

Arabcity | Ourouba

September 14 - November 22, 2019

Introduction

In a region of twenty-two countries spanning from North Africa to the Gulf, distinct from one another, but sharing the same language, overlapping histories, and a dominant religion, is there a common cultural link? In the exhibition, **Arabcity | Ourouba**, curator Rose Issa explored that question through the work of seventeen Arab artists whose art reflects the aesthetic, conceptual, and socio-political concerns of their generation.

"Arabcity" is the English term Issa coined from the Arabic word *Ourouba*, translated roughly as "the state of being Arab." It is a theme she has interrogated over her long career based in London as a curator, writer, producer, and champion of visual art and film from the Middle East. Her work aims to counter stereotypes and clichés long held by Western audiences about a largely misrepresented and misunderstood region.

In this, Issa's first Washington, D.C. exhibition, she presented artists who use distinct forms to address many of the concerns facing the Arab world today. They include political, social, economic and environmental challenges, playing out against a backdrop of political upheaval and growing demands for greater justice, freedom, and opportunity from an exploding youth population.

Across mediums that ranged from painting and sculpture to installation and video, the artists in this exhibition drew upon a multitude of influences, such as pop culture, folk art, Sufi poetry, and everyday found objects to reflect on their personal experiences. Their works convey themes of memory, history, identity, war, and justice, while also capturing the humanity, richness, and resilience of the region's artists and people.

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Photo by Jason Dixon



About the Artists

The artists selected by curator Rose Issa included Adel Abidin, Chant Avedissian, Ayman Baalbaki, Said Baalbaki, Khaled Barakeh, Anas AlBraehe, Tagreed Darghouth, Hassan Hajjaj, Fathi Hassan, Susan Hefuna, Abdul Rahman Katanani, Youssef Nabil, Mahmoud Obaidi, Khalil Rabbah, Raeda Saadeh, Batoul S'Himi, and Sharif Waked.

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Curator's Essay

"When twenty-two polymorphous countries share the same linguistic, geographic, and historical sphere, and often the same religion, is there a common cultural link?," writes exhibition curator [Rose Issa](#).

[Read essay](#)

Bringing the art of the Middle East to Washington

An interview with curator Rose Issa on the inaugural exhibit at the MEI Art Gallery and why an understanding of the region's arts and culture are important to the policy discourse in Washington, DC.



Perpetual Identities

Embedded within *Arabcity | Ourouba* was "Perpetual Identities," a pop-up show of works by Lebanese artist Katya Traboulsi. The series consists of hand-crafted replicas of bombshells used in the Lebanese civil war, each adorned with the designs and iconography associated with the artistic traditions of 21 featured countries. The sculpted, ornamented forms transform weapons of war into objects of beauty, representing the power of art to transcend violence and destruction.



Featured on WETA Around Town

Janis Goodman and Peter Winant join Robert Aubry Davis for a discussion on *Arabcity | Ourouba* and a few of the pieces that stood out to them.

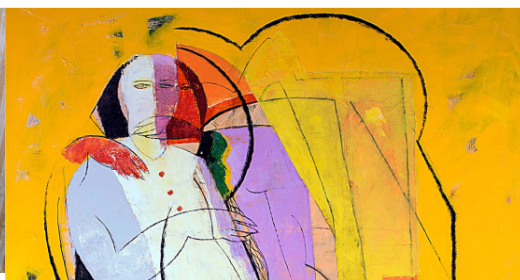


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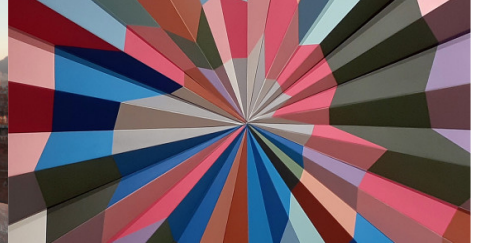
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Louder Than Hearts: Women Photographers from the Arab World and Iran

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November 29, 2023 - March 26,



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[1](#) [2](#) [Next >](#) [Last >>](#)