

Aesthetics of Solidarity by Arab American and Arab/SWANA Diaspora Artists in the US, 1948–Present

April 9–12, 2025
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI



Aesthetics of Solidarity

How do Arab American and Arab diaspora artists in the United States use their artistic practice to show solidarity with those facing socio-political injustices in the US and around the world? Join the MSU Broad Art Museum, the MSU Muslim Studies Program, and the Association for Modern + Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran + Turkey (AMCA) to learn more about solidarity and Arab American art histories at this symposium featuring presentations by artists, art historians, and scholars from around the world.

Register to attend in person. This symposium will be held at both the MSU Broad Art Museum and the MSU Libraries.

Register to attend virtually. Please note that all panels will use the same Zoom link, which you will receive upon registering.

Aesthetics of Solidarity is the 2025 Association for Modern + Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran + Turkey (AMCA) conference and the 18th Annual Michigan State University Muslim Studies Program Faculty Symposium. The symposium was inspired by themes in the exhibition *Nabil Kanso: Echoes of War*, on view at the MSU Broad Art Museum from Feb. 15–Jun. 29, 2025. The exhibition *Entangled Solidarities*, on view at the MSU Libraries from Feb. 7–May 30, 2025, also explores similar themes.

This symposium is a partnership between the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University (MSU Broad Art Museum), the MSU Muslim Studies Program, and the Association for Modern + Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran + Turkey (AMCA), in collaboration with MSU Global Studies in the Arts and Humanities, MSU Center for Gender in a Global Context, The Nabil Kanso Estate, and the Arab American National Museum.

Aesthetics of Solidarity has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy Demands Wisdom. Additional support for this convening is provided by the MSU Creating Inclusive Excellence Grant, MSU Humanities & Arts Research Program (HARP), the MSU Dr. Delia Koo Faculty Endowment, MSU Diversity Research Network Launch Awards Program, MSU Muslim Studies Program, MSU Asian Studies Center, University of Michigan Digital Islamic Studies Curriculum (DISC), MSU College of Arts & Letters Ad-Hoc Funding Request, MSU Libraries, and MSU Global Studies in the Arts and Humanities.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Wednesday, April 9
MSU Broad Art Museum

Welcome Reception: *Aesthetics of Solidarity*

6–8pm

Kick off the international symposium *Aesthetics of Solidarity* with us! While you're here, check out the exhibition that inspired the symposium—*Nabil Kanso: Echoes of War*.

Thursday, April 10
MSU Libraries

Panel 1: “When Conversation Fails... Art, Trauma, Gaza”

9–11am

This panel explores how artists provide a vocabulary to manage our witnessing and experiencing of traumatic times through poetry, textile art, visual art, and comedy. Elmaz Abinader explores “When Conversation Fails... Poetry Speaks” by examining poetry that navigates devastating emotional and physical terrains. Mounira Soliman in “When Conversation Fails ... Women Thread Needles and Weave” explores how tatreez has become instrumental in resisting attempts to annihilate the existence of Palestine. Visual artist Manal Deeb in “When Conversation Fails... We Illuminate” discusses how the ongoing siege and genocide impact her creativity and artwork. Maha Elsaid in “When Conversation Fails... We Laugh” deconstructs comedians who disrupt misrepresentations of the Gaza genocide and push boundaries of free expression, showcasing solidarity.

Panel 2: ““Don’t forget us here”: Liberatory Expressions and Carceral Solidarity from Guantánamo Bay Detention Camp”

11:30am–1pm

Guantánamo Bay is a paradoxical facility, both claimed and unclaimed by the US in order to subject detainees to US laws while routinely circumventing said laws to torture and abuse. Mansoor Adayfi, known as “Detainee 441” or “Smiley Troublemaker,” was forcibly imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay for over fourteen years without charge or trial—caught in the liminality of the “lawless universe.” Considering their imprisonment at Guantánamo Bay, this panel unpacks how Adayfi’s art, writing, and activism have become powerful pedagogical tools used to educate students about forced detention, juridico-political states, Islamophobia, and Anti-Arabism. This panel will discuss the importance of teaching Adayfi’s art and books *Don’t Forget Us Here* and *Art from Guantánamo* and engage in critical conversations about the impact of creative resistance on carceral-based solidarity movements within the US and beyond. Panelists include Mansoor Adayfi, Jenna Altomonte, and Todd Rowan.

Panel 3: “Diasporic Stories and Solidarities”

3–4:30pm

This panel considers the role of diaspora in developing narratives of self and larger social groups. Panelists include: Andrew Gayed, “Queer World Making: Contemporary Middle Eastern Diasporic Art”; Anne Marie Butler, “Diaspora Stories: Yasmine K. Kasem’s Queer Tales”; and Waleed F. Mahdi, “Art, Advocacy, and Yemeni Diasporic Consciousness.” Alessandra Amin will be the discussant for this panel.

Thursday, April 10
MSU Broad Art Museum

Keynote Lecture by Mariam Ghani: The Limits of Solidarity and the Collective of Grief
6–7:30pm

Where and why does leftist political solidarity run up against its limits? When empathy runs dry in the face of constant horrors, where understanding of context and history is lacking, where coalitions fracture, and when it seems impossible to effect real change, this talk will examine some recent object lessons in the limits of solidarity and explore grief as a possible alternative space or form of collective feeling, thinking, and being in common.

This lecture is the keynote presentation for the symposium *Aesthetics of Solidarity*. Taking place April 9–12, 2025, *Aesthetics of Solidarity* explores solidarity and Arab American art histories through presentations by artists, art historians, and scholars from around the world.

Friday, April 11
MSU Libraries

Panel 4: “Networks of Solidarity”
9:30–11am

This panel questions how artists developed strategies for forming solidarities through publications, printed material, and other projects. Panelists include: Ala Younis, “Publishing as Resistance: The Post-Apollo Press and Transnational Solidarity Networks in the Circulation of Sitt Marie Rose”; Laila Abdul-Hadi Jadallah, “Diasporic Kinship: Exile and Aesthetic Development in Washington, D.C., 1942-1992”; and Meghan Clare Considine, “Mohamed Melehi’s Print Media and the Futility of Importing Modernism.” Sarah Rogers will be the discussant for this panel.

Panel 5: “Identity as Strategy in Contemporary Art”
11:30am–1pm

This panel asks what strategies artists employ to assert their identities and cultures as they form solidarities. Panelists include: Holiday Powers, “Thundercloud: Art and Solidarity in the Work of Michael Rakowitz”; Nancy Demerdash, Marina Ballout, and Rana Huwais, “Reconstructions: Recording, Healing, and Home-Remaking in Contemporary Arab American Art”; and Sheyda Aisha Khaymaz, “‘Symbols in Symbiosis’: Situating Tamazgha in Hamid Kachmar’s Abstract Expression.” Dima Ayoub will be the discussant for this panel.

Panel 6: “The Art of Survival and Resistance”

3–4:30pm

The panel will present examples of survival and resistance from three distinct cultures where the visual arts are centered in creative acts of acknowledging, confronting and healing generational traumas caused by settler-colonial erasure, displacement, domination and repression. Panelists include: Candice Hopkins, “Forge Project and the Radical Potential of Non-colonial Spaces”; Susan Greene, “I Witness Silwan: Murals, Tourism, and Resistance to Ethnic Cleansing in Occupied Jerusalem”; and Lydia Bodnar-Balahutrak, “Bearing Witness to Histories of Genocide in Ukraine”; and discussant John Halaka.

Saturday, April 12, 9am–5pm

Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, MI

Field Trip: Arab American National Museum

Join us for a special visit to the Arab American National Museum—the first and only museum dedicated to telling the Arab American story. This day-long event includes tours of the museum and a making workshop. Transportation to and from Dearborn and lunch provided.

Advance registration for the field trip is required.

For more information about the symposium, visit: <https://broadmuseum.msu.edu/events/>.

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