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*OSUN Center for Human Rights and the Arts
and Middle Eastern Studies Program Present*

“A Body Without a Soul:” Juliana Seraphim and Palestinian Art in 1970s Beirut

Wednesday, April 12, 2023

Olin 102

6:00 pm *EDT/GMT-4*

Dr. Alessandra Amin, University of Pennsylvania

“The galleries of Beirut are becoming a body without a soul,” wrote Palestinian artist Kamal Boullata in 1970, “for the soul was set free in the streets and in the [refugee] camps.” The Lebanese capital was at once a beacon of cosmopolitanism and a tangle of sectarian divisions, its visual culture increasingly fractured along sociopolitical lines. To the right of the political spectrum were “the galleries” of the anti-Palestinian, Christian East, filled with bourgeois, apolitical paintings; to the left were “the streets” of the Muslim West—including the Palestinian camps—where images of freedom fighters papered walls and dominated exhibitions. Like all artworlds under pressure, though, Beirut’s visual landscape was more complex than it appeared at first glance. This talk focuses on the work of Juliana Seraphim

(1934- 2005), a Palestinian-born bonne vivante whose status as a middle-class Christian granted her Lebanese citizenship and enabled her assimilation into Beirut's commercial art scene. Illegible in both Palestinian nationalist and Lebanese sectarian terms, Seraphim channeled her experience of exile into fantastical, hybrid forms that embrace the feminine and the grotesque in equal measure. Troubling binary distinctions between "committed" Palestinian art and its "apolitical" Lebanese foil, this talk examines the triangulation of deliberate frivolity, nonreproductive sexuality, and exilic subjectivity that animates a rich corpus of Seraphim's work from the late 1960s and 1970s.

Alessandra Amin received her doctorate in art history from UCLA in 2022 and is currently the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Fellow in Palestine Studies at Columbia University. She is working on her first book project, *Mother Figure: Art and the Palestinian Dream-State*, which considers the emergence of the dream and the maternal body as nested modes of relating to Palestine in art made during the heyday of the Palestinian Revolution (1965-1982). During the 2023–2024 academic year, she will be an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania.

For more information, call 845-758-7662, or e-mail sstamato@bard.edu.

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Location: Olin 102

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