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Samina Ali, Contributor
Author & Activist

In New Exhibition Nearly 50 Arab Women Artists Forget Trump's Travel Ban And Revel In Female Lust

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About a year ago, Irish actress Róisín O' Loughlin stumbled across a collection of Arabic poems compiled by Abdullah al-Udhari. Entitled "Classical Poems by Arab Women," the verses — which read like short, intense pop lyrics - were written by women over the span of thousands of years, mostly between the 7th and 12th centuries.

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One of those poems, by Wallada bint al-Mustakfi in 11th century Cordoba, stayed with O'Loughlin long after she'd set down the collection:

"I am made for higher goals and by Allah

I am going my way with pride.

I allow my lover to touch my cheek

And bestow my kiss on him who craves it"

Think Muslim women back then were submissive?

Turns out, O'Loughlin told me, Wallada was "this amazing Muslim poet and the daughter of a Caliph who inherited her father's estate and ran her own palace and literary salon, which many of the great minds of the time attended. She gave lessons to the women of her court and held her love affairs openly and unapologetically, writing rhymes in praise of her lover, Ibn Zaydún, and when things went bad, lambasting him. This was in today's Spain. Why have so many of us never heard about her?"

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Moved to introduce the poems to a modern audience, O'Loughlin decided to curate an exhibition. Called "Radical Love: Female Lust," the show features 48 female artists, half of Arab and Muslim heritage, responding to the Arabic poetry written by women over a thousand years ago.

Having already created quite a buzz long before it opens (appropriately) on February 14th at The Crypt Gallery in London, the show features both emerging and acclaimed artists from around the world, including Syrian artists who have been displaced, such as Yara Said, who designed the [flag](#) for refugee athletes competing in the recent Olympics (inspired by the life preserver she wore while fleeing Syria)

Given that the show is especially timely in light of the current court hearings regarding President Donald Trump's executive order restricting immigration and refugee resettlement from seven Muslim countries, featured below are six artists from four of those banned nations, along with the ancient poems these contemporary artists are engaging with.

1. Aula al Ayoubi (Syria) "My Eyes Outshine the Oryx's Eyes"



Salma bint al- Qaratisi

Iraq, 12th Century

My eyes outshine the oryx's eyes

My neck outshines the gazelle's neck

and my neckline sparkles my necklaces.

I have no problems with my hips

and my breasts don't weigh me down.

If I had neighbored the land of Thamud

Heaven's wrath wouldn't have fallen on the Thamudis.

Syrian artist Aula Alayoubi exhibits her work at ArtsWorcester

By Nancy Sheehan, Correspondent

Posted Oct 5, 2017 at 8:00 PM

Art is helping Aula Alayoubi face the future.

An accomplished painter, the Worcester resident nearly stopped her creative endeavors after leaving her war-torn native country, Syria. But the vibrant artwork she saw in Worcester, from paintings on walls to Elm Park's Art in the Park sculptures, lifted her spirits. She took up her brushes again and began painting on her perennial theme: faces.

Women's faces, specifically.

Alayoubi's multi-layered paintings of women whose facial expressions are as compelling as they are enigmatic can be seen in a new show, "Fruit of Heaven," opening at ArtsWorcester, 660 Main St., Oct. 6 and running through Nov. 4. An opening reception will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Oct. 6. Two shows running concurrently with Alayoubi's at the Aurora are "The Return," a series of large graphite drawings by John Hayes-Nikas; and "All Together Now," whimsical drawings by Susan Swinand.

The fruit referenced in the title of Alayoubi's show is the pomegranate which, in Islamic culture, is considered one of the fruits of heaven, according to Alayoubi. In one painting, she put the pomegranate, sliced open to show its convoluted compartments and seeds, atop a woman's head. It was her way of indicating direction, of showing the widely held concept that heaven is located somewhere up there.

At times, Alayoubi paints the pomegranate with blue seeds rather than the familiar red ones because, while it's visualize after fleeing a gruesome war, it wasn't hard for ArtsWorcester to picture Alayoubi having a show at its Aurora Gallery after first seeing her work about two years ago. She came in to attend a popular free annual event called the Worcester Portrait Exchange, where people of all artistic skill levels pair up across a table and create portraits of one another.

The event that year “just brought in groups of people who were entirely new to us and most of them were actually immigrants,” Juliet Feibel, ArtsWorcester executive director, said. “She was one of them and she made this fabulous portrait and then she just disappeared for a year.”

Last January, Alayoubi resurfaced with submission for ArtsWorcester’s 17th biennial, a juried show slated to run in the spring. “It was a very vibrantly blue woman with her face and body being turned into a target,” Feibel said. “It was absolutely stunning.” The piece was juried into the show and, perhaps because of that success, Alayoubi returned to ArtsWorcester not long after with a portfolio full of work ready to show.

“They were executed beautifully,” Feibel said. “They had a great deal of confidence. They’re beautifully made and they do grab you and ask you to look longer. The ones in the pomegranate series, the repetition of that fruit just invites you to wonder ‘What is the story here?’”

Alayoubi’s story is as complex and intriguing as her paintings. She did not feel comfortable being interviewed in English so some questions were posed to her that were then translated. Here are her answers, slightly edited for brevity:

Q: When and why did you leave Syria?

A: I left Syria in 2004 because of my job in Kuwait, and my last visit to Damascus was in 2010. I arrived in Worcester in 2011.

Q: Why did you come to Worcester?

A: I came with my former husband as a refugee (my husband was from Iraq)

Q: What is your relationship to Syria now? Do you still have family there?

A: The memory of what happened is nothing but pain and sadness. Most of my family members stayed in Damascus, while a few members left after the war started.

Q: How has coming to Worcester affected your artwork?

A: Because of a lack of social relationships and my weak English skills I became very depressed, which had a negative impact on my art ... I hope in the future to overcome this and to return to my former vigor. However, the presence of sculptures and works of art in public places, such as parks and buildings, was an incentive for me to not get lost from art completely, and for hope to remain.

Q: Who are the women in your paintings? From where are you drawing your inspiration?

A: The woman — in all her particularities — is the homeland, deriving the features of her face from its terrain: from its streets, its houses, its rivers, its earth, and its flowers ... from its stories ... from everything around me. Perhaps it is more than just from the homeland — perhaps it is a link between our current lives and our other lives. This is what her face “says” (expresses), full of strange particularities that wonder and wait in fear or sadness or hope for what is coming... This is what her hair, which travels towards the free sky, “says.”

Q: What is the relationship of the pomegranate to Damascus?

A: The pomegranate exists in Damascus in large quantities, to the extent that some cultivate its tree in their homes. It is a fruit used as medicine as well as food. Arab poets describe the pomegranate as a symbol of femininity and the beauty of a woman’s bosom. Furthermore, the name “pomegranate” is also used to reference bombs. (In Arabic, the words for “pomegranate” and “grenade” are the same)

Additionally, the juice of the pomegranate symbolizes blood. Lastly, in the Islamic religion, it is said that the pomegranate is one of the fruits of paradise that is available in this world ... Thus, this fruit carries a lot of meanings. But how do I see it today in women, who have lost their femininity and who have learned to bear arms? Its place will not be on a woman’s bosom, but either in her hand or on top of her head ... above ... in heaven.

This is simply how the people of this country dream. It is the symbol of paradise. I jumbled up the notions that help us understand what paradise is and what is required of us to enter it. Is killing the path to obtain and enter paradise? Perhaps these ignorant thoughts were the reason for the emergence of extremist and murderous religious groups. It was this mystery or ignorance in understanding paradise and religion, which I tried to express through the different shapes and colors of the pomegranate.

Q: What do you want viewers to take away from your exhibition?

A: To summarize the idea ... it is the invitation to think rationally, develop the mind with the evolving demands of the contemporary era, and to enjoy the life on this earth. We do not know what awaits us... A lot of the stories in religion may not be completely true or they may not align with our times or modern aspirations — even

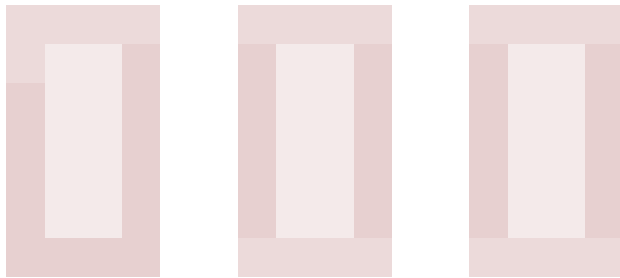
the idea of paradise itself... [for those who believe in its existence and that it will never be killed.] Ultimately, it is an idea presented in art which calls for reflection. First and foremost, I wish that the viewer has pleasure in my art and that they benefit from it on an artistic level.

Q: What is your personal relationship to the war in Syria?

A: At the beginning of the war in Syria, after the killing had started, I was on the side of Syrians who were attempting to obtain their freedom and I supported my position with words and through art. I'm against war in all its forms and against killing — especially for religious purposes. At the moment, I wish only for peace and stability for all Syrians, regardless of whether Bashar al Assad stays or goes.

sábado, 18 mayo 2019 - 19:59 h

Arte Mediterráneo en Es Polvorí



Obra de la artista argelina Semhane Kelil.

27-01-2016 | Dxeiro

Los artistas que conforman el Col·lectiu Mediterrani, junto a cuatro artistas invitados más, celebran en Es Polvorí, la Trobada Internacional d'Art Mediterrani, un proyecto que surge como respuesta a un trabajo de cooperación intercultural entre artistas, con un fondo común como es la mediterraneidad.

Con esta muestra se pretende romper fronteras para que el público asistente pueda sacar sus propias conclusiones respecto al intercambio y a la interacción entre culturas hermanas que tienen en común el mar Mediterráneo.

Así, en la exposición se podrán ver obras de los artistas Conchi Romero, Salvador Galán, Perceval Graells, José Luis Rico, Jaume Marzal, Pilar Sales, Juan Asís, Isabel Rico y de Willie Márquez en representación de la isla de Eivissa.

Además habrán cuatro artistas invitados venidos de Marruecos (Monia Touiss), Siria (Sinan Hussein y Aula Al Ayoubi) y de Argelia (Semhane Kelil).

En el acto de inauguración contarán con la actuación de baile del Grupo de Danza Contemporánea Interactiva, de Alicante, compuesto por Ángela Torregrosa Carratalá, Elena Barrera Piqueres y Camila Manzano Olmos.

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La inauguración será este viernes en la sala de Es Polvorí, en Dalt Vila, a las 20:00 horas y podrá visitarse hasta el 25 de febrero. La entrada es gratuita.

Relacionado

- [Arte mediterráneo](#)
- [Polvorí de Dalt Vila](#)

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Artistas de Siria, Marruecos y Turquía en una exposición de arte mediterráneo

REDACCIÓN

04/09/2015 18:05

Alicante, 4 sep (EFE).- Catorce artistas de España, Italia, Siria, Marruecos y Turquía participan desde hoy en una exposición de estilo contemporáneo que aúna pintura, escultura, poesía, fotografía y trabajo en papel, con motivo del I Encuentro Internacional de Arte Mediterráneo.

El evento está organizado por el 'Col.lectiu Mediterrani' (Colectivo Mediterráneo), una asociación cultural con sede en Alicante que tiene por objetivo establecer relaciones interculturales con los países de las dos riberas del Mare Nostrum y abrir nuevas perspectivas de entendimiento y colaboración.

Los alicantinos Conchi Romero, Adriano Carrillo, Javier Pastor, Jaume Marzal, Juan Ais, Isabel Rico, Pilar Sala, José Luis Rico, así como el italiano Claudio Bandini, los marroquíes Anas Bouanani y Monia Touis, el sirio Aula Al Ayoubi, el iraquí pero residente en Siria Sinan Hussein y la turca Meryem Tomak son los artistas participantes.

La exposición pretende "fomentar el diálogo y la cooperación entre diferentes países y sus culturas", así como "construir puentes que unan a los pueblos y personas más allá de sus diferencias".

En este sentido, Isabel Rico, artista expositora y miembro de la organización, ha declarado a Efe que su intención no es hacer una mera exposición sino "mantener un intercambio real con países mediterráneos, que aunque estén tan cerca parece que sean grandes desconocidos".

"Es el modo en que un grupo de artistas, pintores, fotógrafos, escritores, escultores, músicos y creadores de diversas nacionalidades pretenden romper fronteras físicas, geográficas, plásticas, intelectuales y profesionales", ha agregado.



AD

En la muestra se pueden contemplar trabajos de fotografía contemporánea y digital, como los de la propia Rico o el artista Juan Ais quienes, en palabras del presidente del colectivo, Javier Pastor, representan "el movimiento de la vida" o lo abstracto de la realidad, respectivamente, a través de objetos cotidianos.

La abstracción, la figuración y el surrealismo también están presentes en formato pintura, donde destaca el trabajo del artista de origen iraquí pero residente en Siria Sinan Hussein, quien, "a través de un toque irónico", hace "una crítica mordaz de las religiones", entre ellas la musulmana.

De hecho, en una de sus obras aparece representado el profeta Mahoma junto al personaje de dibujos animados Homer Simpson.

La escultura en madera de pino de la turca Meryem Tomak es otra de las opciones y permite a los visitantes descubrir las múltiples caras del ser humano a través de sus representaciones de máscaras.

La intención del colectivo tras esta primera edición es desarrollar un encuentro bienal y abrir un concurso para que artistas de ámbito nacional e internacional puedan presentar sus trabajos y ser elegidos.

Además, según ha detallado Rico, se baraja la opción de trasladar la sede del encuentro internacional a otros países del arco mediterráneo, al menos una vez cada cuatro años, para seguir fomentando el intercambio cultural.

"Toda cultura es básicamente pluricultural; no evoluciona, no avanza si no es a través del contacto con otras culturas. Su razón de ser, su modo de formarse y de extenderse es a partir de su encuentro con distintas comunidades, es que aporten asimismo sus modos de pensar, de sentir y de actuar", han explicado desde el colectivo.

A pesar de que el evento cuenta con el apoyo de la concejalía de Cultura del ayuntamiento de Alicante, de momento no se ha conseguido ningún tipo de subvención, por lo que todos los artistas y organizadores trabajan de forma desinteresada.

La inauguración contará, a partir de las 20 horas, con la actuación del grupo Danza Contemporánea Interactiva y durante todo el mes hay previstas actuaciones musicales a cargo de 'En Clave de Jazz' y 'Grupo Mediterráneo' con Abelardo Kostanegra, así como poesía musicada sobre textos de Luis García Montero.

1011418

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AULA AL AYOUBI

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Aula Al Ayoubi was born in Damascus in 1973 and studied mathematics and educational sciences at the University of Damascus. Her mixed media collages capture some of the region's most iconic, glamorous women, from Faten Hamama to Fairuz to Umm Kulthum. Accented with rich, colourful detail and dynamic compositions, her portraits convey her emotional responses to these celebrated figures. Her bold colour palette and mixed-media collage technique, imbue her canvases with a rich textural quality. Speaking of her creative process, she states: "Collage lends a feminine touch when combined with intricate orientations." She has exhibited widely in Syria and Kuwait and her work is featured in private collections.

[Back to all artists](#)