art curation, they had clear goals. With the intention of celebrating the breadth of immigrant narratives, they "hoped to build physical and emotional space for artists affected to tell their stories, unfiltered," says Kiana, "a respite from having to explain one's story."

The exhibition's open call and mission statement point to the warm environment Kiana and Mahya created from the outset. The call was extended to US-based artists with a connection to the seven affected countries. Kiana and Mahya encouraged the artists to change the narrative "from the inaccurate, antagonistic image so often portrayed," with the aim of shattering "the persistent duality of life as an immigrant in the United States: pursuing success and thriving while made to feel unwelcome and misunderstood."

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Walking into Before We Were Banned was a diasporic homecoming—an exercise in memory beyond borders. Picking up a customary cup of tea, I gravitated towards Layali Al-Sadah's piece *Blood at War*, featuring a battered American flag with English and Arabic inscriptions. The flag itself, stolen from a Walmart, was a canvas for words like "threat", "radical", "targets," and "collateral damage," transposed by the repetition of the phrase, in Arabic, "Oh lord, please save my country Yemen." As a Syrian-American, I found solace in the Yemeni-American artist's rejection of this language, which exists to subdue and marginalize non-white Americans. The flag exposed America's shallow patriotism, as Layali notes that, on one hand, the US government "covertly supplies military funds to the conflict in Yemen" while simultaneously engages in the "closing of the border to fleeing civilians seeking refuge." Layali loudly and proudly interjected her narrative

in a society that is silent on the US role in terrorizing Yemen through a space tailored to uplift her voice.

While viewing this piece, I also overheard an amusing conversation that reflected the all-encompassing space Mahya and Kiana had successfully created. Two attendees of Yemeni origin were reminiscing about past trips home when one of them excitedly admitted, "Okay, orientalism aside, Yemen is so exotic." I smiled to myself, realizing that I was somewhere with complete fluidity and comfort with our definitions of home.

I wandered into Farhad Barham's Farsi-laden audiovisual installation with curiosity and building giddiness. I was immediately struck by the power of being in a room steeped in words from my grandmother's native tongue. Two walls were covered with stand-alone phrases and words like "immigration" and "home" in Farsi, with a muted video projection on a third wall featuring participants sharing "a list of words that represent their individual identity." Imagining the discomfort that the visual experience caused for other non-Farsi speakers made me even more comfortable. Though I do not speak Farsi, I appreciated Barham's pointed use of language to force viewers to engage "with people they can't completely understand and cannot reduce to a label." Farhad welcomed attendees into the space, and his work reminded us that the subjects' "words, images, and presence cannot be labeled or banned." Having visited Iran once in the last seven years, his work was a much more nuanced window into discussions about Iranian identity that disregard American and Iranian political narratives.

BWWB artists explored their connections to Iran in varied ways. Tandis Shoushtary, a graduating student at Cooper Union, was "trying to navigate the dissonance between western and non-western contexts encountered when the culture and language of familial roots are learned in settings of migration." Having visited Iran just once, Tandis was wary of being defined solely by her Iranian identity even before Trump's election. Tandis' piece *Mother's Tongue* was, as she says, an honest response to the "instances of misunderstanding and miscommunication that occurred when I visited my 'home country'." To "reclaim, remember, and editorialize a specific connection to the Iranian passport," she meticulously painted 800 frames of home video footage from her trip to Iran. One look at a single frame from her piece forced me to think about my own connection to Syria, much of which lives through memory and photography. Through muddled noises of children screaming in the courtyard and aunties with accentuated, thick eyebrows politicking in the living room, Tandis' struggle to assert herself as a second-generation immigrant while embracing identity through family roots deeply resonated with me.

BWWB was Carmen Daneshmandi's first New York show. The daughter of a Spanish mother and Iranian father, Carmen describes her mixed identity as something that she feels "very deeply for but also feels at a loss with." She laments not knowing her Iranian heritage well enough, and detests being devalued because of that heritage. BWWB created a space for her to heal, reflect and voice her narrative in her own terms. The result was a set of individual collages, which brought the viewer very close—her mustachioed male relatives in the car, her grandmother in a warmly lit olive doorway, transposed with background photos of Iranian landscapes like mountains, a smoky highway, or a

Installation view of Before We Were Banned. Photo by Adam Bettencourt. (From left to right) Truth in Timbre, 2017, 72" x 66", oil on canvas, Tea & Ramen, 2017, 30" x 20", oil on canvas, Don't Do It, 2017, 56" x 52", oil on canvas, In the Garden, 2017, 46" x 36", oil on paper, by Gina Malek. (far right) First Friday, 2017, Variable Dimensions, Hand dyed cotton and silk, wool, plaster, upholstery hardware, by Rhonda Khalifa.

rug that serve to build "family legacy and ancestral legitimacy." Though the photos she used in the backdrop were less intimate, they showed how daily life is broken down into mundane and familial elements, which structure our shared identity. I recalled the countless summers in cars in Yaafour, Syria, trying to make sense of the juxtaposition of arid mountains and rusted cars emblazoned with Hafez and Bashar Al-Assad's faces.

Diasporic merchandise from Fully Booked, artist Taravat Talepasand and musician Yassin Alsalman AKA Narcy were also featured throughout the weekend. I floated around proudly wearing my favorite "Islamic Youth" T-shirt, made by Taravat. I've worn the shirt in plenty of places, and have been served looks from brunch tables to TSA lines—but wearing the shirt at BWWB was cathartic, and not solely defiant.

Reflecting on the tugging and strange associations with home as a diasporic individual, BWWB furthered the conversation about how our collective alienation and discomfort with our relationship to home is what relates us to each other. Iranian pop legend Googoosh was blasting during the event set-up and, on the last day, an attendee used one of the exhibition rooms for prayer. Mahya and Kiana intentionally did not label artists' work based on their nations of origin; instead, the artists' own narratives shined. To be seen and validated, a year after being collectively and arbitrarily banned, was a critical step in rejecting the currents of history and defining our own identities. Before we were banned, our narratives were constricted in a multitude of ways, but Kiana and Mahya provided a space to breathe and imagine a future we deserve.

PERPETUAL MOVEMENT

AN EXHIBITION BY LIZZY VARTANIAN COLLIER

Perpetual Movement was an art exhibition that ran between March 1-25, 2018 that explored the relationship between memory and migration through seven female artists, all connected to the Arab world. In a joint effort with AWAN (Arab Women Artists Now) and Rich Mix, Perpetual Movement crafted a space for MENA women to express themselves freely and creatively, and the result was powerful. Artists Yumna Al-Arashi, Najd Al-Taher, Nada Elkalaawy, Shaikha Fahad Al-Ketbi, Thana Faroq, Araz Farra and Nadia Gohar brought to life buried memories and traditions in a colorful display. The curator's, Lizzy Vartanian Collier, work is increasingly important in a climate where Arab narratives, particularly female Arab narratives, are marginalized and overlooked.

Luar Klinghofer Bar Dov Install. All images courtesy of Lizzy Vartanian Collier.

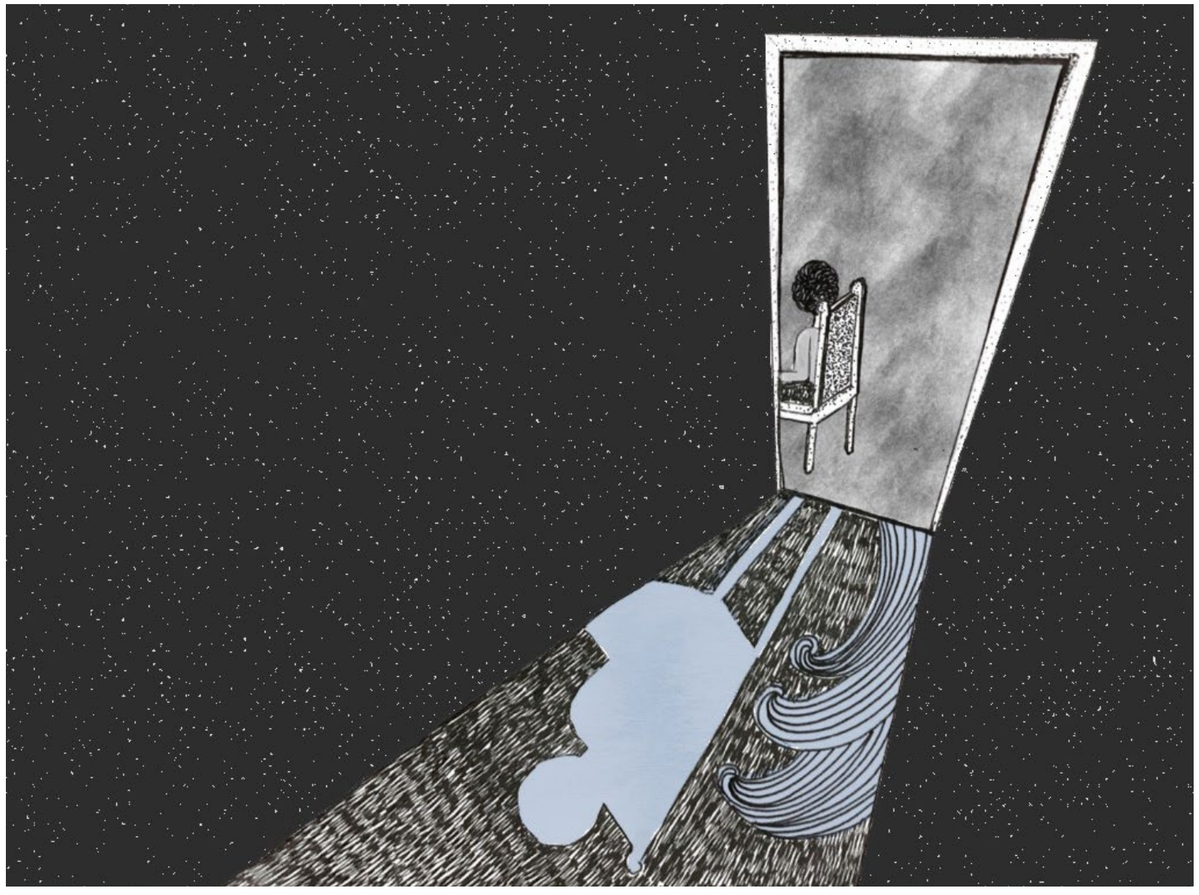
Al Yaqeen, Najd Al-Taher.

December Child, Nada Elkalaawy.

Al Yaqeen, Najd Al-Taher.

FISHING

HAMZA BILBEISI



Original artwork by Dilan Arslan.

I found out *Khalo* was broken when I was about eleven. The family was at his house to visit and Mama had my hand tightly in hers. I broke away from her grasp and ran to the study. The door was hinged open and I don't think she realized I let go. She was in one of those half-hearted chats with *Khalto* that leave you between occupying the conversation and your surroundings. Neither is present enough. Khalo's study was never locked, even after his frequent visits to the hospital, and I wandered in from time to time to flip through dusty books filled with barely-legible handwriting.

I was surprised to find him sitting at his desk without his caretaker. His eyes were fixed on nothing in particular outside the window, and he had a tattered notebook with relaxed pages laid flat in front of him. He must have heard me come in because he smiled before turning his gaze to me. I hadn't spoken to him directly in years, so it surprised me when he asked if I wanted to hear a story. I had no choice except to let everything unfold as he liked. The door's edge was still in my hand, and my feet were stubborn; they would not move.

He kept referring to his book as he told his story with vacant eyes. He said it was his old journal.

The waves could have swallowed my entire boat. You know, I built the boat myself. I liked doing things like that, with my hands. I never had any trouble with the sea either. I understood its rhythm. There were the few minor incidents, mostly to do with my engine or the length of my fishing line, and I did some quick patch-up work once. But that one day I was consumed by the water's anger. The sea seemed calm further out, I promise you. Can the sea choose a victim? I still think about that now.

The entire sky went grey, like a reflection of the displeased sea. The water barely eased itself onto me, it was a rushed nightmare. I turned off my engine and gripped the sides of my boat. I promise you no engine would have stood a chance against what I saw. I threw my fish overboard and prayed for Allah to spare me. The waves would clap against my boat, then lift up to try and devour me from the other side. Of course I was scared; it was the type of fear that settles you closer to the comfort of your own mortality. Not out of will, but the dwindling options. Every time the boat

completely filled with water and I braced myself for an end, another wave would strike my boat to empty all the seawater, and I was forced to endure my preparation from the start. The indecisive pull between hope and despair that I felt on the cusp of death might have been worse than the storm itself.

It began to rain in fistfulls as well. Water is strange. It will unwind your nerves when you submerge, but will melt you down under the torrential downpour of rain and waves. Always be wary of where you place your trust. The sea was my friend and in an instant it stripped me of myself. I have yet to get my vengeance—

He began coughing heavily and stopped to take a sip of water. He readjusted his glasses, but only to look up from his book. He stopped talking. He was like this sometimes.

Khalo didn't come after me when I shuffled out, but I heard him carry on narrating his story moments after I left his study. He was speaking as if I was still standing opposite him. I sat down and held Mama's hand tight again. I don't think she realized I ever let go. When we left his house to drop Khalto off then go home, I told Mama what happened. She laughed and told me Khalo was never a fisher. She pinched my cheek and told me he had a tendency to tell tall tales about water, and that it was important to visit him nonetheless because it was lonely for him. She said family is important, so we should be patient with Khalo.

Just over a year passed, and I was cleaning up after dinner when they told me Khalo passed away. He died in his bathtub the evening I found out. It was a strange incident, and they shrugged it off as an 'unfortunate result of his unpredictable behavior'. They found no sign of resistance. The bathtub was barely filled with water and he was lying, completely composed, with his head just slightly underwater. The curtain and floormat remained neatly in place. However, all four bathroom walls and the ceiling were drenched in water when the caretaker found him.

NO CASH ALLOWED

SANDRA ESMERALDA DE ANDA

I insert
quarters like small metal balonies
that Oscar Meyer shit I couldn't afford back
when I was talking to my neighbor who said I was boyish with my large
T's—never forget to cross them
the difference between time and lime is just one line
and the rest is 100% pulp mass produced.

I was collecting coins while you were collecting experiences
Dried apricot slices that i put into the washing machine
cold water for my colored fabrics,
i let the white socks just get lost because for every sock I lose
i get another lover in return
A reminder to pay for my student loans
Another taco truck where i hadn't seen one before.

Eucharist wafers in the coin slots,
holy water on my noodle souped turtlenecks
soft broth baptism i remember you telling me that I had the hunger
to eat myself and you if i could and i mean I tried but
i spit you out like alphabet soup so much
gibberish in my mouth i almost confused
you for the gum I chew in the morning to be hungry by noon.

You weren't spicy at all so i ate myself 100 times over and over
something that is over before it is over,
feeling tossed in the washing machine with all the crumbs the asteroids in the universe
wondering like a Brown Ophelia that no matter how many cycles I pay for there is still no revolution.

Brika, Yumna Al-Arashi, digital print on crystal archive paper, 2017.

FACE

ANDREA DENIZ

Inspired by her grandmother and great-grandmother, but unable to return to Yemen for this project, Yumna Al-Arashi's photographs tell stories of power and home in her exposition of land-specific stories. Her photo project, *Face*, unearths rich female histories by documenting the tattoos of Middle Eastern and North African matriarchs. Depicting powerful female faces adorned with delicate inked imagery symbolizing what each woman values in her life, *Face* highlights the importance of learning from memories, since it was there that women's divinity held more power.

The value of these stories is intimately connected to identity and representation. As a Yemeni-American artist, Yumna feels "as though I had two separate identities that had nothing to do with one another." Yumna thinks it's "important to see the differences and similarities in both of these places." Through the female gaze, "we can relate to both of these places even though we'd like to think they're so different."

Openness and accessibility also underlie these deeply personal narratives. Yumna formed relationships with the matriarchs without the need for 'family connections,' professional fixers, or money. Instead, she approached them the same way she does with any of her photo subjects, "by talking to them, getting to know them, telling them about my project, and why I'm doing it."

"I think our region has forgotten about these past generations of women, and when they have the opportunity to, and are reminded of their beauty, they celebrate them. But I think in our entire society, all over the Earth, we have forgotten women's power in general."

This brazen omission in our collective memory is not unique to the Middle East—this is a world-wide problem. But, says Yumna, "I think this is something that is beginning to become unearthed again. These conversations are not limited to 'east or west'."

Yumna does not believe that the so-called 'Eastern World' deserves "the target of worldwide hatred and propaganda to make it seem as though it is the worst of all. I do not believe it is. I believe we are all at fault for our treatment of women throughout the entire world. That's the first step we need to admit before we place fingers at east or west."

In a world where the identity of migrants is fraught with projected misrepresentations in the media, *Face*'s honesty fastens us. Having myself grown up in the United States as a child of Latinx and Middle Eastern immigrants, maintaining the memory of family and land were crucial to honoring my heritage. Today agricultural practices are still largely important to women in the MENA region. My grandmother's once active lifestyle led her through fields and pastures of flowers and fruits, where she would stop at the prettiest petals to say hello. My girlfriends keep planting the same seeds their matriarchs once planted in Bulgaria before they immigrated to Anatolia. And it is in our memories that we retain this knowledge of matriarchal activities and their veneration for the land they worked on.

Face asks us to remember our grandmothers. The tattoos that adorn their faces demand that we acknowledge the strength these women carry. For those of us who are stuck away from home, away from our matriarchs, artists like Al-Arashi help us to reconnect with an innate part within ourselves.

Special thanks to Lizzy Vartanian Collier and Omar Alhashani for facilitating this interview.

Image courtesy of Yumna Al-Arashi.

UBIQUITOUS FOLLIES

SARA KHAN

When someone comes from a very different place compared to where you grew up, you find you can still relate to each other on a more basic and human level. This connection comes from elsewhere, it is not common to cultural backgrounds or skin colour; instead, it comes from the minute details of our personalities. The atmosphere of the home you grew up in, the kind of mother you had, your interests; universal attributes which vary, but share a oneness in their "universal-ness."

I study the repulsive and beautiful found in ordinary spaces and situations, and question the normalcy of the seemingly mundane matters in life. For example; as a child, the coziness of pretending the bed is a ship on a vast expansive sea belies the notion of it capsizing and drowning us. Or how close relationships between women can be warm and nurturing, but mixed in the flock are those present who want worshipers and followers instead of the honesty of friends and family. Or how a man inside a woman leads to the birth of another human; turning the woman into a mound of soil in which a human germinates like a plant from a seed, and in the process disfigures the woman to the limits of possibility.

It is in dealing with these observations that I draw them out, to find a place for things that are neither here nor there. Slowly laying out translucent layers of watercolour, I work toward pronouncing some areas, while covering others entirely, almost decoratively as if to say "you didn't belong, but now you do." I leave some questions to chance, answer others more definitively, hovering somewhere between restraint and complete spontaneity. The idea is to develop a space or landscape with both extremes in it, the abhorrent and the fantastic. Coexisting to form one complete picture; thriving in the gray areas, it's a subtle dance between "is it" and "is it not."

Womens Games, watercolour on paper, 22" by 30", 2017.

The Baby Conundrum, watercolour on paper, 22" by 30", 2017.

Child's Play, watercolor on paper, 22" by 30", 2017.

The Main Courtyard, watercolour and gouache on paper, 22″ by 30″, 2017.

Procreation and Other Relationships, watercolor on paper, 22" by 30", 2017.

Original photograph by Mariam Khudikyan.

SUSPENDED ORBIT

KNAR HOVAKIMYAN

Night was still scary to her—still, even at this age. It wasn't until the rooster sang that her heart sighed with relief. With the oncoming sunrise finally providing an excuse to get out of bed, she rinsed her face and ate a handful of dried fruits and nuts as light gradually seeped in through her windows. It was already another year today, so she slipped her sandals on and filled her bucket with water at the spout a few paces outside the shack. The water flows in steady spurts into the bucket.

Time flows in cycles for her. And cycles within cycles. The yearly visit to the grave was always a reminder of a reset; she was back at a road already littered with her own footsteps. And as she goes through the familiar motions of filling the bucket, she is all at once present, ten years behind, and ten years ahead—assuming she's still around then. It's a beautiful moment of alignment, this ritual—each year, she loses sleep the night before.

The bucket full, she waddles across the hills and canyons towards the village cemetery. It was far. She walks with an asymmetrical gait, water spilling left and right from the bucket. Now and then, she stops to wipe the summer sweat off her brow and let out a sigh from deep within herself.

When she reaches the gravestone, she begins the memorial process by cleaning. She bends from her hips to pull out the surrounding overgrown branches from their roots and uses them to sweep smaller plant matter off her husband's engraved face and epitaph. She pours the water from her bucket onto the clear gravestone, rubbing it in with her flat palms. The water seeps into the porous stone which is suddenly darker and more alive; but dampness evaporates quickly. As her grandma used to say, the mountain sun is strong.

She takes out a few dusty rocks from inside her bra—yellow, semi-translucent rocks of hardened sap and flower oils. From the other worn-out cup, two cylindrical pieces of charcoal leave her right breast blackened. She kindles the charcoal with her lighter, lights a cigarette while she's at it, and tosses the

yellow rocks onto the embers. Thick smoke extends up and outward from the incense and wind carries it across the gravestone. The smoke smells sweet and pungent but she doesn't notice it over the smell of her cigarette. Mountains tower dramatically behind her as she takes a few steps away from the grave and watches the smoke from a distance.

Her parents hadn't been from the village—she'd grown up in the town twenty kilometers away, almost an hour on these roads. They'd only see her when she'd come by in midsummer to sell apricots at the market. That was a cycle she'd escaped, the harvesting and selling of the apricots. She was too old to go into town now so she let the village boys come into her land and harvest the fruit to make a few kopeks for themselves.

She adjusts the bra under her heavy bosom. The mountain sun has pooled sweat below her breasts and under her arms. As the smoke by the gravestone dies down, she tosses her cigarette on the grass and walks away, leaving it to burn out on its own.

She walks back into the valley, heavy on her thick ankles. Around her now, dark obsidian shines through duller rocks in grassy hills. She crosses a weary bridge over a trickling stream, and finally, a few paces ahead is a small, dusty-orange building with elaborate crosses carved into the hefty porous stones by people long-gone and forgotten.

Inside, the church is a dark and dank cave. Although the room is small, somehow no outside light enters, and only the dim lights from the candles on the far shelf illuminate the scrawls of prayers on the walls. She leaves a silver and gold coin in the tray by the entrance and takes a single candle. She lights her candle with the flame from one of the others and buries its base deep within the sand-filled shelf. As the candle burns down, she mutters a prayer under her breath, holding a handkerchief tight against her chest.

It is only when something thuds against the outer wall of the church that she is moved from her position. She's startled, but even in her rush to leave and be of some assistance to the person who surely, stricken by heat, must have fallen against the side of the building—a shepherd maybe—she makes sure to exit the building backwards, crossing her heart.

The outdoor light is fire; sun-bright after the dim cave, and her eyes take a whole dizzy minute to adjust. For what feels like a long while, she stands clutching the church wall in vertigo, but eventually she is able to see what's right at her feet: a full-grown sheep, bloody and half-devoured. The shock pushes her to her knees and warm blood seeps into the worn and sun-faded fabric of her skirt. Her recovery takes a while, 30, maybe 50 breaths—but she is back.

How did the sheep end up in such a state? A wolf? She looks at the sheep's rectangular irises and mutters a prayer, crossing her heart. She lingers for a moment longer, staring at the listless sheep. She herself feeling listless, is mesmerized by the bloodied creature. The sheep's blood pools beneath its belly, and the branches of the red fluid merge into a single stream that trails towards a distant cave. She considers following the blood with her swollen feet.

She thinks about the thick red coating on the yellowing grass—not just about the strangeness of the blood in such a familiar place, but the eerie juxtaposition of glossy and dry textures. The blood does not dry out as quickly as water, even under the summer sun.

The blood leads her to a crevice that interrupts the rock face and she crosses beneath carvings of saintly figures to enter the cave. The darknesses and brightnesses of the day continue to be dizzying. She blinks hard a few times as her eyes grow accustomed to the lack of light. Still, nothing is visible. She steps deeper into the cave, her fingers dragging along the ground, following the trail of lukewarm blood. The cave's darkness is different than the church, thicker somehow, pushing the summer's warmth out, so with each step a coldness seeps into her muscles, sprouting goosebumps on her flesh. The blood trail gets colder as she follows it deeper, cold and congealed.

She might have been thinking about her father's army stories, or reminiscing about the cold and dark years, or imagining the inside of her husband's coffin. But she wasn't thinking about what was at the end of the blood trail. She continues for an impossibly long time, bloodied wool and dead rectangles on her mind, until something compels her to stop. Was it the cold that caused the dark hair on her arms to stand up? Or the hollow sound of breathing?

She blinks, 20, 30 times. And remembers the lighter in her pocket. Carefully, fearlessly, she removes it and extends her hand forward, armed with the lighter. Did she feel warmth from a couple steps ahead? Her thoughts come racing back and she wonders why she isn't afraid of the wolf. Maybe she was too old for fear, listless like the sheep. The lighter flicks on and casts light on the walls like prayer candles in a church, and dimly lit, a breath away, she does find a creature.

Though not a wolf.

The creature is smaller than her but reasonably human-sized. And if she squints and tilts her head just right, he looks like one of the village children, or her own child had she married young enough to bear one. Granted, the blood dripping from his hairless muzzle suggests more animalistic rather than human tendencies, but the long fingers and upright stance were overwhelmingly familiar.

It adopts her uneven gait on their walk back to her home as though it were a natural way for it to walk. Together they waddle amidst the dry summer hills as the sun beats down on them relentlessly. And she wonders, how does this surprise fit into her cycles? Was there anything in her life that had been entirely cycle-less? Another sigh to release the useless, garbled thoughts.

She and the creature settle in the shack peacefully, like they were long-accustomed to each other's presence. After busying herself for some time trying to cater to her guest, Silva finally rests her weary body on the couch when a woman walks in. With the grating voice of a nosy neighbor, "Silva? Have you had coffee?"

"Come in Zabel jan, come in."

Zabel enters the shack and goes straight to the kitchen, "I'll make the coffee. Bitter, yes?"

"Put some sugar in it today," Silva says, still sitting on the couch, droplets of sweat glistening on her temples.

The neighbor fills the little metal coffee pot with water and sets it on the stove. She adds two heaping spoonfuls of finely-ground coffee and half a spoonful of sugar. As the coffee bubbles up and rises in the pot, "Did you already go to the grave today?"

Silva gestures dynamically with her response, "I went when the sun was hardly up but already it was hot!"

"Why do you go all alone in the morning? If you waited a little we would have gone together. I swear, every year you leave earlier!"

Zabel brings the coffee to the living room and sets it on the table, spilling a few drops from each overfull cup. "Eh? Speak Silva jan."

Silva looks at Zabel and shrugs. "What should I say, hmm?"

"Have you heard about Mko's daughter? Married an American. Can you imagine? What luck!"

Silva doesn't show much interest or offer much of a response and, within this silence, the atmosphere turns. A nervousness comes over Zabel, as though it were late night and she was left home alone, with her husband still off in the hills. The young woman stiffens, her tightened muscles trying to protect her vulnerable body from the unknown threat. Zabel slowly looks around herself, and initially all is as expected until finally, within a shadow, she notices something grotesque propped lopsidedly against the corner of an armchair.

"Silva, what is that?"

"He's fallen from the sky."

They both stare at it and it seems to stare back although they can't tell for sure. The respected older woman looks at the creature peacefully, and seeing Silva with this sense of security, Zabel's muscles, too, relax a little.

"What do you mean Sil?"

"He comes from the stars."

The neighbor considers this for a moment, "Which stars?"

"You know the star that flickers red on clear nights in the spring?"

Zabel nods.

"That's his home."

"So why is it here?"

Silva shrugs. "The boy doesn't speak."

Zabel looks at the creature, but only fleetingly since the colors and textures of the thing are difficult for her to stomach. He is all at once overripe, mold-soft yet covered in a scab-like crust.

"The boy?"

"Eh, I thought, looks kind of like Hakop's son."

They both laugh until their cheerful echoes die down. Zabel looks at the old woman's listless eyes, almost rectangular in shape, and she thinks about the tired hips walking this thing home...

"Has he eaten?"

Silva motions to the table they're sitting at. "I set a whole table: lavash, cheese, fruits, tolma... he won't touch a thing. But when I found him he'd left behind half a sheep."

"So maybe he is ready for tea? And dessert? I'll get something ready."

Silva releases a long, slow sigh. "Thank you Zabel jan, I haven't baked in years."

Zabel dashes into the kitchen, happy to help the old woman, but also glad for an excuse to leave the room. She begins opening drawers and cabinets while her coffee cup is still rattling on the table.

"Hold on, I think Sarine has my rolling pin."

She runs back through the living room, and before even reaching the door, Zabel cups her hands to her lips: "Sarineee!"

And Sarine materializes immediately, before Zabel has a chance to get back to the kitchen and throw bowls and wooden spoons and cutting boards on the counter.

"Hi Silva jan, Zabel jan. Did you need the rolling pin?"

"Yes! Bring it here, bring it to the kitchen, we're making gata!"

"Good, let me have some coffee first."

Sarine drops off the rolling pin in the kitchen and goes to the living room. She picks up Zabel's coffee cup, still rattling from all the uproar in the house.

"So, Silva jan, did you go to the grave today?"

"Yes, I went early in the morning and it was so hot! The sun was somehow already straight overhead!"

"This heat is intolerable, completely intolerable!"

For a moment, the two women just sip on their coffee quietly while Zabel bangs around in the kitchen, but finally Sarine begins to feel the eyes that have been staring at her relentlessly and she turns to stare back. She finds herself looking at the creature, who is still sitting quietly in his corner.

"Silva?"

Silva does not wait for a question. "Yes, yes. I found him outside the church this morning. He comes from the stars. He looked like a kid and he looked hungry so I brought him here."

"Did he eat?"

"No! I set this whole table but he didn't touch a thing!"

"So that's why the girl is making gata?"

"She thinks maybe he'll want dessert."

"Why did you just leave him on the couch like this? Send him out to sit with the men!"

"The men? What do you mean? He's just a boy."

"He needs to get off the couch. What other choice is there? You want to leave him wandering out there around the kids?"

"Okay I'll take him out. Help Zabel, yeah? I feel bad for her working all alone."

By the time Silva actually leaves the shack with the creature, her kitchen is filled with village women baking and complaining and laughing. The women's husbands have congregated because of talk of a curiosity at Silva's, and they're settled outside for a smoke, waiting for the commotion in her home to die down.

She approaches the three crooked-nosed men and hands off the creature to Sako, who proudly takes on the task of watching it. Once each of the men gets a chance to thoroughly inspect the thing, they allow it to sit at their feet as they transition to a game of backgammon to fill the time. Silva lingers outside with the men to enjoy a cigarette.

Sako stands above the backgammon board, watching the other two men play. His back hunched, he stares at the game board and slowly releases smoke from his lungs with a sigh. Sako's voice, raspy and brisk, "But why did he come here?"

"Why? Our village has the best drinking water in all of Armenia. In all the world! Straight from these mountain springs."

"You are talking like idiots. He didn't choose to come to our village, he just ended up here. If he had a choice, he'd be in America."

"God makes these decisions."

"No, no, I mean why did he come here to Earth?"

"God makes these decisions. These are not questions for you to ask."

"What if he's dangerous? He's already killed a sheep! That's two I've lost this summer! We have to protect our people."

"Dangerous? What stupid things you say! Look at him! He's hardly a boy. More of a boy than Hakop's son even!"

All three of them let the conversation be interrupted to laugh at the expense of Hakop's son. Silva herself hardly stifles a giggle.

"Look at us laughing. This is what he wants. It's an act to get us off guard. He came here, disguised, to see what's happening, scope it out. He'll return to his masters and they'll all come down here. This won't be the first time our lands were taken over and our people killed. Like I said, he's already killed a sheep! And he hasn't eaten anything. Did Silva tell you that? Not a single thing."

"Oh, be quiet Sako. Enough of that."

They are all quiet for a while. Although Armen was immediately so dismissive of Sako, even he was harboring some fears that sunk into his bones within the silence.

"Where is he from?"

"Silva says he fell from the stars."

"She's just saying random things. He's not from the cosmos. For all we know he's some deformed kid some family abandoned in the forest a few years ago."

"He's not a kid. Okay, we joked about it, but if we're being serious, you really would call that a kid?"

"I wonder what his world is like."

They all quietly imagine. Not one of them has a good enough idea to share out loud. And not one of them has noticed that the creature is no longer sitting at their feet. Silva herself doesn't notice—she's lost in a reverie, initially imagining the creature's home, then returning to the mutilated sheep from the morning, then finally settling on her dead husband, his grave, his coffin.

The sun moves towards setting as the silence drags on. And as darkness gradually sets in, the stars begin to reveal themselves, bringing the creature's reality closer to their own. Goosebumps settle on the flesh of the men. The children have moved their games indoors. The women are on their third cup of coffee, eating gata fresh out of the oven. Vahag clears his throat and brings them all back to the moment, to conversation.

"This is a test. We each must think carefully about what we do in this situation. God is testing us."

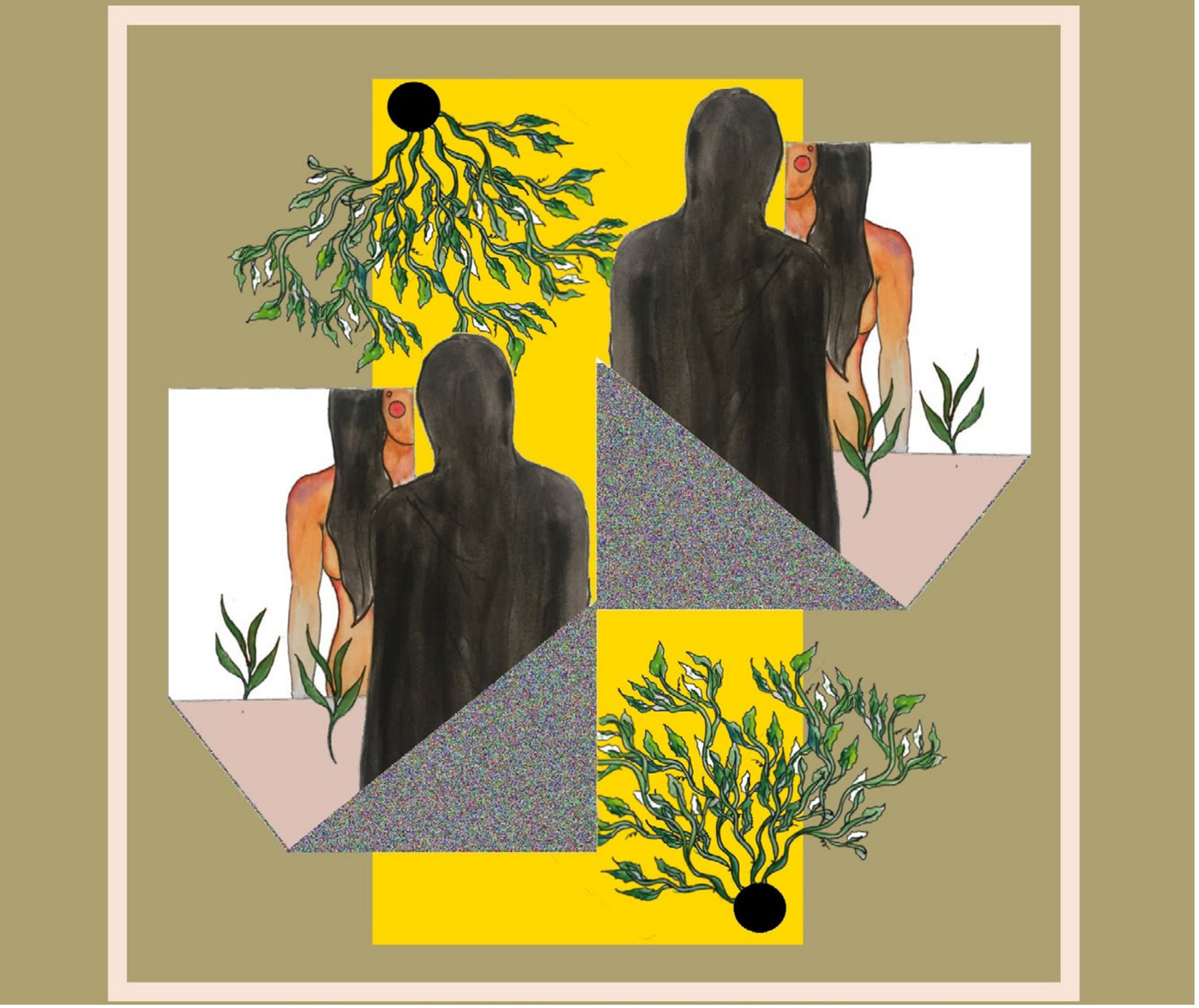
"Why do you think God cares about you personally so much that he would design such a test for you?"

"You know what, he's testing Silva too. And look at her, she's doing great. What better way to be a human than to take someone in and feed them, without wasting time asking questions that are not for us to ask?"

Vahag's statement affects Sako and Armen more than either of them would like to admit. They get up, intent on doing something useful and finally notice the absence of the creature. Silva insists on going after the creature on her own, so the men start up a fire for a barbecue, at least to feed themselves and their families.

Silva goes off to look for the creature, but they don't run into each other, even as they both wander over her land. She thinks about the festivities in her home, a party on the anniversary of her husband's death. She is unsure whether she'll clean up before she goes to bed or once she wakes up in the morning. Her friends will offer help before they leave. She needs the help, but she will deny it. The sun is almost fully descended and Silva's lost in an evening cycle without much analysis.

In the morning, there is no sign of the creature and she can't remember if they ever were able to find him or convince him to eat anything. And before she has a chance to think about it, she rinses her face and eats a handful of dried fruits and nuts.



GROW ALONG

HAJER AKA ECLECTIC YEMENI

It's possible to get over the pain of losing someone, but is it possible to get rid of the pain of losing yourself?

Who do you trust to bring yourself back when you're lost?

What do you trust to bring yourself back when you're lost?

To me, whenever I feel lost, I take a step back and take a closer look at my struggles. I look into how that is affecting me, and it shapes who I am.

The hardships I've faced of accepting myself as a whole—mind, body, and soul—are countless. And with every new struggle, I lose and gain a part of who I am and who I will be respectively.

The past is cruel; the future is pivotal. But for me, my struggles are the inception and conclusion of my existence. They are growth...

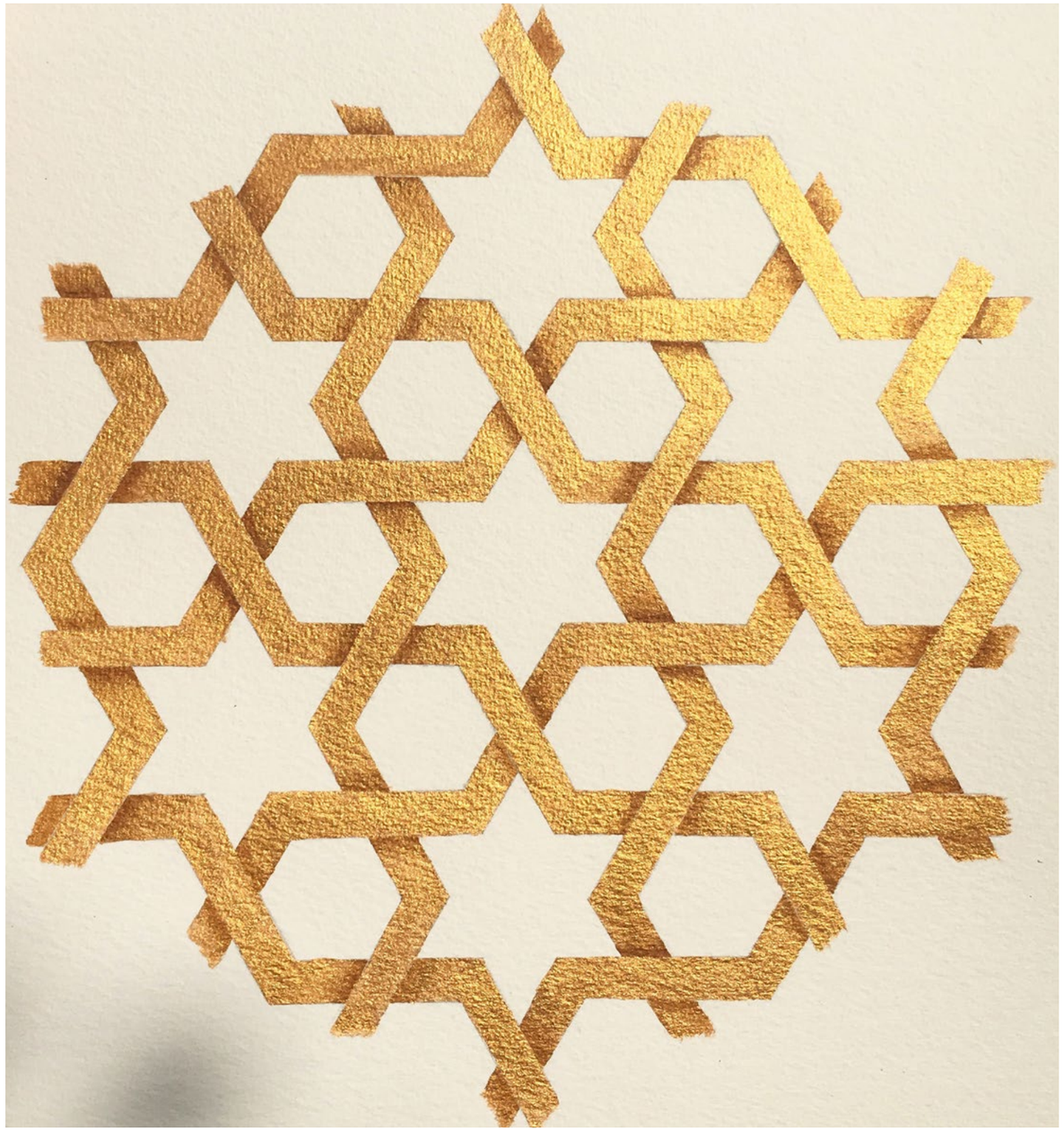
HIDDEN TRUTHS

SHEHANA UDAT

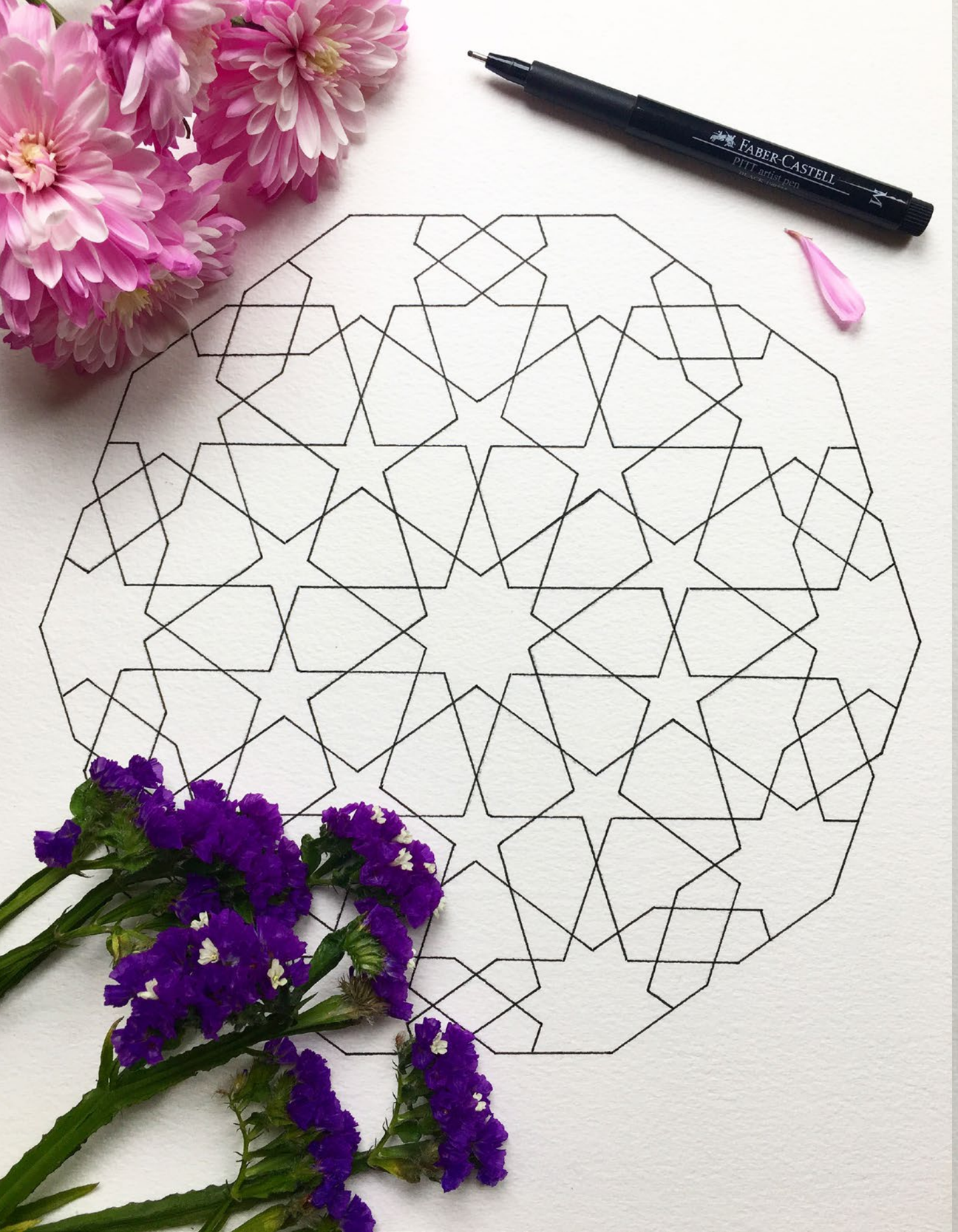
As a young girl, I was always marveling at Islamic geometric patterns that I came across, whether it was on architecture, inside mosques or simply on the covers and pages of holy books. I was guided back to this interest years later and decided to have a first-hand go at practice. My intention was to simply re-create its beauty. But it was through drawing each line and circle (that would eventually form the completed underlying construction) that I recognized that these majestic patterns have hidden meanings that lie under the surface.

Under the surface of each geometric pattern lies a hidden construction, which can be translated as veiled meanings and truths. These patterns may at first glance appear complicated, but upon further exploration, one can discover so much that brings clarity. It has been said that by studying and contemplating them one can obtain an understanding of the origins of everything and, in this, a sacred truth.

All Islamic geometric patterns derive from the same origin – a simple circle; the essence of all geometric forms symbolizing unity and being the ultimate source of diversity in creation. This for me reflects the important knowledge and ultimate truth of the Universe. The world at first glance may seem complicated and turbulent, however, upon deep reflection and a commitment to seek truth, we come to recognize and understand the oneness of humanity. In the same way, Islamic geometry intrinsically reflects this vital truth—it is a unified yet diverse art form very much like human nature.



Golden weave. Second page, Bu Inaniya (left) and Autumn (right).

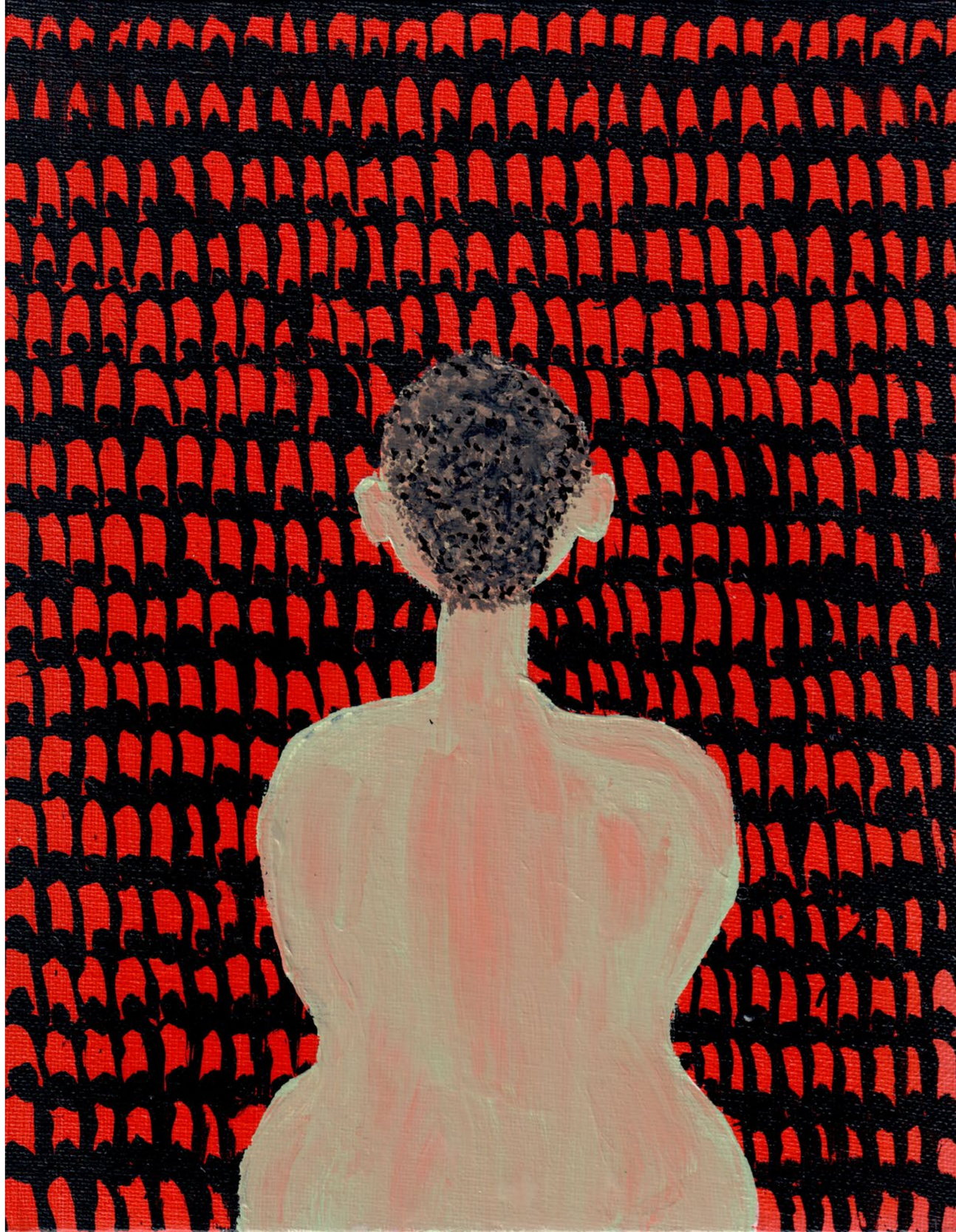

FABER-CASTELL
PITT artist pen

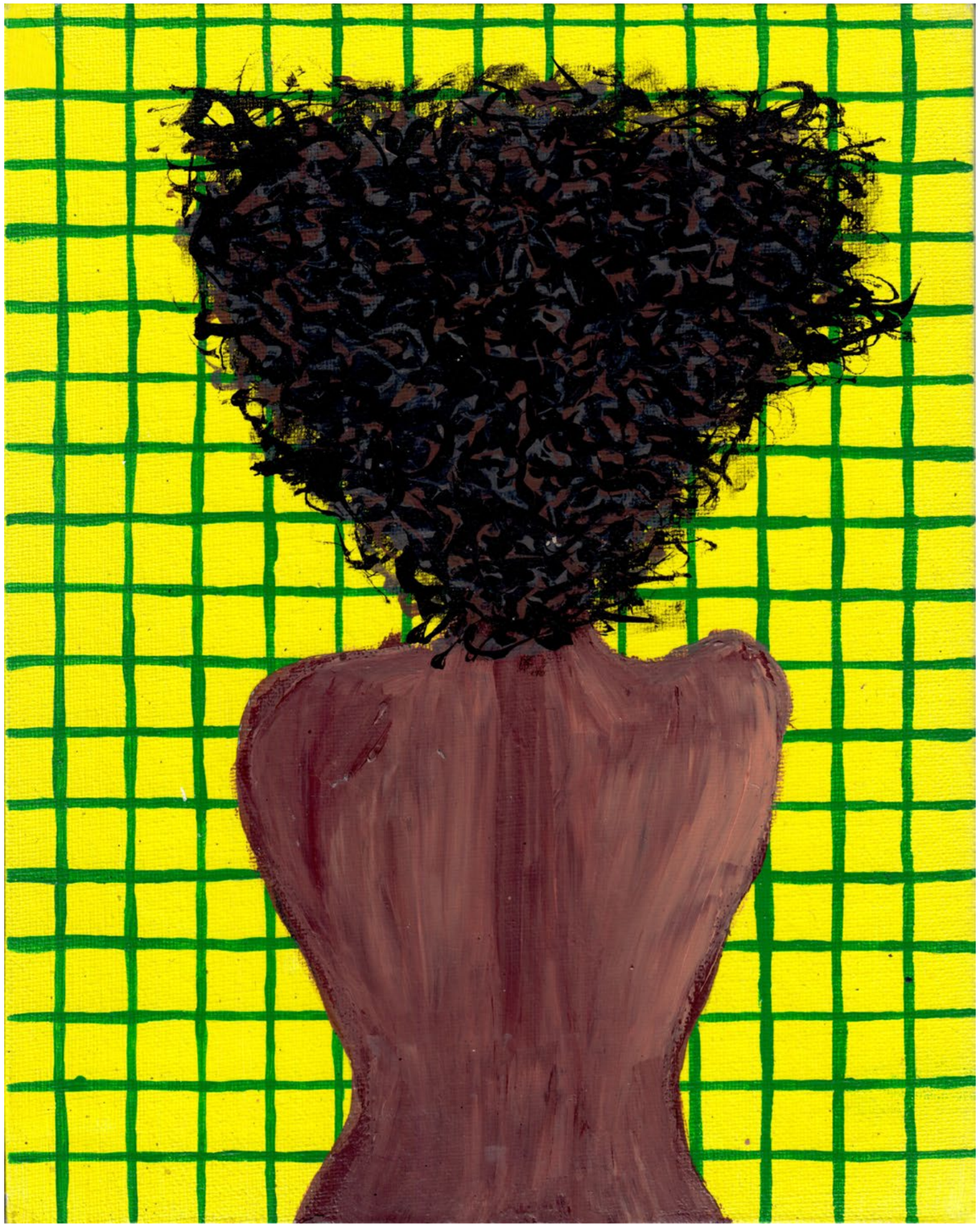
ROOTS

MARYAM JAMAL

This series celebrates hair and the variety of creative techniques applied to its texture. Showing diversity was the goal, by exhibiting many skin tones. This series is dedicated to the art and history of hair, where it can be used as a statement.

Medina Dugger's *Chroma*, a vibrant project where she celebrated the hairstyles of Nigerian culture, inspired these pieces. Duggwe pays homage to J.D. 'Okhai Ojeikere's revered 'Hairstyles' series in her *Chroma* project.





High Voltage (left), Zulu (right). Previous page, Les Inferno.

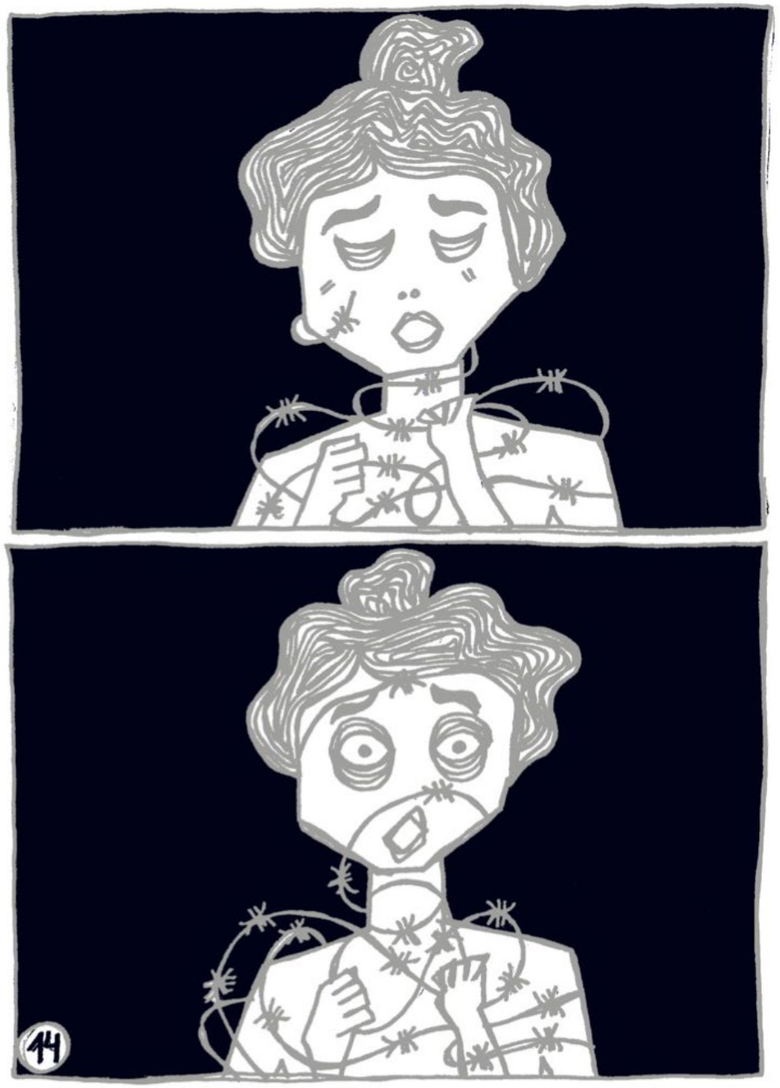
AASIYA

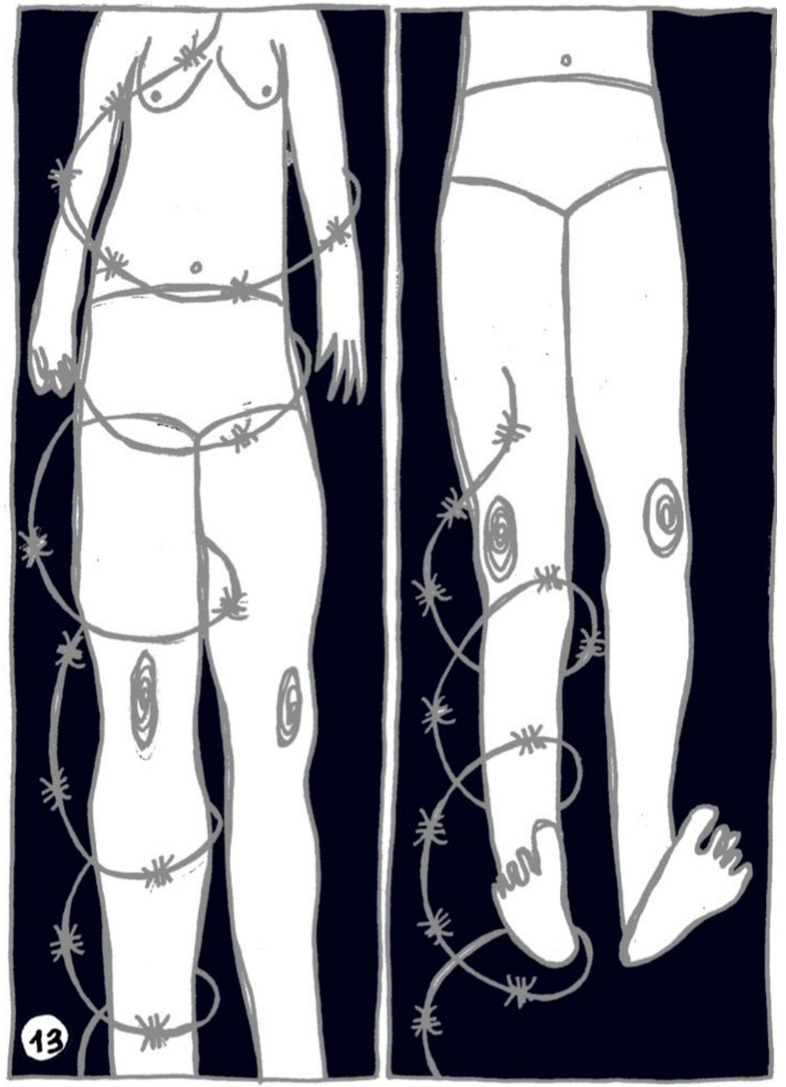
RAWAND ISSA

Aasiya (Insubordinate) is the illustrated account of how a young Lebanese woman found herself facing charges of "fomenting unrest" and "destruction of property" in the state's Military Court after her first time protesting in the widespread 2015 demonstrations in Beirut. Drawing on real characters, author/artist Rawand Issa portrays the important role of intergenerational mentorship in the activist scene. Facing severe charges in a court reserved for soldiers, the protagonist Sawsan finds strength and inspiration in her attorney, an experienced activist herself. While the Lebanese state continues to quash citizens' legitimate self-expression, *Aasiya* provides a glimmer of the solidarity and inspiration that keeps the activist community fighting.


في منزل سوسن
ملقمتينا
كليكي
يا ماما!
ما نيّمتينا
كل الليل!
وقّفي نزلات
الشارع!
11


بعد عدّة أيام
من عودة سوسن من المخفر.
Calling
Private Nb
ألو..
الاربعاء بدك تجي
على المحكمة العسكرية.
عندك جلسة
مع قاضي التحقيق.
12


14


13

STUPOR

HAWAZIN ALOTAIBI

As the title of the work might suggest, *Stupor*, (Pronounced in German) is a painting about the state of the unconscious mind. It is made to convey what is buried in our unconsciousness, whether it be memories or the present. Thus, the internal personal space in our heads. A space that is occupied with thoughts and daydreams of imagination, personal dialogues, replays of the past and such, and how they are relevant to our external reality and their transition into our world.

The landscapes in the painting are painted from my memory and photographs I took from a recent trip to Switzerland and Germany. As of recently, I have been interested in using media with my paintings, such as music and animation. Every element I add to my work serves as an instrument, where they all work together to create a certain emotion, just as most songs and musical pieces do. These elements or tools each work to emphasize a certain feeling more than the other and if they all successfully work together, it draws the viewer deeper and deeper into a different ambiance, whether it be one that they personally feel or one that I am aiming for.

This comic was originally published in Samandal*'s 2017 issue, "Topia." Find the whole comic on khabarkeslan.com*

DON'T YOU KNOW WHO MY MOTHER IS?

TRACY CHAHWAN

I've been fascinated for years now by gender, in a way that I always question what part of me is "masculine" or "feminine." I like to explore the barriers between these two, from being objectified to being, myself, the "predator"—I like to reappropriate all these roles and play with them. The victim, the trash queen, the predator, the object, etc. We live in societies where sexual identities are still more or less strongly essentialized. It takes a fucking while to become aware of these social constructs and to find your own identity in all that shit.


YOUNG MEN'S NIGHT
WE'RE ALMOST THERE CUTIE
BOKN
KILL
UMMM... THANKS, BUT I CAN'T...
WANNA GIVE ME YOUR NUMBER? WE CAN TALK IF YOU GET IN TROUBLE AND NEED HELP.
COME ON NOW "
IS THIS HOW YOU REPAY YOUR SAVIOR?


?!!
HEY!!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! HE'S WITH ME!!


OK, OK FINE!
CLAC!
COME ON SAMIRA, MOVE IT!
DO YOU REALIZE HOW WORRIED YOUR FATHER IS ? WHAT GOT INTO YOU?
I JUST WANTED TO WANDER BY MYSELF
I'M REALLY SORRY MA'AM
WANDER BY YOURSELF? WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? THESE WOMEN ARE ANIMALS !!


DING! DONG!
WE'RE REALLY GOING TO GET IT NOW. THAT'S FOR SURE!
WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?! I ALMOST DIED OF WORRY!
GO RUSH TO YOUR ROOM, QUICKLY! YOUR MOTHER IS FURIOUS!!
COME BACK FOR DINNER... I'LL TRY TO CALM HER DOWN ...
THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE !!!
YOU WILL PAY! THANK GOODNESS NO-ONE RECOGNISED HIM!
WE FOUND HIM WITH THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER, YOUR EXCELLENCY

Image courtesy of Kinan Azmeh.

INTERVIEW: **MOZART CAN BE SYRIAN**

KINAN AZMEH & AZMI HAROUN

Calling Damascus and NYC home, Kinan Azmeh is a renowned Syrian clarinetist and composer who focuses on abstract performances and collaborations. Before the age of Twitter, his father wrote to Encyclopedia Britannica for advice on how Kinan, too ambidextrous for the violin, could focus his musical craft elsewhere. They wrote back: try the clarinet.

Kinan's musical pedigree has seen him become the clarinetist in Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, a global collective of musicians who scored a 2017 Grammy. His discography includes three albums with his ensemble Hewar, soundtracks for film and dance, and an album with his New York Arabic/Jazz quartet, the Kinan Azmeh CityBand. He is also the artistic director of the Damascus Festival Chamber Players, a pan-Arab ensemble dedicated to contemporary music from the Arab world. Having played some of the most prestigious symphony halls worldwide, Kinan's charisma lies in his innate ability to reimagine musical boundaries and help us "experience emotions that we do not have the luxury of experiencing in real life."

At 3:00 pm in Prospect Heights, he delved into his poetic and optimistic project, Songs for Days to Come Vol. 2 *in an honest discussion about how identity, resilience, and collaboration shape his artistry.*

Azmi Haroun: Hello Mr. Azmeh. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this. Could you start with some fundamentals?

Kinan Azmeh: I was born in Damascus in 1976 and raised there for most of my life. I went to a standard high school, and did music school with classes twice a week. When I finished high school, I double majored in music and electrical engineering. Then I came to the U.S. to do my Masters at Julliard in New York, and my doctorate at the City University of New York. And the city sucked me in man, like it does to a lot of people.

I was going back and forth between home and here; I never wanted to become an expatriate. I tried to stay in touch as much as I could with both communities: the new one here in New York and the one where I belong—not only Damascus, but Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Unfortunately, travelling to Syria stopped in 2012.

In your interview with Yo-Yo Ma, you said that you moved to New York weeks before 9/11 and that your perception of the city changed drastically afterwards. You said you were "never scared, but always aware" as an Arab immigrant. Has that mentality changed?

When 9/11 happened, I didn't know how to react to it. I was facing the pressures of moving to a new city and starting a rigorous program at Julliard. Then, immediately, Arab immigrants were all told to register with the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System. You don't realize the severity of what you are asked to do, but I knew that it would change my life every time I fly within or to the U.S. However, I'm somebody who

always likes to look on the bright side. I'm able to make a living out of playing my music, so I'm not complaining.

That's the only New York I know though: getting taken aside at the airport because you speak Arabic and have a Syrian passport. That's been my life for 16 years. Every time I go check in, it's followed by additional screening. Then you sit in this waiting room where you meet friends from Sudan to North Korea.

The only thing that is consistent is how angry I get at being profiled. It's not only about me, it's about everybody. If you scan the skin colors of people pulled aside, it's a joke. The screening isn't random. For me, it's 100 percent of the time.

"Additional screening" is an example of how this profiling continues under different names.

I understand how things become like this when countries react with fear. Is dividing and profiling the right reaction? No, but it's tested throughout time. I can only see things from my angle, and I believe that you cannot make a blanket statement on people from a political, ethnic, or religious standpoint. That's a fight that we all are fighting, but how do you deal with this?

Once, I wrote a piece waiting in that room. I thought it could be a protest song, uniting people who didn't share the same language in the room. I was imagining this as a movie, sitting in this room waiting to be questioned and people start humming a little unification song. I tried to be creative in reaction to this instead of, "Fuck that, fuck this."

I am reminded about one of your many projects, Hewar (meaning dialogue in Arabic), in the situations you described. What kind of dialogue were you and your bandmates envisioning?

Dialogue as the norm, not the exception. As a musician and an individual, you cannot exist on your own, it's not a rewarding life. Some of the best ideas come from juxtaposing your ideas against somebody else's, so I'm always happy to share ideas and listen. Hearing what others say will inform how you can phrase your own thoughts.

I don't want to be too philosophically negative, and people always blame social media—which I won't do. Everybody is about projecting what they have to say, but nobody reads what other people say. If you look at the number of books being printed and read in the Arab world today, it's ridiculous. There's less and less room for dialogue, since people feel, if they publish things, they have importance.

In *Songs for Days to Come* many collaborators are friends of yours, experiencing forms of exile. Can wars and other inhumane situations be breeding grounds for artistic creation? Do you think that creativity can at least serve as a coping mechanism?

Great question. Yesterday, I was at the premiere of my project *Songs for Days to Come*, a project in collaboration with American pianist Lenore Davis and two childhood friends, Dima Orsho and Kinan Abou-Afach. The music is paired with lyrics from eleven wonderful contemporary Syrian poets.

I didn't do this project in reaction to what's happening at home. I set these poems to music because I think they're great poems, not because they're Syrian poets or because Syria is in focus or I'm Syrian. The sudden courage in the writing paired perfectly with the music. Of course, the context changes, and part of your role as an artist is to document. Part of what you do is to try to create the emotions that you don't have the luxury of experiencing in real life.

Having said that, what Syria, Syria being the collective of Syrians, has produced is incredible, even in the darkest of times. People are finding alternative ways to spread these words to the world. And the unfortunate tragedy of people leaving their homes helped spread these words. Do I think I would have written differently if the revolution and the war didn't happen? I don't know. I can only think of what happened now and my reaction to it. But I would like to think of art as a proactive force—you're pushing the boundaries versus just responding to how the boundaries change.

I enjoyed your collaboration with Kevork Mourad, "Home Within." In an interview with CBS, you were explaining how we are forced to realign our senses of home. Home isn't necessarily limited to a physical place. Is this something you actively feel as you compose music?

With Syria, I wondered: What can I really do? I had moments where I thought to myself: "This piece of wood that I'm holding, I'm obsessing about, practicing… What does it do?" In reality, it doesn't feed the hungry or stop a bullet. It doesn't free a political prisoner or bring a democratic, secular Syria… I had to stop writing for about a year. I wrote some sketches, but I wasn't able to think productively.

I kept playing because that's what I do for a living, but then I realized that I owe it to myself to hold on to my tools of expression. For me, that's very important. If the whole uprising started with people wanting to express an opinion, then I should hold on to my tools. Mine may be more abstract, but I started to write again because I felt the need to express my feelings. "Home Within" was about me documenting my and Kervork's feelings at different times from 2011 to today and in reaction to specific events.

We left the title open-ended, engaging with questions like: What does home mean? Where is home? Are we imagining ourselves being at home? Or does "Home Within" mean your home is inside of you? We wanted people to relate to the idea of home in a more universal way while pointing out that, even if it's not in the news now, the war and its consequential atrocities are still happening every single day.

At the same time, we try to clarify that this is not the summary of Syrian stories. If you really want to hear the Syrian story, you have to hear 24 million stories.

It is difficult for many to understand that stories from Syria, while interconnected, are all different.

That's right. Syrian artists are spread around the world and there are great stories and art that is not bound or limited to telling 'contemporary Syrian

stories'. In the long run, this changes the narrative. But ultimately, artists should be doing their art and I don't think artists should be concerned with changing how the Syrians are looked at. They should be very honest and authentic—in the most democratic sense of the word. That doesn't mean you have to wear traditional Syrian clothes to be a genuine Syrian artist.

Through tragedy, you've been inspired by themes of love and resilience. It might seem painfully obvious, but Syrians experiencing significant tragedy still fall in love. Is this a source of joy for you? Does it influence your music?

I'm always impressed by people who fall in love. I think it's such a noble act, which sounds silly. I wrote a piece titled "Wedding," inspired by the mood at a countryside Syrian wedding: How everyone is invited, how, even if you dislike your neighbor, you have to invite them… People just show up, and the musicians dictate the landscape of the occasion.

I think about how nobody is able to stop people falling in love throughout the war. Love is one of the very few human rights that no authority can take away from you. Now, when I see artwork about noble human sentiments, I find it to be incredibly powerful because it's universal.

On that note, are any of your songs a reflection of sadness?

I don't think so. Once, my mom asked me something similar, "Why is all of your music sad?" I reflected on it, because I lived a very happy childhood. Maybe I had not experienced sadness, and maybe I have an intellectual or primal need to feel that. In fact, I think the reason I stopped writing music when the uprising began because there were emotions I had never experienced before, and the need for music disappeared.

In *Songs for Days to Come*, it is about how better things are yet to come. I'm an optimist by nature, and I have the luxury to be, but I've been proven wrong many times. It's hard to tell somebody who's lost everything, "You have to be optimistic," but those of us who can afford to be optimistic have to stay optimistic. It can be contagious.

The poetry in the project was written between 2012-2017 (with the exception of two poems written in 2004 and 1998). They explore topics that, as Syrians, we started to debate recently because so many taboos were broken in the last six years. You're talking about authority, religion, and so many other conversations that were silenced. That's why these are songs for days to come, because the discourse is new and I'd like for it to last a long time.

As a Syrian artist, do you feel politicized?

It's unhealthy to be preoccupied with how people perceive you as an artist and as a human being. The only thing you can do is to be honest, genuine, and true to yourself and the art you're making. Different labels will come at you, but that should not change who you are.

I systematically reject invitations sent to me just for being Syrian. It's an immediate no. Sometimes it's ridiculous. An event organizer writes you an email saying "You're a Syrian artist. We'd like to invite you to this festival. What do you do?" You become an ambassador even though you cannot be representative of everybody. But you can function as a window to a scene. That's why I always suggest friends of mine for festivals because it's nice when people see that I am part of a large community. I don't want to be the Syrian musician; I want to be one of many Syrian musicians.

I don't mind it if people ask me genuine questions about Syria. It's better than being indifferent. We cannot be insensitive when somebody makes an effort. If somebody says, "My house was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina," you say something, but you realize how limited you are in what you can say.

If someone asks me about what happened and they really want to know, I refer them to real documented history, whether online or print. If not, I just tell them my version of the story. Most of the time people hear me play, not talk, so I have easy access to people listening to what I have to say.

Also, there's so much misinformation about Syria. The plight of Syrians has been reduced into reactionary and often incomplete media narratives about migration, war, and terrorism.

That's right. I mean it's tragic, because, until now, people still don't know what's happening even though the story is quite clear. I always immediately refer people to places where they can help. There are so many organizations out there doing a fabulous job on the ground: UNHCR, MSF, Karam Foundation—the list goes on. If people want to help, they can donate, volunteer, or go to the camps. But you can start by just learning about what's going on.

Can you tell me a little bit more about your involvement with International Rescue Committee?

My trips are about doing something meaningful in a very short time. Going to play with the refugees, or for them—sometimes just hearing them is incredibly inspiring.

Lenore Davis commissioned *Songs for Days to Come* and we decided that part of the proceeds of the album sales would go to the IRC. We visited a Jersey school program for the IRC and did six sessions, which I try to do it as often as possible.

One of my most inspiring trips was to the Za'atari camp. I also visited 'urban refugees centers', which house refugees who are not registered with UNHCR. I brought some musical instruments, and I was teaching a group of eight girls between the ages of 8 and 12. We finished the lesson early with 10 minutes to spare, so I said, "Ok, let's write songs. What kind of songs do you like to sing?" They stayed quiet at first. "Shall we write about home? About freedom?" Then one of the girls whispered, "Estaz [Teacher] Kinan, we're done with these topics." They wanted to write love songs. One of them shared that they wanted to write a song about a boy that one of the girls liked. That's resilience.

Previously working at IRC, I was always impressed by clients' resolve. I would tell my students that I'm lucky to work with them and learn from them.

It's mutual. The whole experience is a tremendous boost of energy, especially knowing that you might have changed somebody's life. When I was in Za'atari, many of the kids were asking me about the Japanese flutist. "Who's the Japanese flutist?" Apparently, a flutist from Japan went and played in the camp just a few months before I got there, and everybody was obsessed with him! The best part is that they assumed that we knew each other because we both came from outside the country.

When you were in Beirut last year, one of the travel bans affected you. What do you take from these evolving bans?

Frankly, it continues to be ridiculous that one signature can change the lives of so many. But, I'm used to it. I didn't want to blow getting stuck in Beirut out of proportion, but the media did. I was in Hamburg and had a really exciting concert with Yo-Yo Ma. I then landed in Beirut, and opened my phone to a notification that Green Card holders with Syrian passports are banned from entering the U.S. My reaction, a stupid one, was "What will happen to my plants?"

I was in a very privileged situation. I was in Beirut with a hotel room and money to buy food. I could think of a plan, if necessary. The ban made me put that in perspective because I was definitely annoyed and angry, but imagine your home is gone, your family is gone, everything is gone. Think of all the people for who the travel ban is still imposed on (green card holders were lifted).

I had a show at night on February 1st and I didn't know if I would be able to travel or not the following day. But then I played—maybe the best I've played ever. When the context changes, there'll be more urgency to the art you do, even if the art you do is abstract.

The Mozart concerto became a protest song, but then green cards were no longer included in the ban. This back and forth, it's crazy. All these people who left their home because of war or any kind of problem and they manage to find elsewhere to call home. And then someone tells them, "You know what? This isn't home either."

In NYC, you've spoken about how running helps you disconnect. How does disconnecting facilitate your creative process?

Running has been a really exciting part of my life for the last six or seven years and I do lots of triathlons now. I enjoy the mess it leaves you with after you finish. It's a good way to disconnect, to not be glued to your phone. I'm not proud of it, but I find that the only time I'm not close to my phone is when I run or when I play. It's just me and my brain.

I don't think of it as 'distracting' though. I don't think people should do hobbies because they distract. That's the wrong way of looking at it. You don't take a break from work to go running. You do something because you enjoy it.

Would you mind explaining your involvement with the Silk Road Ensemble?

I knew about the Silk Road project since its inception. My dad heard about it on BBC and, when I was 24, he told me to keep an eye on it. Of course, I knew who Yo-Yo Ma was. Fast forward a few years, I'm meeting many members of Silk Road in the New York music scene. Then, in 2012, I got an email asking me if I am free and interested for a residency to workshop a piece by British composer David Bruce that has a clarinet part. It took me about a second to respond saying yes. I didn't even read the details.

The project is very much in line with how I think about music: as a continuum. It's a collective of musicians, thinkers, improvisers, composers, educators, and people who have a wide perspective of the whole world. That started in 2012 and, since then, I've been the clarinetist of the group. People on the top of their games challenge you to the maximum. Yo-Yo Ma has a unique and inspiring way of looking at the world and working on music. He simply leads by example and although he doesn't need compliments, I'm deeply impressed when I see someone like him.

The project works because all of the individuals in the project are equally solid. To be a good artist, and a good person, you need to have three things. You need something to say. That's the most important, what does your art say? If it doesn't say anything then it shouldn't exist. Secondly, you have to have a tool to say what you want to say. It can be anything, like sculpture, painting, writing, or a clarinet. Third, you have to have the skills to use the tool to say what you want to say. When you have a group of people who have something to say, and who have the tools and the skills, and are open to what other people want to say, then you have a very rewarding environment to be part of.

You are someone who naturally weaves between genres or canons. What is your view of the concepts of Eastern and Western music as canons in your experience as an abstract artist?

East and west of what? I don't think such a thing exists, to be honest. I understand the need for archiving—in order to identify music and what part of the world it comes from—but this is 2017. Some of the best Mozart happens in Korea. Some of the best tango might be in a bar in New York.

I grew up playing Mozart. And for me, Mozart was Syrian too. I have listened to it here and in Syria, and I played it in Syria. It's equally Syrian. He belongs to humanity. I remember, back in the day, there was a store called Tower Records in New York. It was the most interesting revelation for me because it was the first time that I went into a music store of that size. And there's a huge rack for Rock&Roll and a huge rack for R&B, a huge rack for folk music. And then there is this little tiny drawer for "World Music." The whole world. Really? And when they say classical music, they have Philip Glass and Mozart in the same category. What does that mean?

For me, playing music is really about bringing pleasure, in the most noble meaning of the word. I think it's very important for me to play what I like. I also don't play what I don't like. I happen to like a variety of things. The borders where something stops and something begins doesn't interest me. Some people think of Hewar and my band as a collaboration between "East and West." It's bullshit. Its people using instruments to speak, where the clarinet

is not only Western and the Oud is not only Eastern.

Are there boundaries?

There aren't. Of course, if you want to hear really authentic songs from the villages of Northern Syria, you have to go to the villages to know what they are. The whole "East meets West," it's happened. It's no longer new, there is no settling. I think you need to do something that is genuine, which reflects the collective interest of people who are playing. Where the collective is larger than the sum of the parts.

What is one record that you're listening to that you'd recommend for readers? And anything you want to add about your latest project?

There's a band in New York that I really like called Dawn of Midi. Check them out. I often listen to what my friends are doing musically. I've been in composition mode with less time to listen. A friend of mine, a Palestinian clarinetist Mohamed Najem has a recent album which is great. There are few works by the singer in *Songs for Days to Come*, Dima Orsho. She's doing lots of lots of new things. There are beautiful new pieces by Kareem Roustom, a composer I collaborate with often. Hello Psychaleppo is another artist to follow.

Finally, *Songs for Days to Come Vol. 2* will be released soon, in the summer we'll record. I don't know if it's official or not but we might release a Vol. 3. There's always more room for days to come.

HAMED SAYS

BENJAMIN STEVENSON

The abandoned construction
site we were parked next
to has gold buried underneath.
That's why there are
always so many policemen
near it. "You see that girl
right there? She's mukhabarat" —
informants for the government.
Her car's license plate begins
with the number 14, and that's how
you discern the difference.

There were only me and Hamed
in an old beat up jeep his parents loaned him
on weekends. Allegedly, Hamed worked
for the king, which is how he claimed to know
so many things I didn't. Silently, I nodded
my small head and agreed as per usual.

Hamed passed me the near empty bottle
and continued on in his broken English,
"I want you to know that it's okay
if you don't want to be with me.
We can be more like brothers if you'd like.
You know? I think of you
like I think of my family
so don't feel pressured to like me."

As the conversation came
to a sharp close as I slipped out
onto the dilapidated concrete.
Then, Hamed promptly did the same,
shut his door and began walking me to
the door
of my apartment building. I stumbled
into the building and towards the elevator,
Hamed began chuckling to himself.
Confused, I looked at him and waited for
his mouth to open again. He said to me,
"You look as if you are walking
with your father into a candy store to
beg."

The expression on his face
suddenly darkened as my
quivering finger reached for the up button.
Before I knew it,
Hamed was in the elevator with me.
His hands ready to take my hips and
his mouth much more open than the last
time I had seen him.

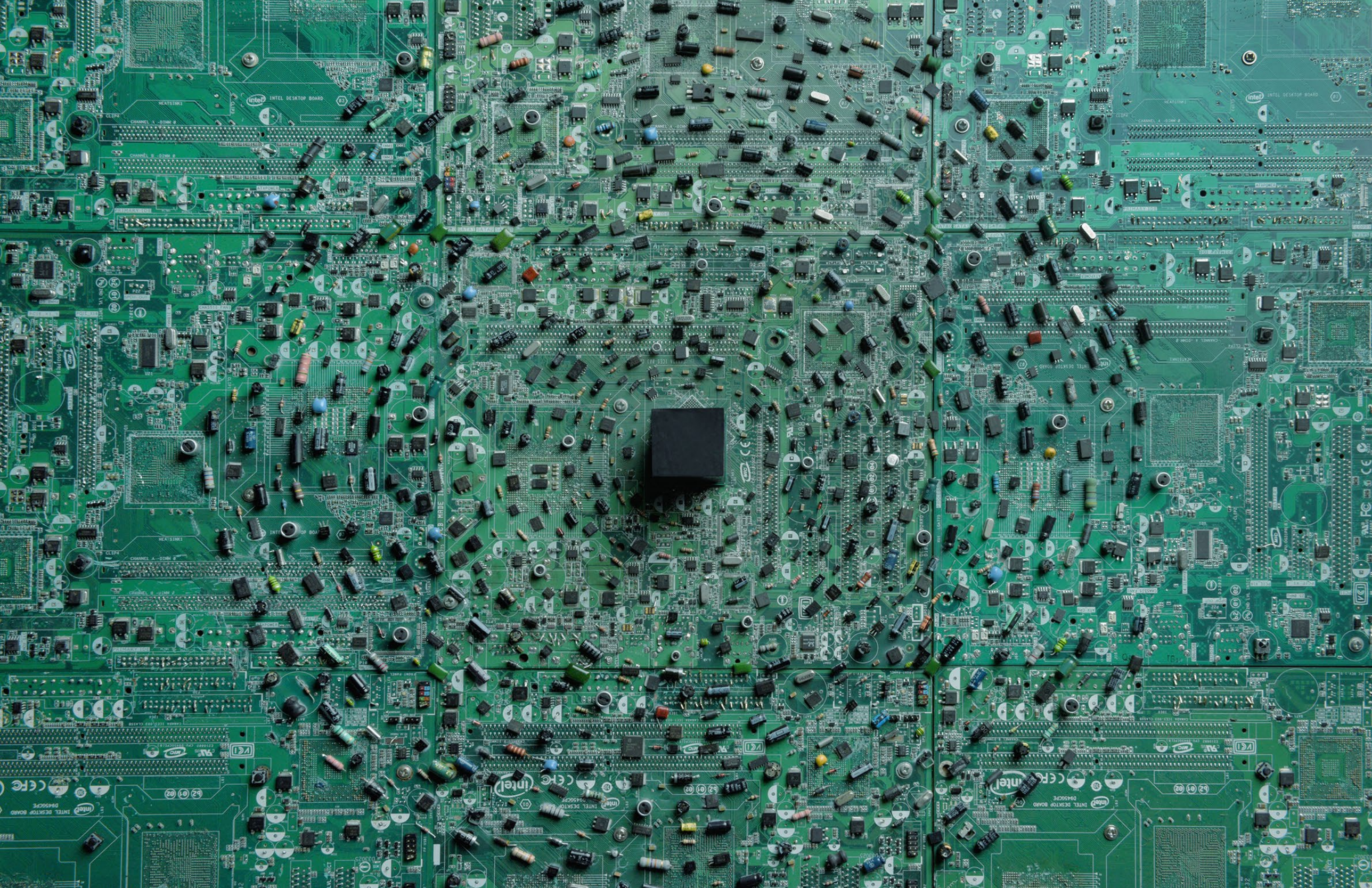
I'd been fed so much arak
that night, I couldn't seem
to say no. I had played the game
in which I chugged as much
liquor my stomach could handle
before making up an uncomfortable
excuse to leave. But Hamed quit
believing my excuses somewhere
between the 3rd and 4th night I played
with him.
This time he told me he only wanted to
hug me
in the elevator, on the way up to my
apartment,
but when he left I was still wiping the cum
off my face.

DIGITAL SPIRITUALITY

AMR ALNGMAH

Amr Alngmah explores the root of the word “spirituality.” The artist believes that humans consist of two main parts: the body and the spirit, where the spirit holds a higher rank as the main engine in the machine of the body. Furthermore, spiritual influence is an effect produced by strong and deep bonds between various elements or peers. This association results from the deep value placed upon peer-to-peer spirituality and morality. In this installation, Alngmah looks to the spiritual influence of the Kaaba in Mecca, where over a billion of Muslims turn towards to pray multiple times throughout the day.

Alngmah’s use of digital hardware as material for his installation is a direct reflection of the modern era as the age of technology. All electronic devices have circuits that possess microprocessors.These microprocessors are the main components of electronic circuits and essentially represent the pulse and power of the whole apparatus. The work ultimately presents the functions of power within the mechanical engineering of electronics to the ritual behaviors of human spirituality.



tRASHY CLOTHING

tRASHY CLOTHING first started off as an online social experiment in March of 2017 to raise awareness regarding Palestinian and Middle Eastern culture alongside the Arabic language and their ties to terrorism. Due to public interest, the brand launched in July of the same year.

The concept is to take refugee clothing that is perceived by the privileged as "trashy," and convert it into fashion to reclaim the term itself. Old city markets and thrift shops are also inspirations for the brand's designs. A value that the company holds is giving back to our society and fellow refugees. Thus, the company will be donating 15% of the profits made per item purchased, to Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps.

PROMO CODE:

KESLAN

tRASHY will be donating 15% of the proceeds on all purchases using the KESLAN promo code to Mona Relief—a local charity based in Sana'a Yemen.

The aid from Mona Relief will go towards food, medicine, and other basic necessities such as beds, blankets, and classroom furntiture.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE
PLEASE READ

FEELING ALONE ?
NEED SOMEONE ?
AFRAID ?

“Embrace is a non-profit organization (NGO) which works to raise awareness around mental health in Lebanon and the Middle East. Embrace launched in affiliation with the Department of Psychiatry at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) back in 2013. As of August 2017, Embrace became an official registered NGO in Lebanon. It is a one of a kind charitable and fundraising initiative for mental illnesses. Embrace seeks to inform and support people who need help by dispelling the myths and misinformation that surround mental illness. Embrace provides information about the resources available to people who live in Lebanon. Embrace also raises money to help provide needed treatment and care for people who cannot afford it. In September 2017, Embrace launched the first national suicide prevention helpline in Lebanon.”

HELP SOMEONE
TALK TO ME

CONTACT EMBRACE
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info@embracefund.org

Khabar Keslan *is an independently run, volunteer-based, primarily English-language online review featuring art and critique relating to the Middle East, North Africa, and South (East) Asia (MENASEA). This is a dedicated platform for dissidents, artists, critics, and those on the margins to express themselves.*