

## Aesthetics of Solidarity (East Lansing, 9–12 Apr 25)

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

Deadline: Aug 30, 2024

Rachel Winter

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

The multifaceted work of Arab American artists and diasporic Arab artists in the US has been overlooked in histories of modern and contemporary art both in the United States and in the SWANA diaspora. In 2008, Faye Oweis published his insightful "Encyclopedia of Arab American Artists," in which he provides an overview of the life and work of 100 Arab artists living and working in the United States. Oweis's introduction briefly addresses the ways these artists explore contemporary socio-political issues around war, "immigration, displacement, diaspora, exile, freedom of expression, human rights, women's issues, racism, and discrimination." Yet the question of how Arab American and US-based Arab artists work as subversive political actors through their artistic practice both within and beyond an art world that marginalizes them has yet to be questioned in detail. This is especially true within the nascent field of Arab American art history.

This conference interrogates the way that Arab American and Arab/SWANA diaspora artists use their work to highlight contemporary injustices and show solidarity with those facing sociopolitical challenges. Specifically, we consider solidarity from an aesthetic perspective while redefining solidarity within a creative, transnational context. Temporally, this inquiry is framed by the 1948 Nakba and concludes with contemporary events, encompassing decades that witnessed the triumphs of decolonization and the disasters of dispossession. Furthermore, this transnational context welcomes perspectives that address the broader SWANA diaspora, as well as Muslim and non-Muslim diasporas. By redressing this absence around the aesthetics of solidarity, this conference endeavors to catalyze further development of the field.

We invite 15–20 minute papers as well as prearranged panels that consider any aspect of artistic practice, broadly defined to encompass visual art, material culture, literature, music, and theatre, connected to solidarities. Case studies may theorize or historicize solidarity in its broadest sense or explore works by individual artists/makers. Of greatest interest are papers that explore solidarity in transnational contexts attentive to the transgression of racial, political, ethnic, religious, social, and ideological boundaries in the name of collective struggles and liberation.

Panels and papers may address the topic from a variety of perspectives that include but are not limited to the following:

- What are the aesthetic strategies used by US-based Arab/SWANA artists and Arab American artists from 1948 on to show solidarity with those experiencing socio-political injustices in the US

and globally, and what impacts their aesthetic choices?

- In what ways have artist groups, alternative spaces, institutions, and/or publications helped to fashion and/or disseminate solidarities?

- Thinking about examples like Samia Halaby as historian, Kamal Boullata and Afaf Zurayk as curators, and Helen Khal as historian and critic, what other roles did artists assume as forms of solidarity?

- Like the many intersections between Palestinian rights, Indigenous sovereignty, and the Civil Rights Movement, among others, how are solidarities formed and visualized, and across what contexts?

- Beginning with the visual, how can we define and theorize solidarity in an Arab American context and/or the context of the Arab/SWANA Diaspora in the US across individual and collective practices?

- How can case studies around solidarity help to outline a genealogy and historiography of Arab American and Arab diaspora art history?

Interested presenters should submit an abstract (250-300 words), a CV, and a short biographical note (150 words or less) to the following Google form by August 30, 2024: <https://forms.gle/uCBie7ERuomhBwAH9>. For those who wish to submit a prearranged panel, please provide a short panel abstract (300-350 words) and the names of confirmed participants with paper titles. Questions should be directed to Rachel Winter at [winterr6@msu.edu](mailto:winterr6@msu.edu).

We expect to be able to provide some support for travel and lodging expenses. Funding will be confirmed along with notification of proposal status in September 2024. We are working to make a hybrid option available for scholars unable to travel.

Events concurrent with the conference will include: 1) the exhibition "Nabil Kanso: Echoes of War" featuring Lebanese-American painter Nabil Kanso at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University; 2) an exhibition exploring solidarity and the book arts of the Arab diaspora at the MSU Libraries; 3) a fieldtrip to Dearborn to visit the Arab American National Museum (to be confirmed); 4) other events to be announced

Co-convenors: Rachel Winter and Salah Hassan

Conference Committee: Nada Shabout, Sarah Rogers, Jessica Gerschultz, Pamela Karimi, Soma Chaudhuri, Tad Boehmer

Organizational Sponsors: Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, Michigan State University Muslim Studies Program, Association for Modern + Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey (AMCA), Michigan State University Global Studies in the Arts and Humanities, Michigan State University Center for Gender in a Global Context, The Nabil Kanso Estate, Arab American National Museum

Reference:

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