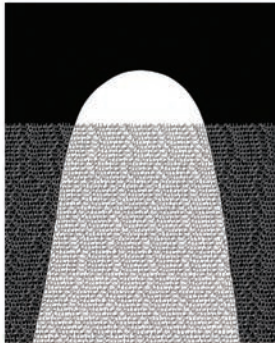




I AM



ARAVAN





Under the Patronage  
of  
Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah

I AM

World Premiere at



## ABOUT CARAVAN

CARAVAN is an international peacebuilding nonprofit organization that focuses on building bridges through the arts between the creeds and cultures of the Middle East and West. Originating out of Cairo, Egypt, and now based in Chicago, USA, CARAVAN's experience has shown that the arts can serve as one of the most effective mediums to enhance understanding, bring about respect, enable sharing, and deepen friendships between people of different faiths and cultures. CARAVAN exhibitions have resulted in unprecedented gatherings of premier Middle Eastern and Western artists using art for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Learn more at: [www.oncaravan.org](http://www.oncaravan.org)

### SPONSORS of the Jordan Premiere



بنك الاتحاد  
Bank al Etihad



Zara Investment Holding  
شركة زارة للإستثمار القابضة



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special appreciation goes to numerous people and groups for playing an important role toward seeing this timely East-West peacebuilding exhibition, I AM, come about.

To **Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah** for Her gracious patronage of I AM.

To **H.R.H. Princess Wijdan Al-Hashemi**, the President of the Royal Society of Fine Arts in Jordan, for her belief in the importance of this exhibition.

To **Kenneth P. Dutter**, who had the original idea for this exhibition, inspired by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's important book, A Call to Action.

To **Dr. Khalid Khreis**, Director General of Jordan's National Gallery of Fine Arts, for generously hosting I AM at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman for the premiere of its global tour, and his marvelous team, for all their support.

To **Senator Haifa Najjar** and her team, whose assistance in the preparations for I AM in Jordan made all the difference.



With Special Recognition:

To **Janet Rady**, the curator of I AM, for her critical artistic guidance and assistance throughout.

To the **31 participating artists** in I AM who have demonstrated through their art the pivotal role that Middle Eastern women play in keeping hope alive and fostering peace in all its forms.

To our **strategic sponsors and program partners**, whose generosity and commitment to using the arts for bridge-building purposes is most appreciated.

To CARAVAN's partner, **The Episcopal Church/USA**, whose continual support and encouragement is treasured.



Lastly, to the **Middle East**, where the CARAVAN initiative was born - whose peoples continue to creatively evolve new narratives that uphold their rich heritage while embracing a future full of challenges.

Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler,  
Founder and President, CARAVAN

## CONTENTS

|                     |                                     |    |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|----|
| Foreword            | Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah | 7  |
| Introduction        | Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler           | 8  |
| Curator's Statement | Janet Rady                          | 10 |
| Opening Words       | Dr. Khaled Khreis                   | 11 |

## Artists

|                     |    |                    |    |
|---------------------|----|--------------------|----|
| Marwa Adel          | 12 | Hilda Hiary        | 44 |
| Rawan Al Adwan      | 14 | Carelle Homsy      | 46 |
| Afsoon              | 16 | Lulwa Al Khalifa   | 48 |
| Ahaad Alamoudi      | 18 | Marwa Al Khalifa   | 50 |
| Alia Ali            | 20 | Nabeela Al Khayer  | 52 |
| Boushra Almutawakel | 22 | Ghada Khunji       | 54 |
| Zena Assi           | 24 | Annie Kurkdjian    | 56 |
| Shereen Audi        | 26 | Hanaa Malallah     | 58 |
| Manal Deeb          | 28 | Rania Matar        | 60 |
| Maitha Demithan     | 30 | Raeda Saadeh       | 62 |
| Lalla Essaydi       | 32 | Nagla Samir        | 64 |
| Mariam Ali Fakhro   | 34 | Soheila Sokhanvari | 66 |
| Taiba Faraj         | 36 | Mayasa Al Sowaidi  | 68 |
| Faten Gaddes        | 38 | Wijdan             | 70 |
| Azadeh Ghotbi       | 40 | Helen Zughaib      | 72 |
| Nermine Hammam      | 42 |                    |    |





## FOREWORD



Many words come to mind when I reflect on this stunning collection.

*Awe:* at the limitless imagination and talent of our region's women – something of which we are, happily and increasingly, reminded again and again in so many different contexts – from the arts and culture to science, technology, politics and more.

*Respect:* for these artists as they channel their visions not only in pursuit of their own creative expression but in support of something grander which our beloved region so desperately needs -- lasting peace within and between our countries, and far beyond our borders.

*Hope:* that those who take the time to enjoy this exhibition will see beyond each individual painting to the stories behind the collection, stories that reveal the rich mosaic of life across the Middle East with their timeless and universal themes: love and loss, success and failure, progress and regress.

For isn't that the joy of art -- its ability to speak to us all about what is both familiar and unfamiliar? To be a language that transcends borders and barriers. To be the consummate diplomat, traveling the world overcoming race, religion and rancor, building bridges of respect and understanding between us all, North, South, East and West.

I hope that as this exhibition opens in cities worldwide, and people look through this window into our lives, they see what I see -- what I've always known. That the people of the Middle East are as warm and welcoming as they are generous and open-minded. And that, today, perhaps more than ever, they are eager to forge friendships beyond their own borders in the name of a stronger, more harmonious global family.

Many words come to mind when I reflect on this stunning collection; what are yours?

**Rania Al Abdullah**

## INTRODUCTION



*"I am amazed by the misconceptions about Muslim women and the Arab world that I hear, and that really does hurt me."*

- **Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah**

*"I now find myself looking at every sentence, every image, that purports to tell the West about the Arabs ... with this question in mind: to what extent does it feed into existing stereotypes and established prejudice?"*

- **Ahdaf Soueif**, bestselling Anglo-Egyptian author and novelist

As the world's attention is focused anew on respecting women's rights, and while there is an increasing need for developing understanding and encouraging friendship between the peoples and faiths of the Middle East and West, I AM is a peacebuilding exhibition organized by CARAVAN that showcases the insights and experiences of Middle Eastern women as they confront issues of culture, religion and social reality in a rapidly changing world, both in the Middle East and West.

Designed to address misconceptions of the "other", the I AM exhibition is a visual celebration of the crucial role that Middle Eastern women play as guardians of peace, celebrating their strengths and rich and diverse contributions in the enduring global quest for a more harmonious future. I AM aims to challenge existing stereotypes about Middle Eastern women by showing that they are current, contemporary, engaged, active, dynamic and contribute very significantly to the fabric of local and global culture. This exhibition is an acknowledgement of how they continue to creatively evolve new narratives that uphold their heritage, keeping hope alive while embracing a future full of challenges.

In so doing, the I AM exhibition highlights what women globally contribute toward healing our world, because of their inherent connection to the sanctity of life, and their ability to nurture and protect it, thereby inspiring a legacy of harmony. At the heart of communities, women work to support the needy, offer friendship and foster peace in all its forms.

This I AM exhibition originated from a desire to creatively and positively build on the message of the highly-acclaimed book written by former US President Jimmy Carter, who is much loved and respected in the Middle East, titled *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power*.

The title of the exhibition, I AM, implies a representation of one's culture and heritage - showing the uniqueness of the individual, as well as their identity within the community and the world. The phrase "I AM" is also significant to the Abrahamic faiths as words of Divine self-identification (i.e. the story of Moses and the burning bush), and therefore serve as an interreligious bridge, reminding us, regardless of creed, that all are equal and one. In this regard, the I AM exhibition focuses on how fundamentally essential the contribution of women is in freeing our world from sectarian strife of any kind.

For this timely exhibition, we are privileged to have Janet Rady as the guest curator, a specialist in Middle Eastern contemporary art. The thirty-one women artists selected for I AM are acclaimed artists of Middle Eastern origin representing a broad geographic area of twelve countries. Each artist was invited to create one work in a still art medium.

We are deeply grateful to H.R.H. Princess Wijdan Al-Hashemi for the honor of having the I AM exhibition premiere at the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman, from where it travels West. Throughout the tour, an exciting schedule of programs and events accompany the I AM exhibition at each venue to stimulate discussion, dialogue and education, promoting further understanding.

Perhaps the profound words of Elif Shafak, the award-winning novelist and most widely read woman writer in Turkey, best capture the spirit of I AM; "In art, there is no them. The other is me." In this sense, this exhibition has the primary objective of helping us see the "other" with fresh eyes, celebrating the diversity of human expression, while also asserting the common priorities that we all seek and treasure.

**Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler**

Founder and President, CARAVAN

## CURATOR'S STATEMENT



When Paul-Gordon Chandler invited me to curate I AM, I was not only honoured but delighted to have the opportunity to work with such a diverse group of Middle Eastern artists practising both in the region and the diaspora.

Each was invited to respond to the theme of I AM and what it meant to them personally as a woman of Arab or Iranian heritage. What is immediately apparent when viewing the selected works, is the extraordinary talent and powerful messages that these artists display in their respective practices and the varied visual interpretation of the global quest for harmony and peace. It would have been all too easy to depict a stereotypical female figure, perhaps one veiled or situated in a domestic setting or even shown indulging in that clichéd past time of retail consumption on the well-trodden streets of Knightsbridge or the shopping malls of Dubai, such as is so often characterised by the international media. But not. These artists have chosen a more challenging and though provoking approach. We see images of women celebrated for their public achievements be it as a singer or actress; or more intimate portraits depicting the fundamental role of motherhood. Some have chosen the trope of the self-portrait, subverted to make us question our identity, or hinting at strengths lying hidden beneath an unassuming surface. Subtle symbols of faith apparent in their daily lives underpin the work of others, giving hope in the face of loss and destruction. Moving still further away from reductive figurative stereotypes, metaphor defines the work of several artists, who through the use of alternative media, play with concepts of beauty, connectivity and harmony.

Ultimately, by whatever language the artists have chosen to express themselves, one important message prevails throughout all their works – that of optimism and celebration of being.

**Janet Rady**  
Curator

## OPENING WORDS



My friend Kenneth Dutter, with whom I have collaborated in the past through the Art Reach Foundation, called me from the United States to tell me about the I AM exhibition, and that his friend Rev. Chandler, Founder and President of CARAVAN, will be in touch with me to finalize the details of the exhibition. As the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts is an ambassador for Jordan, as well as for the Arab and Islamic world, with a desire to break the erroneous stereotypes images about our culture, we immediately adopted this exhibition that includes the works of 31 women artists.

"I AM" is a title that embraces a number of searching social, political and religious questions that the artists explore at a time of increasing globalization, when pivotal issues of identities and borders are constantly challenged. It is an ongoing quest to overcome obstacles and work towards a reality in which all worlds are united - races, creeds, sciences, arts, beliefs, riches and faiths.

The human experience of each individual artist taking part in this exhibition is a reflection of the great strides and recognition that women have made in all fields during the last century. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of accomplished woman artists in this part of the world and I AM is a true expression of today's concepts, ideas and beliefs. The artists have used a variety of contemporary media and techniques in their work to speak to the viewer, providing a poignant, intellectual and sensory dialogue.

My gratitude goes to all who have contributed to this exhibition, led by the Rev. Canon Paul-Gordon Chandler, the curator Janet Rady and to my dear friend Kenneth Dutter, as well as to all the participating artists, with my admiration and sincere wishes for continuous success in its global tour.

**Dr. Khalid Khreis**

Director General

Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts



## Marwa Adel (Egypt)

Born in Cairo, Egypt, Marwa holds a BA and an MFA from the Advertising Department in the Faculty of Applied Arts from Helwan University. She received the Golden Prize at the 9th European-Arab Festival of Photography in Germany, and the best Arab Photographer Award at the Emirates Photography Competition in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Marwa has participated in many international exhibitions both in Egypt and internationally such as in Dubai, Sweden, Senegal, Mali, England, Sharjah and The Netherlands.

For Marwa, her artwork is an attempt at showing the evolution and the infinite conflict between some fundamental forms of existence that live in a state of permanent contradiction and antagonism. It is the discovery and revelation of the relationship between form and essence, spirit and materiality, image and ideas. It is the metamorphosis of primitive to supreme, passing through humanity.

### Statement

Every woman's life is full of stories which manifest love, peace, wisdom, truth, giving and sacrificing.

Stories about the true journey of life.

A journey can take you to a place that is not on any map. . . the journey of the soul to reach Eden.



Eden  
Digital Photomontage  
100 cm x 75 cm



## Rawan Al Adwan (Jordan)

Born and raised in Jordan, Rawan Al Adwan's inspiration comes from her rich and mystical Arabic heritage. As a child, Rawan was greatly inspired by her Bedouin roots which play a great role in her expression as an artist. Rawan obtained a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at Yarmouk University in 1995, and since then her artwork has been predominantly expressed in ceramic, painting and mixed media.

Rawan has held solo exhibitions in Amman, Jordan and has participated in group exhibitions within Jordan, Kuwait, UAE, Austria, Italy, USA and United Kingdom. Rawan moved to London in 2012 and has participated in group exhibitions such as with Fitzrovia Gallery/Frieze Art Fair, Parallax Art Fair and Konooz Auction at the Intercontinental Hotel, Park Lane. She has written a monthly article for the Wall Street International magazine about art and culture since 2014.

### Statement

As in ancient times, women more often than not are the guardians of harmony in our communities and in the world. My artworks express the magnificence of the cultural heritage of the Levant with a contemporary twist. Most of the time I merge reality with imagination and memory. I work hard to develop paintings that express the beauty of our ancient societies which are in continuation of the present.

In the Middle East, women have always been the primary contributors in our communities toward healing our world, from early times to the present. Their inherent connection to the sanctity of life, and their ability to nurture and protect it, have inspired a legacy of harmony.

My artwork is inspired by the ancient inscriptions and drawings discovered on old basalt volcanic stones in the Middle East. These drawings were created by the Safawi people that inhabited the desert in 500 B.C in Jordan. My artwork reflects the spirit of this primitive art while allowing and respecting its freedom to also become contemporary art in the 21st century. My artistic objective is to breathe life into forgotten ancient societies and their values, through redrawing and adding vibrant colors to them.

Earth inspired colors, somber brown, ochre, red and blue shades dominate my artwork reflecting my vision as an artist and human being. My paintings are characterized with simple outlines, presence of symbolic signs and emotive distortions of figures. The use of the golden hue reflects my hope for a better future full of peace and love.





**A Legacy of Harmony**  
Acrylic, pastel and sand on canvas  
60 cm x 90 cm



## Afsoon (Iran)

Afsoon is an Iranian born, London based artist. Occident and Orient coexist in her works, which are multi-layered and often combine text with images, using various media such as linocuts, watercolour, photography, collage, and etching. She returns emotionally to her motherland via her work, which results from painstaking research into her chosen subject matter.

Afsoon's works have been extensively exhibited and can be found worldwide in prominent collections and museums, including the British Museum and Berger/YSL Collection, among others.

### Statement

Born in 1905 in Iran, Ghamar ol Moluk Vaziri entered the world of music at a time when women were not allowed to sing in public. As an orphan, she grew up living with her grandmother who was a religious singer for ceremonies in mosques. Ghamar became the first woman to sing in front of men and she was one of the first female singers to be broadcast on national radio.

I chose her for the I AM exhibition in order to be reminded and to remind others that there were pioneering women like Ghamar in the East who broke the barriers and used their art as a tool for gender equality. These days more than ever we need women who use their ability, knowledge and talent to pave the way for others to follow.



Ghamar  
Watercolour and paper-collage on Arches paper  
42 cm x 34 cm



## Ahaad Alamoudi (Saudi Arabia)

Born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1991, Ahaad's love for art was evident from a young age; with her mother being an artist and an art teacher, Ahaad was always surrounded by artworks and art materials. She moved to England and that broadened her view and appreciation for art and the world. She loves how people express themselves through different media and are able to affect people's mindsets and lives. This is what motivated her to continue pursuing art when she returned to Saudi Arabia. Ahaad obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design at Dar Al-Hekma University and is currently finishing her Masters in Print at the Royal College of Art in London. She has exhibited in both solo and group shows in the Middle East, Europe and in the USA.

### Statement

Land of Dreams was an installation in the Saudi Arabian desert close to Jeddah in January 2017. The larger than life images of celebrity Emirati singer, Ahlam Alshamsi, is my perception of the dimensionalities of the internet and its virtual realms; a place where information is distributed and fostered, and where many popular celebrities, including Ahlam, reside.

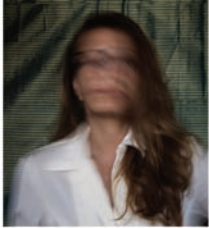
I wanted the viewer to come with their own notion and interpretation of their land of dreams—and then be subjected to Ahlam scattered across an empty plot of land ("Ahlam" means "dream" in Arabic).

I chose Ahlam because she is one of many central pop figures in Arab culture; she comes with her own connotations and meanings, all obtained through her career as an Arab pop singer. The provocative images challenge commonly held stereotypes that all Middle Eastern women are veiled, quiet and submissive.

In the current climate of immigration, inequality and hope for a better future, the work asks "what is your land of dreams?"



Land of Dreams  
Photograph of an installation  
67 cm x 100 cm



## Alia Ali (Yemen)

Alia Ali (Austria, 1985) is a Yemeni-Bosnian-American multi-media artist and visual storyteller. Having traveled to fifty-three countries, lived in seven and grown up among five languages, her most comfortable mode of communication is through image and multi-sensory mediums. Her extensive travels have led her to process the world through interactive experiences. As a child of two linguists, Alia believes that the interpretation of verbal and written language has dis-served particular communities and can present more of a threat than a means of understanding. It is for this reason that Alia's aesthetic interests stem from people, place, and the processes which unite and divide us, all at once. Her work reflects on the politics and poetics of contested notions surrounding the topics of identity, physical borders, universality, mental/physical spaces of confinement, and the inherent dualism that exists in everything. Her work blurs the lines between what we claim to be objective and subjective, illusion and reality, truth and interpretation.

Alia is a graduate of the United World College of the Atlantic (UWCAC) and holds a BA in Studio Art and Middle Eastern Studies from Wellesley College. Her studio is based between New Orleans and Marrakech. Her recent work has been featured at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art as part of PhotoNOLA, the Marrakech Biennale as part of the Swiss-Moroccan KE'CH Collective, at PhotoLondon as part of the LensCulture Exposure Awards, and most recently the Kuala Lumpur International Photo Awards in Malaysia.

### Statement

Alia Ali is Austrian born, Yemeni and Bosnian by blood, American by rights and mobility, global by education, and Moroccan by residence. In response to the bold statement, "I AM," the artist investigates the theme in terms of what she is not. To label oneself is to willingly cast oneself in a static mold; yet, each day, as we respond both to major events and to minute decisions, we recast who we are by discovering what we are not.

In her auto-portrait, Alia Ali uses woven newspaper to create a barrier between herself and the viewer. She is both the photographer and the subject, the observed and the observer. In this piece, she questions the fabricated barriers in society that vilify the other. Who holds the power to create an identity? How can we break through the lens through which another views us? Perhaps it is better for us to embrace the multiple layers of what creates our complex identities by living on the borders of all what we are rather than continually struggling with abridged stereotypes imposed by others. This leaves the question of what do we really know of anyone? Aren't we all enveloped in stereotypes created by the other? The more we allow these labels to seep into our judgment, the more of a boundary we weave between each other, becoming both the victim and the culprit, all at once.



[Laysa] Ana / I am [NOT]  
Photographic print on aluminium Dibond  
100 cm x 72 cm



## Boushra Almutawakel (Yemen)

Born in Sana'a, Yemen, in 1969, Boushra Y. Almutawakel studied in the USA and Yemen, obtaining a BSBA in International Business at the American University in Washington, DC. It was during her time as a student, that she became interested in photography. On her return to Yemen in 1994 she continued developing her photographic work, participating in many group exhibitions.

In 1998, Boushra became a full-time photographer, and some of her clients have included the United Nations, CARE International, the Royal Netherlands Embassy, the Social Organisation for Family Development, the National Institute for Health Education, The British Council, The French Embassy, as well as various commercial and individual clients. In 1999, she was honored as the first Yemeni Woman Photographer, with a number of other Yemeni women pioneers by the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Centre at Sana'a University. Since then she has won numerous awards and her work has been featured in renowned global publications.

Her work has been acquired by the British Museum in London, The Museum of Fine Arts of Boston, the Barjeel Foundation, as well as by other well-known collectors.

### Statement

In this triptych a woman in a colorful Yemeni hijab/veil assumes traditional prayer poses of the three Abrahamic religions, indicative of the central role that religion plays in the region.

Since September 11, I have been compelled to create images on the veil, particularly since Islam and Muslims had taken international center stage. I found that we, as Arabs and Muslims, were either demonized or romanticized. Part of this paradoxical portrayal is the way Middle Eastern women have been portrayed artistically and/or in the media, as exotic, beautiful, and mysterious; or helpless, oppressed and ugly. Part of this portrayal, in many cases, has included the hijab.

In this project on the hijab/veil I explore the many faces and facets of the veil based on my own personal experiences and observations: the convenience, freedom, strength, power, liberation, limitations, danger, humor, irony, variety, cultural, social, and religious aspects, as well as the beauty, mystery, and protection.

I also want to be careful not to fuel the stereotypical widespread negative images most commonly portrayed about the hijab/veil in the Western media, especially the notion that most, or all women who wear the hijab/veil, are weak, oppressed, ignorant, and backwards. Furthermore, I hope to challenge and look at both Western and Middle Eastern stereotypes, fears, and ideas regarding the veil.





Untitled  
Photograph  
54 cm x 100 cm



## Zena Assi (Lebanon)

Born in Lebanon, in 1974, Zena Assi lives and works between Beirut and London. She graduated with honors from l'Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA) and taught in different universities. Her pieces are punctuated by strong visual references to her native Beirut and the predicament of its citizens. The artist uses various supports and mediums to document and explore the cultural and social changes of her country. Her work takes shape in installation, animation, sculpture, and mainly paintings on canvas. Themes that are central to her vision include present-day issues related to countries in the Middle East as they battle with internal strife and civilian unrest.

Many of her pieces were repeatedly shown in different international auction houses (Christie's Dubai, Sotheby's London, and Bonhams London) and are part of various public as well as private collections. Assi has exhibited in solo as well as collective shows across Europe, the Middle East and the United States of America, including: Alwane Gallery (Beirut, Lebanon), Art13 & Art14 London Fair (London, UK), Artsawa gallery (Dubai, UAE), Espace Claude Lemand (Paris, France), Rebirth Beirut Exhibition Center (Beirut, Lebanon), Contemporary Art Platform Gallery Space (Kuwait) and Subtitled (APEAL), Royal College of Art (London, UK).

### Statement

Every now and then, I pass by the streets of Beirut with my camera, and I take pictures of the graffiti on the walls. The tags keep changing so rapidly . . . Some old ones survive somehow, but this is the thing with graffiti, their beauty resides in the fact that they are fragile, completely public and unprotected. These pictures I constantly collect, end up being part of my work, they build my cities and dress my portraits . . . like the saying "if only walls could talk". Our city walls tell so many stories, sometimes they even register the history of a country more reliably than any history book. They can translate the social, political, cultural and religious background of the city's inhabitants.

The title of this piece "Al Kouwa Fi Yad El Mar2a", meaning "the force is in the hands of the woman," is directly taken from a slogan sprayed on a wall of Hamra's street in Beirut. This tagger must have imagined a strong woman, staring at you straight in the eyes, confronting her secrets, defying her culture, challenging her scars and enjoying her complexity. I always go back to see if it is still out there, claiming high and bright the power of women! Next to it there is another one stating "fight rape", but unfortunately this one has lately been covered in black spray in a desperate attempt to erase it.



Al Kouwa Fi Yad El Mar2a (The Force is in the Hands of the Woman)  
Mixed media and collage  
100 cm x 100 cm



## Shereen Audi (Jordan)

Shereen Audi was born in Amman , Jordan 1970 and graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Amman in 1992. Since then she has completed several art and print making courses at Darat al Funun's summer academy and the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts' Print workshop with such established artists as Jordanian painter Khaled Khreis, Iraqi artists Nedim Kufi and Mahmoud Obaidi, and Boston University School of Visual Arts Director, Prof. Lynne Allen.

Audi's artworks are highly personal and, in her own words, depict her 'inner self'. However, they reveal a range of universal emotions and concerns that are inherent to the female identity.

She has had several solo exhibitions and has participated in a number of group shows in Germany, Bahrain, Lebanon, Algeria , Egypt and Jordan. Audi lives and works in Amman.

### Statement

This painting reflects the burdens and frustrations often experienced by women in our society and, in spite of everything, their continual optimism for a better future. Beauty and fragility belie the inner strength and determination of women to confront new challenges.

The roses reflect the beauty needed in our world while the wings represent the capacity of women to fly above conflict and tragedy, with a view to a more peaceful future.



**Dreams Give Hope**  
Collage and mixed media on canvas  
100 cm x 100 cm



## Manal Deeb (Palestine)

Manal Deeb is an Arab American visual artist out of the Washington DC area. Manal had many solo and group exhibits in Washington DC, New York City, Dallas, Boston, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, Fairfax & Lorton in Virginia/USA, London, Paris, Cairo/Egypt, Doha/Qatar, Rome and Malaga/Spain. Her artwork is a reflection of her original identity as an Arab female and the challenges in living in the US and raising three daughters.

Manal has contributed artwork for the causes of Arab females, women rights in general, and the Palestinian cause. She is a residing artist at the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia, USA. Her artwork has recently been selected as one of the curated 2016 Directors' Collection at the Center.

Manal's work presents many identities that are indistinguishable. Each identity has the same apparent memories and perceives identical surroundings, while believing, with evidence, to be representing the real self and the actual memories. Manal studied studio arts at UIC, Chicago, and Psychology of Art at GMU, Fairfax, VA. Her studies of fine arts and psychology have provided her with the ability to work on her artwork as a self-therapy tool while presenting projects with vital messages reflecting women rights for living a productive and enlightened life.

### Statement

Arab women are regaining awareness of Being. They are conforming and abiding in the state of feeling realization. They are finding the true nature beyond name and form. They are practicing the connectedness with measurable and indestructible essentials of life.

"Golden" is a mixed media painting that reveals this transformation from darkness to light (with an influence) using the mechanism of abstraction while showing the merits of carrying the culture and traditions throughout the journey. The painting combines portrait, acrylic painting, Arabic calligraphy, and detailed texturing and layering.



Golden  
Mixed media and acrylic on canvas  
99 cm x 99 cm



## Maitha Demithan (UAE)

Maitha Demithan is an Emirati artist born in Dubai in 1989. Her work combines several mediums; photography, scanography, painting, drawing and photo transfers.

The first drawings she created were sketched in the sand which then formed her appreciation for colour, texture, line and shadow.

Maitha's most successful exhibition was in 2009, "Documentation" at Tashkeel where her first scanned self-portraits appeared. Later in 2009, she participated in "Across the Gulf", a group show that took part in the Brisbane Biennial. Other group shows include "Emerge" in Venice, "Emirati Vision" exhibition in Berlin and the "Biladi" exhibition at the UAE Pavilion, during the Shanghai Expo 2010.

### Statement

This piece depicts motherhood; a mother as a hero. It shows a mother with her children close to her, holding them. In her hands are the tools of an artist, because these are the elements without which she cannot feel complete - these define her "job". In both, are the feedback cycles of creating and nurturing, immersion and engagement.

The role of motherhood could physically and mentally deter an artist from making art. It's a constant challenge to balance time and energy.

The process of scanography in itself is very time consuming, as the photo is taken during a time frame, unlike a camera which is fast and instant. The labour in lifting and moving the scanner, and then later in collaging the images is a reflection and a reminder of the constant challenge of the role of motherhood.





Mother  
Scanography  
100 cm x 80 cm



## Lalla Essaydi (Morocco)

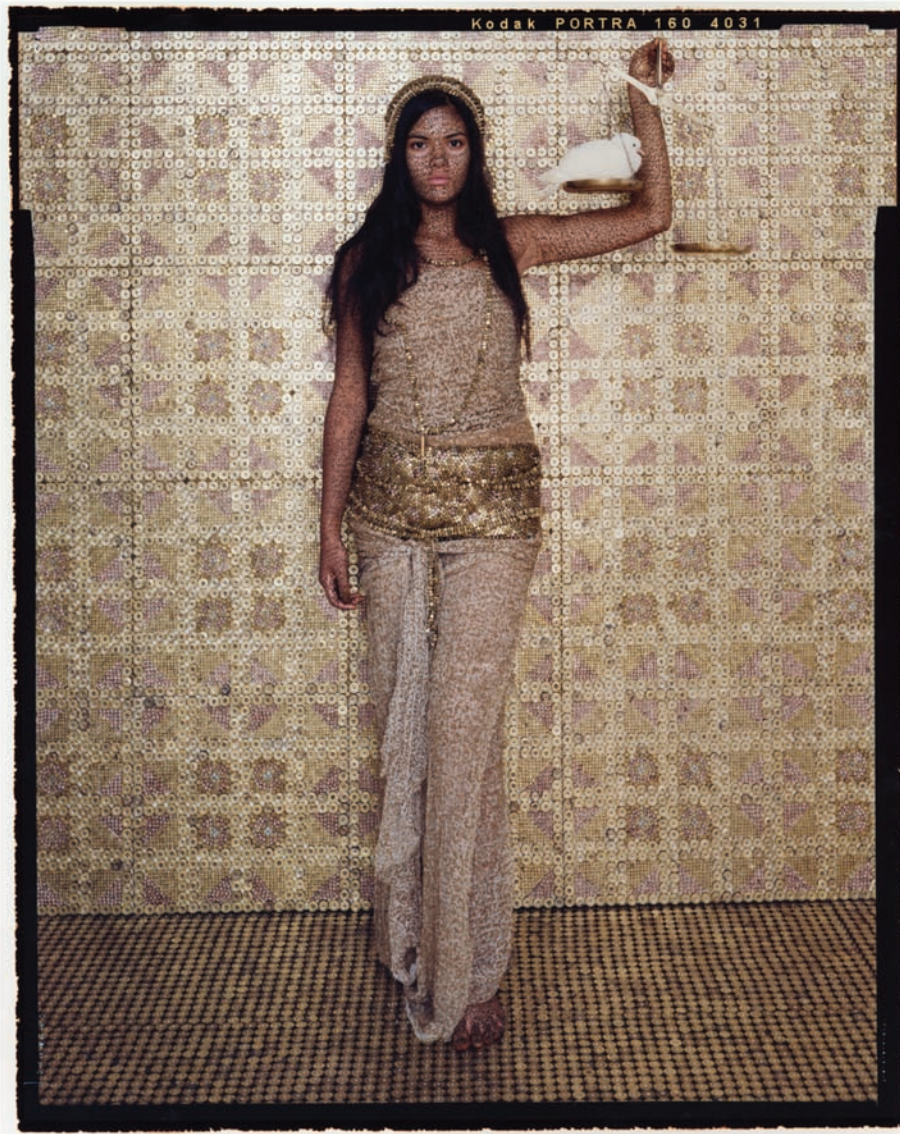
Lalla A. Essaydi grew up in Morocco and currently lives in the United States where she received her MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts/TUFTS University in May 2003. Her practice, which often combines Islamic calligraphy with representations of the female body, addresses the complex reality of Arab female identity from the unique perspective of her own personal experience. In much of her work, she returns to her Moroccan girlhood, looking back on it as an adult woman caught somewhere between past and present, and as an artist, exploring the language in which to “speak” from this uncertain space. Her paintings often appropriate Orientalist imagery from the Western painting tradition, thereby inviting viewers to reconsider the Orientalist mythology. She has worked in numerous media, including painting, video, film, installation, and analog photography.

Essaydi’s recent exhibitions include solo presentations at the San Diego Museum of Art, CA (2015) and the National Museum of African Art, Washington DC (2012). She is represented in numerous public collections across the world including the Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; the Fries Museum, the Netherlands; the Louvre Museum, France and the Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar. The artist lives in New York and is represented by Edwynn Houk Gallery.

### Statement

I see my photographs as intersecting with the presence and absence of boundaries – boundaries of history, class, and architecture that mark spaces of possibility and limitation. All of my work, in some way, deals with the limitations of women in Islamic culture. This is my own history as well, so my work must conflate public and private spheres. This project addresses the polarization between East and West and the ways in which we in the East have, to limiting effect, allowed the Western gaze to imprint itself on our view of ourselves.

This photograph is reminiscent of an Orientalist painting but the scene is inflected with bullet casings that turn the domestic space into a psychological one, charged with contemporary realities. The woman, inhabiting this space and dressed accordingly, has become a weapon on herself. Her clothing contains real bullet casings. The clothes, in other words, form empty shells, depicting women as they can only exist in the minds of others, women without selves or identities of their own. The work portrays both the invasive role of violence and the threat of violence now heightened by the West’s fear of terrorism. It also responds to the current trend in the Arab world of seeking refuge in Islamic culture and belief. Islam provides a powerful message of peace and can be seen as a potent antidote to the violence of extremism. But like any religion, it can also be used as an excuse for constraining women in an attempt to protect the private, domestic space. Until the power of love conquers all, the love of power will always prevail.



**Bullets Revisited #15**

Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate  
101 cm x 76 cm



## Mariam Ali Fakhro (Bahrain)

Mariam Fakhro, has been actively painting, exhibiting and contributing to Bahrain's vibrant and flourishing art scene since 1984. Currently working mainly on canvas and in acrylic, she has a history of experience with oil on canvas as well. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Beirut Arab University in Lebanon and has been a member of the Bahrain Arts Society since 1985.

Early in her career as an artist, Mariam also ran Laffan Gallery for a few years curating shows for some of Bahrain's highest profile artists as well as some regional and international artists. She also coordinated the curation of over 25 art exhibits during her role at the Ministry of Information at the Bahrain National Museum and Arts Center between 1991 and 2000.

Mariam Fakhro regularly exhibits both in Bahrain (ART Bahrain 2015) and internationally. Her most recent participations include Aseela Festival, Bahrain Arts Across Borders (BAAB) in London and GCC artist workshop in Kuwait.

### Statement

All my art work invites the audience to experience peace, love and to enjoy the beauty of life. In "Memories of Dwellings," these traditional, old homes signify warmth and belonging surrounded by the calm of the sea. These homes represent also their inhabitants, such as the many women and their important roles towards their families.

I see that women from all over the world are the cohesive core of the family unit, and in a spiritual sense, they are the home of their families and children.



Memories of Dwellings  
Mixed media and acrylic on canvas  
100 cm x 100 cm



## Taiba Faraj (Bahrain)

Born in 1983, Taiba Faraj graduated from the University of Bahrain with a degree in Banking and Finance. Faraj is self-taught calligrapher and became a full-time artist in 2012.

Commenting on her modern calligraphy practice, Taiba writes; "I use the inborn and visual power of alphabet and letters, to convey my emotions to my audience; what I do is to deform and disarrange the shape of letters, make them dance, break them to create a different space and connections. The subject and the idea can be anything, a poem, a memory, a song and . . . and I do my best to relate with my audience through my emotion; it doesn't matter whether my viewer can read Arabic words or not, or where they are from, but only to understand and enjoy my work and to be able to relate to it. And this is the international language of art without borders or limits with where I can easily reflect my emotions and feelings outside the writing applications of the language."

Taiba has participated in more than 15 group exhibitions in Bahrain as well as exhibitions at the Victoria & Albert Museum and Gallery 8 in London and at the popular Desert Design Art Gallery in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

### Statement

My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,  
and I intend to end up there.  
This drunkenness began in some other tavern.  
When I get back around to that place,  
I'll be completely sober. Meanwhile,  
I'm like a bird of paradise,  
sitting in this aviary.  
The day is coming when I fly off

- Jalal-al-Din Rumi

This well-known poem by Rumi inspired my work. It reflects the resolute strength and faith that underpin the daily lives of women as they strive for fulfillment, peace and harmony. In Islamic mysticism, the bird is one of the symbols of the human spirit that flies to its home. The bird is the perfect symbol for freedom and perspective. Because they fly high into the sky, Lightworkers often tell us that they are messengers of the Divine who provide humanity with a bridge between the mundane and spiritual life. I have used the shades of turquoise and blue which symbolize the color of paradise and heaven.



**Bird of Paradise**  
Acrylic, texture gel and calligraphy markers on canvas  
100 cm x 100 cm



## Faten Gaddes (Tunisia)

Faten Gaddes is French/Tunisian photographer born in Tunisia in 1974. She currently lives and works between Tunis, Paris and New York. She graduated in Interior Design while indulging in her passion for photography and sharpening her skills through training classes. She is a member of the Visual Art Association in Tunisia (VA).

Faten regularly exhibits her photos at the Ammar Farhat Gallery in Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia. Her work is part of the permanent collections of the Tunisian government, the French Agency for Development, the Pierre Berger Foundation, the Michelin Guide, and various collectors in Tunisia and abroad. She has also participated in various international exhibitions such as: Villa Borghese « la fabrica » Lucciano Benetton Collection (Rome, Italy, March 2014), Jadite Gallery (New York, NY, March 2015), United Nations (New York, NY, April 2015), PHOTOQUAI - Musée du Quai Branly (Paris, France, September 2015), MUCEM - Museum of Modern Art (Marseille, France, November 2015), Bardo Museum - Solo Exhibition (Tunis, Tunisia, October 2015), Artist residency, Institute of Islamic Cultures (Paris, France, February / Mars 2016), Pratt Institute « la fabrica » Lucciano Benetton Collection (Brooklyn New York, May 2016).

### Statement

Faten Gaddes shows us her vision on femininity and its conflicts. The accomplishments and wounds that women expose or hide are displayed; transcending, violating and rejecting social norms. Middle Eastern culture carries and elevates the woman, but also often restricts her to a "cliché" identity. This "cliché" identity drives them to question and discover themselves even further by endlessly asking: "WHO AM I?" and "WHAT AM I?" Many women today are fighting for their equality in a society where they are not heard. And they are continually finding creative ways to express and prove their strength to the rest of the world.

Faten Gaddes's women want to express their asserted femininity while at the same time often needing to wrestle against laws, social constructs and religious constraints. They are on a journey toward becoming the emancipated women, able to say, "I AM, I AM, I AM".

Faten Gaddes's work reveals the beauty of transgression of boundaries and of the desire to change the notion of gender and identity. She depicts women that encompass the transcendence of gender as well as what it means to be true to ourselves in a society that tends to restrict us to certain identity types.

- Maureen Gozlan





Reemy  
Photograph  
50 cm x 34.7 cm



Estefanoo  
Photograph  
50 cm x 34.7 cm



Cayenne  
Photograph  
50 cm x 34.7 cm



## Azadeh Ghotbi (Iran)

I experienced revolution, loss, exile, and the idiosyncrasies of feeling proud of one's heritage yet stateless early in life. I left Iran at an age when one is too young to make life-changing decisions yet old enough to suffer their consequences. I left behind everything I knew, cared for, and took for granted. The "present" and the beautiful prospect its future held were wiped forever at that very moment.

The passing of time has only made me further appreciate and cherish the importance of history, roots and cultural ties. Diaspora, statelessness, transience, lack of continuity are my "normal". However, I have found that such experience can bear unexpected gifts of strength, adaptability, empathy, and a heightened sense of observation. The cumulative effect of all this imparts and reflects itself upon my work. .

Azadeh's work has been exhibited in Amsterdam, Basel, Cairo, Dubai, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, London, Los Angeles, New York, Paris and Tehran.

### Statement

This installation celebrates the extraordinary drive, strength, resilience and passion of female compatriots. I chose a clear trophy case to symbolically showcase women who have contributed to their community and field in most diverse ways, people whose aspirations and achievements can be inspirational to us all.

Mirrors have been placed throughout and at all angles so that all viewers see a part of themselves in each of these women. They are invited to peer in and reflect on all facets. Finally, I felt compelled to also use humble packing material (cardboard box & paper filler) hinting to the fact that some of us live in exile and may have transient homes.

Featured women - just a few of the many role models we can be inspired by:  
Anousheh Ansari, Christiane Amanpour, Farah Pahlavi, Gisue & Mojgan Hariri, Haleh Esfandiari, Mahnaz Afkhami, Maryam Mirzakhani, Masih Alinejad, Monir Farman Farman, Sareh Javanmardi, Shirin Neshat and Zahra Nemati



I AM ... Inspired

Photographs, paper, cardboard and mirrors inside an acrylic box  
40 cm x 40 cm x 10 cm



## Nermine Hammam (Egypt)

Born in Egypt (1967), Nermine Hammam is an Egyptian photo artist, living and working between Cairo and London. As an artist, she photographs the world and then alters the images she captures: her works are intricate composites of layered images and symbols, transformed through the prism of an aesthetic that combines digital manipulation and painting to form a rich and highly personal tapestry.

Nermine obtained her BFA in filmmaking from New York University's Tisch School of Arts, going on to work with Simon & Goodman and renowned Egyptian film director Youssef Chahine. Strongly influenced by her background in filmmaking, her images form sequential narratives, like the stills of a film, related in time and space.

Nermine's work is widely exhibited and has been included in public and private collections around the world. This includes international biennales such as the Bamako Biennale for Photography in Mali (2011), X Biennale, Cuenca Ecuador (2009), and Photo Biennale, Thessaloniki (2009). Over the past decade, her work has been shown in more than fifty international exhibitions, both solo and collective, around the world.

### Statement

*"I shall never forget Her who is the giver of happiness; She it is, O Mother, who, in the form of the Moon, Creates the world full of sounds and their meanings, And again, by Her power in the form of the Sun, She it is who maintains the world. And She, again, it is who, in the form of Fire, destroys the whole universe at the end of the ages." -Tantric Hymn to the Goddess Shakti*

Oum Kalthoum is from Nermine's Ma'at series named after the Egyptian goddess of truth, order and justice. "It all started with this urge, a primal one, to embody all the women that I admired, despised or desired to become. To become One with the female archetype," says Nermine.

Here the late iconic Egyptian singer, Oum Kalthoum, is transformed into a larger than life composite of images; a harmonious blend of the earthly and the spiritual, of male and female, in a single perfect whole.

Nermine writes: "These images (the Ma'at series) are a reaction to my unsettled external environment, a shamanic, transformative ritual to conjure harmony and restore order. My warrior women combine the symbols of male and female power in one. In uniting these opposing energies, Ma'at takes on a transformative quality, asking the universe for healing, and recalibration, through art."



Oum Kalthoum  
Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper  
100 cm x 53.5 cm



## Hilda Hiary (Jordan)

While Hilda Hiary lives and works in her native Jordan, she is a global citizen and has exhibited at renowned venues in the United States, Europe, Africa, Asia and Middle East. She obtained a BA in Sociology and Political Science at the University of Jordan and a BA of Fine Art at Zitouna University.

Hilda has held solo exhibitions and participated in group exhibitions in the Middle East, Europe and the US. Over the years, her prolific presence and persistence has vaulted her to the top of a select group of female artists of Middle East origin being recognized globally.

### Statement

I admire the independent self-reliant Arab woman and this great figure of a woman has long been a part of many of my exhibitions. Unfortunately the media's portrayal of the Arab woman is that of a weak timid human being. Yes, you will see the widow, the mother of a martyr or a single woman, but these women are proud, strong and willing to live to give and to love. Of course the over-powered and helpless is also part of the Arab community, but that woman is also part of many Western communities.

The great Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani once said, "Rise against a culture that foresees you as a feast upon a bed," and I used this poem in this painting. I see women of all races the same way; she can either rise and be a figure to be followed or just be a browbeaten minion.



**Pregnant Women**  
Mixed media on canvas  
100 cm x 100 cm



## Carelle Homisy (Egypt)

Born in Cairo, Carelle Homisy graduated from the Faculty of Arts Education at Helwan University in 1991. She is a member of the Plastic Art Syndicate and of the Atelier Group. Her first solo exhibition was in 1992 and she has since exhibited in Egypt and throughout Europe. She has also participated in many group exhibitions and her work can be found all over the world. In Egypt, the Cultural Development Fund, the General Organization for the Palace of Culture and the Museum of Modern Art hold her art.

Carelle Homisy's artwork is characterized by aspects of Expressionism and Fauvism, which she resorts to when expressing her inner feelings, by reforming figures and intensifying colors. Hence the painting becomes an illustration of personal and intellectual experiences. It is also a mixture of elements and strong colors and line vibrations, which gives an impression of continuous movement.

Carelle says that painting is the only way to express her thoughts, dreams and inner feelings.

### Statement

I chose the title " Flowers of the World " for my painting, because I truly believe that women, and surely Egyptian women, have always been, since the beginning of time, a force of power that enlightens everything and everyone around it. They were goddesses, queens, artists, scientists and even great warriors who defended their beliefs, family, land and country. They always spread beauty, kindness and love everywhere. And just like the Nile flowing and flowering everything in its path, women will keep on flowering the world with all they have to offer.





Flowers of the World  
Oil on canvas  
60 cm x 80 cm



## Lulwa Al Khalifa (Bahrain)

I am a self-taught painter. I have never had a formal education in art, but I have always had a deep passion for it. My work is contemporary and mostly abstract. I paint alla prima and my paintings are always oil on canvas. I love the texture and vibrant colors of oil paint. I'm constantly inspired by life around me. I try not to overthink my process and I paint what I feel when I'm facing the canvas. I am not intimidated by a blank canvas, in fact it fills me with possibilities.

Her exhibitions include: World Art Dubai 2015, Art Hamptons, NY, Vogelsang Gallery 2015, Affordable Art Fair New York 2015, Art Wynwood, Miami 2015, Ahlan Gallery Exhibition, The Warwick Dubai 2015, Art Bahrain 2015, Art BAAB 2016 London, Be Bahrain, Bahrain Art Week-London 2016, 43 Annual Fine Arts Exhibition, The Bahrain National Museum 2017, Food is Culture-The Bahrain National Museum, ArtBab 2017.

Her work has been featured in various publications, such as: *Thirty Three Artists, Thirty Three Islands, A Kingdom of Art* by Renaud Siegmann, *Behind the Painting* by Abdullah Alkhan.

### Statement

*From The Outside 2* is part of my "From The Outside" series that explores boundaries and perception. There are preconceived ideas that the world has regarding Middle Eastern women that paints them all in one colour. The women of the Middle East are just as diverse, nuanced and layered as women everywhere else. The painting depicts this concept of perception through the white lines and the woman behind them. There is the view from the outside, being the one where she is seen from behind the lines, and then there is her view where she sees the world through the white lines as well. Both her perception and the perception of the world outside, is seen through a barrier of white lines that impacts clarity.

Perceptions and preconceived ideas about each other can be clarified if we remove the boundaries that separate us. Middle Eastern woman are an integral part of the world community. They are woven into the fabric of humanity that we are all a part of. We have more that unites us than that which divides us. We just have to remove the boundaries of understanding to gain clarity.



From the Outside 2

Oil on canvas

90 cm x 90 cm



## Marwa Al Khalifa (Bahrain)

Marwa Rashid Al Khalifa is a Bahraini artist who has a passion for mixed media art and photography. In order to explore and push new artistic boundaries, Marwa incorporates the use of different materials in her pieces, her work broaching a "spiritual aura" that invites the viewer to meditate and embark on a personal journey.

Marwa has exhibited locally and internationally. She received the Bronze Palm Award in the Fine Art Category at the 3rd Visual Arts Forum for GCC Artists held in Doha, 2015.

### Statement

In her latest body of work Marwa is inspired by the seas of her native Bahrain and their famed natural pearls. She chose to use fiberglass and steel to create a minimalist presentation.

While researching, Marwa discovered that natural pearls form when an irritant such as a parasite or other foreign object works its way into an oyster. As a defence mechanism, a fluid is produced to coat the foreign object. Layer upon layer of this coating called "nacre" is deposited until a lustrous pearl is formed.

Having portrayed a woman's strength and fragility in a previous body of work composed of wood, Marwa started to see the parallels in the process of how a pearl is formed is very much in line with how women face challenges in their own lives.

I am blessed to be surrounded by generations of pioneering women who added value to society, each one unique and shining in her own light just like a pearl does. Each had her own set of obstacles to overcome and yet with every challenge they confronted only added strength and lustre to their personalities. This string of brilliant pearls from mothers to daughter inspired me to become the woman I am.



Jiwan  
Fiberglass and steel  
100 cm x 100 cm



## Nabeela Al Khayer (Bahrain)

Nabeela Al Khayer was born in Manama, the Kingdom of Bahrain. The free spirited contemporary artist, who is also a successful businesswoman, in what remains a very masculine and traditional society, is driven by a fierce passion to inspire and empower women. Her appreciation for all that is feminine is expressed on every canvas, and in every heat-filled brushstroke. Her expressive portraits are brought to life through her vibrant use of colour and shape, and speak volumes of the life heartaches, struggles and joys that all women, regardless of their culture or socioeconomic status, share.

Nabeela, who developed her artistic skills in the Slade School of Fine Art in London and in workshops in Paris and Geneva, has held numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout the Middle East and across the globe. Her first solo art exhibition was held in Bahrain during 2002. In 2003 she was awarded the prestigious Silver Leaf Award, and since then she has had numerous exhibitions in the Middle East, Europe, New York and Asia. Her work is among the collections of Bahrain National Museum, Jordan National Museum as well as many private art collectors.

### Statement

This work of art depicts the intangible human emotions that carry in their midst layers of pain, suffering, and love. These emotions are portrayed in simplified depth, through messages that were sent, some messages arriving to its destination and others lost through time; through words that have been erased by time that still provoke an aching sadness in a deep, yet understated spirituality.

I wanted to achieve a strong focus on the color turquoise. This magnificent precious stone gives tremendous power to its bearer; it also inspires one to give incessantly with an abundant outpouring of emotions and feelings that reflects women's endurance and resilience.

The relationship between the painter, the painting and the viewer is interactive, and in this work I unveil vagueness with clarity to convey the intricate complexities of the human psyche and its simplicity at the same time. What the observer receives is a journey into the human's innermost crevices and then he or she encapsulates the feelings that reveal themselves where they discover that some aspects are not what they seem to be.

From the sturdiness of the turquoise stone comes its might and its power; whereas from the letters emotions emerge. And just like time and the forces of nature create small black and white specks on the turquoise stone, also letters accumulate to create a buildup of spiritually perceptible expressive words. The constraints are removed and others reappear to take us to a new vision that is unadorned yet unique and poignant.



Shather Alfairooz (Gold Specks of Turquoise)  
Mixed media on wood  
80 cm x 80 cm



## Ghada Khunji (Bahrain)

Ghada Khunji is a graduate of the Parsons School of Design and the International Center of Photography's Documentary Program, both in New York. She started her career in the early nineties as a freelance photographer in the fashion industry in New York City, and spent two years as a research assistant for photo agencies, including Black Star and Magnum, followed by eight years as a printer and print manager for a high profile clientele including Annie Leibovitz and Steven Meisel.

Khunji's photographs are known for documenting both landscapes and people from all over the world and the inherent dignity of the human element. In her latest work, she focuses the lens on herself by exploring her innermost feelings, thoughts and identity as a woman. Khunji is the recipient of a significant number of awards, including the Lucie Discovery of the Year (2006), American Photo Magazine's Image of the Year Award (2007), as well as the Golden Lights Award for Travel. She has exhibited widely in the US and Europe and throughout the Middle East. As the recipient of the Julia Margaret Cameron Award (2012), she won the first prize in the category of portraiture. One of her recent works was acquired by the Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives (ALJCI) in 2013. In the same year, she was nominated for the Prix Pictet, the global award in photography and sustainability. In 2017 she will be participating in The Colombo Art Biennale which will be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in December.

### Statement

Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* has puzzled many for its non-inclusion of women in such a pivotal moment. According to the Gospel account in Matthew 27:55: "*Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.*" Jesus's mother Mary was one of his most faithful followers along with another Mary, from Magdala, who was the disciple Jesus appeared to first after his resurrection. As many artists, Leonardo Da Vinci painted his rendition of the moment. We can all take the same picture, but the story will be different.

I was born in Bahrain in 1967. I experienced kindergarten at Sacred Heart School and then moved on to Bahrain School studying until graduation in '85. At one point, Bahrain School boasted students from 51 nationalities. I was surrounded by those from many religions. In my tableaux, I explore religion through a magnifying glass . . . searching for the common thread of light that we all share. I lost my father at a very young age. Although a child, I would feel that his essence was always there. I would look up at the sky and talk to him. Simply, God to me was the sky. Our Father and Jesus had a duality of meaning to me; both different yet parallel to each other. *Our Last Supper* explores the identity of being a woman; of yearning for the father that left me too soon and the frustration of mishandling the true idea of religion. With fragments of personal objects, I photograph and then stitch together the visuality of questions I ask myself.





Our Last Supper  
Photo collage on canvas  
52 cm x 100 cm



## Annie Kurkdjian (Lebanon)

Born in Lebanon in 1972, Kurkdjian lives and works in Beirut. Through the turbulent years of the Lebanese Civil War, she first studied fine arts and psychology at the Lebanese University, followed by theology at St. Joseph's University. Kurkdjian has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including Gallery Sader, UNESCO, Salon Sursock, Royal School of Arts London, and Biennale Arts Hors Normes in Lyon, amongst several others.

Since 2005, she has held solo exhibitions at the Goethe Institut (2005), Centre Culturel Français (2006), Surface Libre (2007), Zico House (2008), Atelier 109 (2010), and espace Bertin Poirée (2012). Annie Kurkdjian's work won the "Johayna Baddoura Prize" in 2012 and has been showcased in Art Dubai and Menasa Art Fair in Beirut in 2013.

### Statement

As a woman, I'm considered to have the capacity to shelter, protect and nourish newborn humanity. I'm the partner of man in paradise, and his partner in hell. The partner of God in giving birth. I give birth in pain.

As much as I know the secrets of life, I also know how to look at death, how to bury and how to mourn. A woman is a priestess of life and death. She's the earth, from where children go for life and to where they return when the journey ends.

In my canvases, I give birth to children, I protect them, I watch over them while they sleep, I observe them agonizing, the head on a pillow, I bury them, I mourn.

A canvas is a space of freedom and peace; I choose it as a space for my womanhood.



Untitled  
Mixed media on board  
60 cm x 70 cm



## Hanaa Malallah (Iraq)

Hanaa Malallah studied Fine Art in Baghdad with an emphasis on graphics and painting. In 2005 her thesis concerning the logic order in Mesopotamian drawing gained her a PhD in the Philosophy of Painting. She has taught and lectured widely at several faculties of the University of Fine Arts in Baghdad. At the end of 2006 she left Iraq for an artist residency at the Institute du Monde Arabe in Paris and from there followed the call of a fellowship offered by SOAS in London in 2008. She held a fellowship at the Chelsea College of Art in London from 2011 to 2013. She currently she works as associate professor at Royal University for Woman (RUW) in Bahrain and concentrates on research.

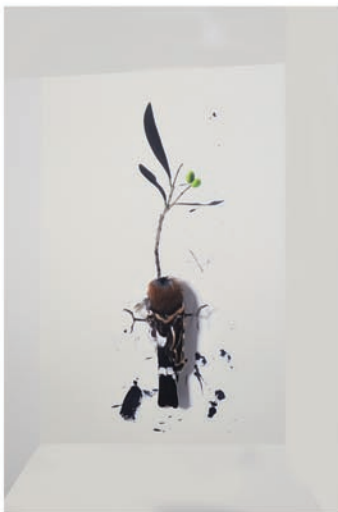
Her work graces numerous private collections, art centres and museums, including the Centre for Modern Art, Baghdad, the Jordan National Museum Amman, The British Museum, The Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, The Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah. Hanaa Mallalah is internationally acclaimed for her material-focused practice and her philosophical /spiritual explorations into the nature of being and not being.

### Statement

Hanaa Malallah writes: “The Hoopoe bird appears in many ancient religious texts. I have started to follow the concept that is presented by the Hoopoe as a bird seeking truth to survive morally and spiritually, by starting a dangerous journey. I have used the Hoopoe as a symbol of suffering and survival in my artworks for the last six years, often in comparison to the Dove with olive branch. While the Dove was originally a Christian symbol, it was transformed into an iconic, secular symbol of peace by Pablo Picasso. Similarly, I have reworked the Hoopoe and olive branch as a symbol of survival in a secular context. I tried to deliver my concept by using taxidermy Hoopoe birds to explain that the shape is there but the content (life) is not.”

The Hoopoe bird (hudhud in Arabic) is also important in Islamic tradition, because it appears in a number of religious texts, most notably in the Holy Qur’an. It has been seen throughout history as sacred, wise and protective. In Malallah’s work, she replaces the Dove with the Hoopoe, which reframes the bird and olive branch motif to represent not peace but survival through destruction. There is, however, an inherent irony with the use of taxidermied, dead Hoopoe birds to represent the idea of survival. It is almost as if the empty bodies of expired birds represent the hollow emptiness associated with survivor guilt. Malallah relates to the Hoopoe bird because of its historic association with moral and spiritual guidance, and legends of dangerous journeys undertaken by the bird, often inviting others to share in the experience. The artist equates these journeys to her own artistic journey, in which she undertakes to seek the truth in order to survive. In her work, the Hoopoe has become a symbol of survival itself.

Louisa Macmillan, October 2014



Survival Hoopoe  
Digital print  
40 cm x 31 cm



I Have Learnt Something You Did Not Know  
Black and red ink on paper  
60 cm x 100 cm



## Rania Matar (Lebanon)

Born and raised in Lebanon, Rania Matar moved to the U.S. in 1984. Originally trained as an architect at Cornell University, she currently works full time on her personal photography projects and teaches photography at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Matar's work has been widely published and exhibited in the U.S. and internationally, such as at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers From Iran and the Arab World*. Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington DC; Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York; Sharjah Art Museum; National Portrait Gallery in London.

Matar has won numerous awards, including the 2011 Legacy Award at the Griffin Museum of Photography, and 2011 and 2007 Massachusetts Cultural Council artist fellowships. She has garnered honorable mentions at the UNICEF Picture of the Year Award, LensCulture Exposure International, Silver Eye Center for Photography Fellowship, and CENTER, and has been a repeat top 50 winner at Critical Mass. Matar's images are in the permanent collections of several museums, institutions and private collections worldwide. She has published three books: *L'Enfant-Femme*, 2016, *A Girl and Her Room*, 2012, *Ordinary Lives*, 2009

### Statement

My work focuses on girls and women, transitions, identity and the passage of time. My series *Unspoken Conversations* explores womanhood at two important stages of life: adolescence and middle age and is inspired by the poem of the same name by Sharon Olds. While I had been photographing girls and women separately in earlier work, I found myself including both mother and daughter in the same frame. Casual glances, hand gestures, subtle shifts in body language, shared embarrassments, vulnerability, are the focus of the images, conveying simultaneously the personal and the universal in the complex mother-daughter relationship. In spite of the particulars of each relation the images focus on the pressures of aging that mark both sides of a woman's life as she enters and exits her years of reproductive fertility, capturing both the pleasures and uncomfortable realities of growing up and growing old.

Central to my work is also the duality of my own identity: my shifting identity as a mother, and my bicultural identity as a Lebanese-American. My work focuses on women in both the U.S. and the Middle East. Beyond the perceived differences, there is universality in our common humanity. In this work – as in my previous series, I hope to create a sense of shared human experience particularly that of women, and highlight how female subjectivity develops in parallel form across cultural lines.



Jacqueline & Juliette, Beirut, Lebanon

Archival pigment prints mounted on DiBond  
60.9 cm x 50 cm



Wafa'a and Samira, Bourj El Barajneh  
Palestinian Refugee Camp, Beirut, Lebanon

60.9 cm x 50 cm



## Raeda Saadeh (Palestine)

Raeda Sa'adeh was born in Um El Fahem in 1977, and received her BFA and MFA from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem. She was the winner of the first Young Artist of the Year Award organised by the A.M. Qattan Foundation in 2000. Her work in photography, performance and video has been exhibited widely internationally in Europe and the US. Recent exhibitions include 'Re-Orientations' at the European Parliament, Brussels; 'No Man's Land', at the GEMAK Museum, The Hague, Holland; 'In Transit', House of World Culture, Berlin; 'Biennal Cuvee', OK Centre, Lens, Austria (all 2008); Infr'ation Festival International d'Art Performance, Se'te, France; and 'About Time 2', Kunstmuseum, Denmark (2007). Her work was included in the Sydney Biennial of 2006 and the Sharjah Biennial 8, 2007.

In 2015, Al-Monitor considered her among 50 people shaping the culture of the Middle East. She lives and works in Jerusalem..

### Statement

The woman as an occurring subject in my installations or performance work is represented as living in a state of occupation. This occupation or "occupying" force is issued through political conditions within her environment and this results in influencing the otherwise peaceful quality of her world. There are both private and public elements that manipulate this world.

The occupying force has many facets: it can take the shape of physical tangible realities of the everyday, such as in a wall of concrete, a fence, a checkpoint, a curfew, a barrier of stone - or it can reassign it's force unto a face of a child, a home, a language, and cultural, traditional expectations. There are limitations on her personal freedom as well: the woman, the mother, the lover, the guide, the protector. She seeks justice and longs for change. She is not blind to the opponents around her and pushes forward with enduring strength – and at times, she feels that it is almost as if she has to assume a sort of madness in her behavior so that she can live unharmed by oppression, in an attempt to always protect those she loves from negative forces of fear.

In my artworks, the woman I represent lives in a world that attacks her values, her love, her spirit on a daily basis, and for this reason, she is in a state of occupation – and her world could be here in Palestine or elsewhere; and despite all, she looks towards her future with a smile. The subject/woman I represent in the majority of my work is weighed down with oppression but is filled with ambition; she is saner than she should be and yet she is also a little mad. She is both fragile and strong, she is fully aware and responsive, and she is constantly on the move. And every move she makes, every act, is an act that exhibits awareness towards her surrounding environment, while simultaneously being an act of revolt towards social orders/conditions.





Keys  
Photograph  
90 cm x 60 cm



## Nagla Samir (Egypt)

Nagla Samir is a contemporary Egyptian media artist based in Cairo.

Her work falls within diverse disciplines; including photography, digital image, video and installation, and challenges social norms versus spiritual aspects. Nagla also explores many themes: the human body, the vessel of soul, and the effect of time and mystery of reincarnation. Her work may seem personal, spiritual and remote, from direct themes related to nationalism, yet she is driven by the essence of her community; one that is obsessed by corporal culture, with a long heritage of mystical beliefs. Her work is her contribution to cultural evolution, defying and transgressing censorship and social taboos.

She has held various solo exhibitions and participated in group national and international exhibitions. Her work has been awarded prizes, such as the Award for Video Installation at the 24th Alexandria Biennale for Mediterranean Countries.

She holds a Ph.D. in visual communication and works as a part time Assistant Professor of Art and Design at The American University in Cairo.

Her curatorial projects include IMAFY (the 1st International Forum for Media Art for Youth in Egypt), and "A Survival Guide". She founded Passage 35 Center for Contemporary Art and worked as Director of the Sharjah Art Gallery at the American University in Cairo.

### Statement

My work highlights the eternity tree, as a symbol of knowledge and self-awareness.

The tree embraces in core my ancient Egyptian heritage, the torso of Nefertiti, Queen of the religious revolution, and the "BA" –the soul- resting peacefully at her feet. The roots extend to Coptic heritage, represented by the fish, symbol of Christian faith and the promise of fertility in rural Egyptian folklore. The branches twist and turn along history to extend beyond the gate with Arabic inscriptions, the Islamic frontal for current Egypt, that again endorses the roots.

All elements complement creating a serene scene, echoing the unique and eternal rejuvenation of Middle Eastern rich and diverse beliefs.



I AM History  
Digital photomontage  
80 cm x 60 cm



## Soheila Sokhanvari (Iran)

Soheila Sokhanvari is a British Iranian artist, born in Shiraz whose multimedia work cultivates a non-uniform practice though her themes are rooted in the notions of collective trauma, power and hope told through the narrative of the individual.

Trained in Persian Miniature painting by her father as a child, her practice includes painting and drawing with egg tempera, Iranian Crude Oil and human hair on calf vellum as well as sculpture. Her employment of egg tempera on vellum in the traditional practice of creating colour slows down the art making process, which in the time of rapid global consumer society functions as a form of "resistance and anarchy".

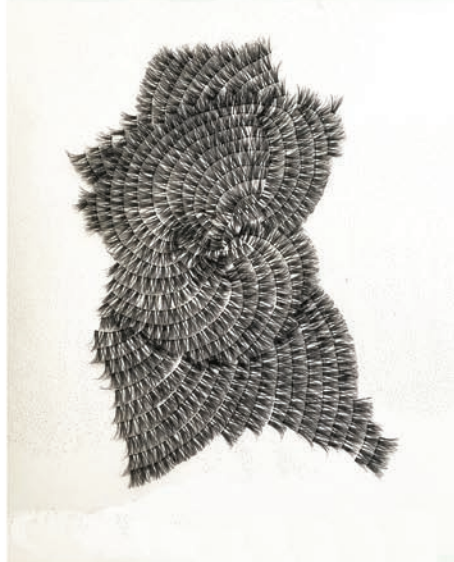
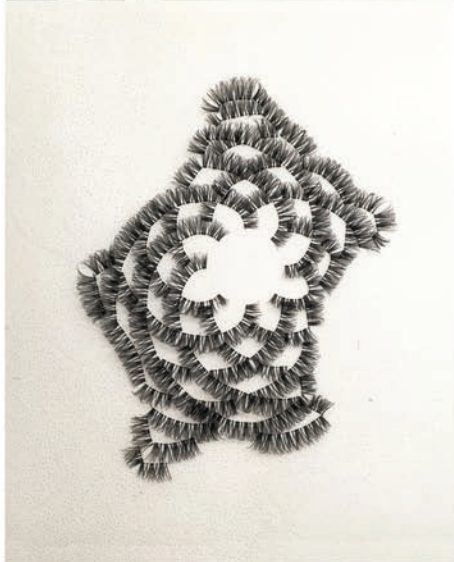
Sokhanvari graduated in 2006 with a PGDip in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art and Design and MFA Fine Art from Goldsmiths College in 2011. She has exhibited nationally and internationally, showing in "Champagne Life," an all-female group exhibition at Saatchi Gallery 2016, Jerwood Drawing Prize 2015, one of the top ten UK new graduates shortlisted for the Catlin Art Prize in 2012 and as one of the top seven new art graduates for exTRACT at GL Strand, Copenhagen (2012).

### Statement

My work consists of four framed drawings using human hair, based on the idea of self-portrait in the age of digital technology and the concept of the historic representation of the artist's self-portrait. These series belong to a concept of symbolic self-portraits that I have engaged with since 2015. These abstract shapes originate from the idea that as I have been absent from Iran since I was a child, hence my nonexistence from family photographs, I have drawn the negative shapes between people and objects in family photographs as my self-portrait, in a sense to reclaim my existence in these events. The drawings using human hair to outline or to trace these shapes represent an absence and a presence where a negative space becomes a positive manifestation. The drawings are done on calf vellum (parchment) which is derived from skin of calf; an animal that is used in most monotheistic religions as the sacrificial animal which here symbolizes the sacrifice of the individual.

The title of my work is "Song of Myself" and comes from a poem first published in (1855) by the American poet, essayist and journalist, Walt Whitman (1819-1892). The key to the poem lies in the "concept of self" (typified by Whitman) as "both individual and universal," the "self" as the human ideal but one of the common people rather than the epic hero. Citing the hero in every individual, the poem celebrates the body and the spirit from the singular to the cosmic.

Song of Myself  
Human Hair on Calf Vellum  
36 cm x 30 cm (each piece)



Self-portrait 1986, 2016  
Self-portrait 1987, 2017

Self-portrait 2014, 2016  
Self-portrait 1980, 2017



## Mayasa Al Sowaidi (Bahrain)

Mayasa Sultan Al Sowaidi is a self-taught artist from the Kingdom of Bahrain. She earned a BS degree in Mathematics from the University of Bahrain, a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration and an MBA from the New York Institute of Technology. With a background in mathematics, balance and order are important components of her artistic practice. Art is an essential part of her daily life, allowing her freedom of expression and a platform to explore her creativity.

Al Sowaidi is a member of the Bahrain Art Society and has participated in numerous exhibitions in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, Dubai and Oman. A recent group exhibition in Dubai showcased 30 artists from the Middle East and South Africa. She also participated in BAAB (Bahraini Artists Across Borders) in May 2016 which was held at the Victoria And Albert Museum in London. She was the Public Vote Prize Winner 2016 of Sovereign Middle East and North Africa, and has also been recognised with numerous other prizes and awards.

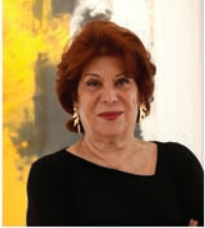
### Statement

The idea of this artwork is to represent that women in the Middle East are important figures that need more than our eyes to be seen; they are not as “bar codes” or as just numbers in this consumption world. Women from the Middle East are often lumped together as non-beings and this is of course not the case.

The dynamic black background represents life’s fast pace which leads toward consuming everything even ourselves, life and time. What I am trying to show in this artwork is that we as women are unique and different. Women in the Middle East are leading partners in developing our countries in all aspects.



Barcode  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
100 cm x 100 cm



## Wijdan (Jordan)

Painter, art historian, academic and diplomat, Wijdan first trained in art, in Amman, with the Italian Armando Prön and Jordanian Muhanna Durra. She carries a Ph.D. in Islamic Art from the School of Oriental and African Studies (1993) and is a Fellow of SOAS (2010).

She established The Royal Society of Fine Arts (1979) which founded the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts (1980). She founded the Higher Institute of Islamic Art and Architecture at Al Al-Beit University in Jordan (1993) and the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Jordan (2002). She was Ambassador of Jordan to Italy (2006-2011). She was the first to write the history of modern and contemporary Islamic art and has over 19 publications. At present she continues painting, working in glass and writing.

### Statement

My artwork steers towards what I believe to be the essential qualities of Islamic art that focus on the spiritual representation. Given the enormous importance of the word of God as set down in the Qura'nic revelation and its transmission throughout the Islamic world, the traditional emphasis upon the written word has made Arabic calligraphy into one of the major styles of modern artistic expression for Islamic artists (Arab Christian artists also use calligraphy in their work).

For me, using letters and/or words in my paintings, sculptures and installations, whether in their abstract or legible forms, is a means to assert my artistic identity as well as to ascertain my creative versatility in a personal and original manner far removed from foreign traditions.

In my present work I am inspired by the colored banners that Sufis hang around the shrines of their holy men and women, proclaiming their devotion to their Beloved, being the Almighty or human. The works include Sufi idioms and expressions that translate this devotion in rhyme and pose.





**I Am You**  
Old manuscript (dated 1902), mixed media on handmade paper  
80 cm x 60 cm



## Helen Zughaib (Lebanon)

Helen Zughaib was born in Beirut, Lebanon, living in the Middle East and Europe before coming America to study art at Syracuse University.

Currently living in Washington, DC, she paints primarily using gouache on board and canvas, and creates mixed media installations.

Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums in America, Europe and Lebanon. Her paintings are included in many collections: The White House, World Bank, Library of Congress, US Consulate General-Canada, US Embassy in Iraq, Arab American National Museum, Detroit, and DC Art Bank. She has received grants from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities in 2016 and 2017. Her paintings have been included in Art in Embassy exhibitions in Brunei, Nicaragua, Mauritius, Iraq, Belgium and Lebanon. She has been invited by the State Department to travel to Palestine, Switzerland and most recently Saudi Arabia, as cultural envoy. Her paintings have been gifted to heads of state by President Obama and former Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton.

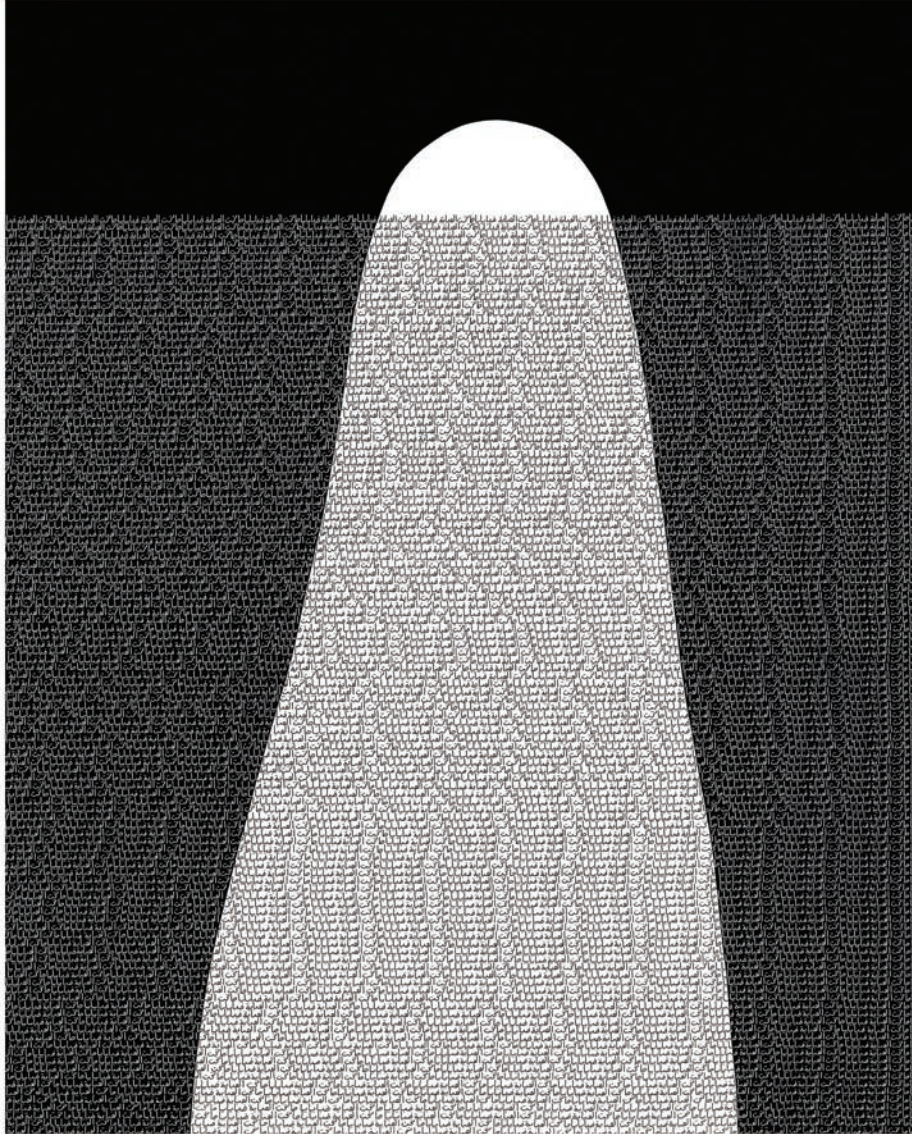
As an Arab American, Helen feels that her background in the Middle East allows her to approach the experiences she has in America in a unique way, remaining an observer of both the Arab and American cultures. She believes that arts are one of the most important ways to help shape and foster dialogue and positive ideas about the Middle East, especially since 9/11 and the more recent crises across the Arab world.

### Statement

The phrase that I have written is from a saying in Arabic, loosely translated to mean, "There are many secrets hidden under the abaya." The abaya is the outer black robe that many women in the Arab world wear.

While writing this phrase over and over, I thought about the many secrets and stories hidden beneath her abaya. What has she seen, what has she heard? I thought about her strength as a woman, her beauty, her power, especially in the face of adversity, war and displacement.

I thought about her protecting her children, wanting only peace and stability for them. I thought about her ability to persevere in any circumstance she faces.



The Secrets They Carry  
Gouache and ink on board  
96.5 cm x 78 cm





