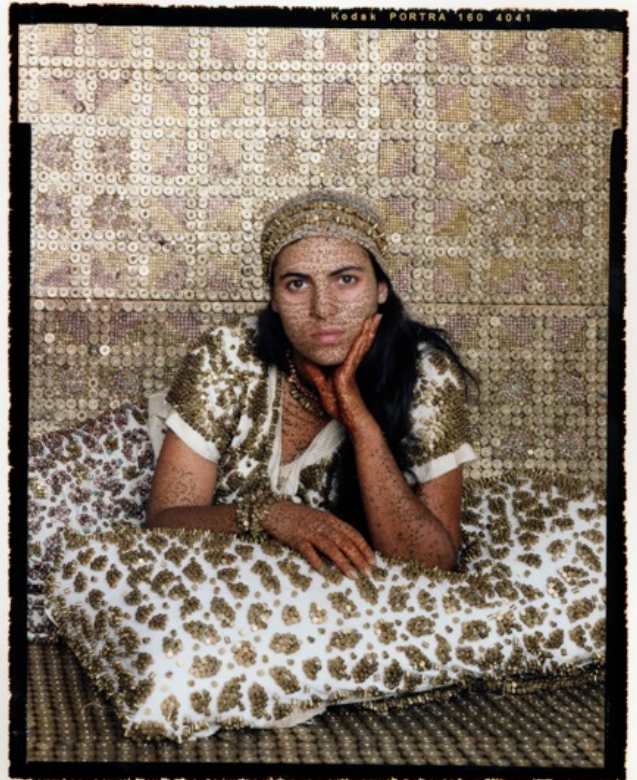


"In my art, I wish to present myself through multiple lenses – as artist, as Moroccan, as traditionalist, as liberal, as Muslim. In short, I invite viewers to resist stereotypes."

– Lalla Essaydi



Bullets Revisited #34, 2014, Lalla Essaydi (b.1956), Morocco/USA

Being and Belonging Exhibition Prospectus

ROM

The Exhibition

A compelling exhibition that explores the critical issues of our time – of being and belonging – from the perspectives of twenty-five transnational and intergenerational women artists connected to a vast geography spanning West Africa to Southeast Asia – a region often referred to as the Islamic world.

Within a framework of three themes – Space, Movement and Power – the exhibition examines issues of home, community, migration, power, gender, sexuality, and politics through mesmerizing and poetic works by contemporary women artists that push against simple definitions and stereotypes.

The exhibition includes outstanding artworks, some that have never been shown, by both emerging and well-established artists, which reflect upon their personal experiences, family histories, and local and global issues through a range of media. The multimedia artworks include paintings, drawings, graffiti art, photography, ceramics, mosaics, textiles, animation, and video installations.

Audiences will see works by artists from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Syria, Tanzania, Turkey, UAE, UK, USA, and Uzbekistan.

Although focussed broadly on the Islamic world, the topics addressed by the artists are universal in nature and reflect global issues and concerns.

The result is an exhibition that does not provide simple answers and definitions of being a woman in Islamic cultural contexts but presents a kaleidoscope of deeply personal perspectives that complicate and disrupt our own understanding of the way politics, culture, and religion shape the way we reflect upon our world.



Not for Me, 2018, made of steel razor blades
Tayeba Begum Lipi (b.1968), Bangladesh

Space

The works presented in the first theme interrogate the concept of space – from domestic and personal spaces to male dominated universes that are negotiated and reclaimed. Others grapple with intangible spaces such as ideological spheres that restrict artistic creativity and intellectual freedom or mystical realms that can only be reached through journeys of enlightenment and self realization.



“The influence of the intimate and private environment or space is key to my understanding of the feminine condition. What makes me a woman? By analyzing these spaces, I explore the tensions between emptiness and occupation that they convey.”

– Maryam Izadifard

Le jardin secret 1, 2011
Maryam Izadifard (b.1982), Iran/Canada

“My work presents an intimate perspective on the spiritual journey which is beyond psychological, cultural, and political boundaries. Aisha’s journey is a metaphor about community and the soul – wherein the person becomes a sacred dwelling, or a meeting place for humanity to rediscover our shared mystical body.”

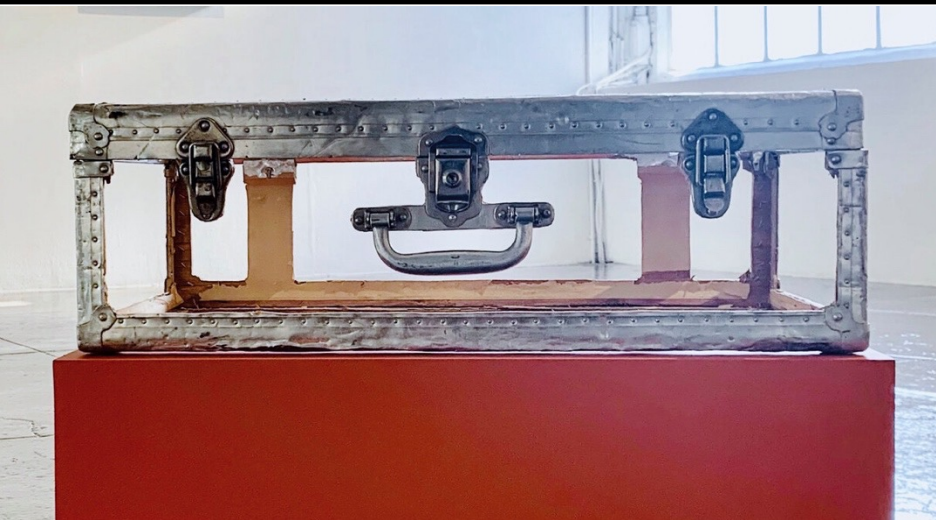
– Maïmouna Guerresi

Aisha in Wonderland series, 2016
Maïmouna Guerresi (b.1951), Italy/Senegal



Movement

The artworks included under the second theme of the exhibition foster dialogue and create tensions with one another about notions of freedom and restriction of movement, displacement, rootedness, belonging, the oscillation between right and wrong, and the transfer of ideas and symbols from one geographical region to another.



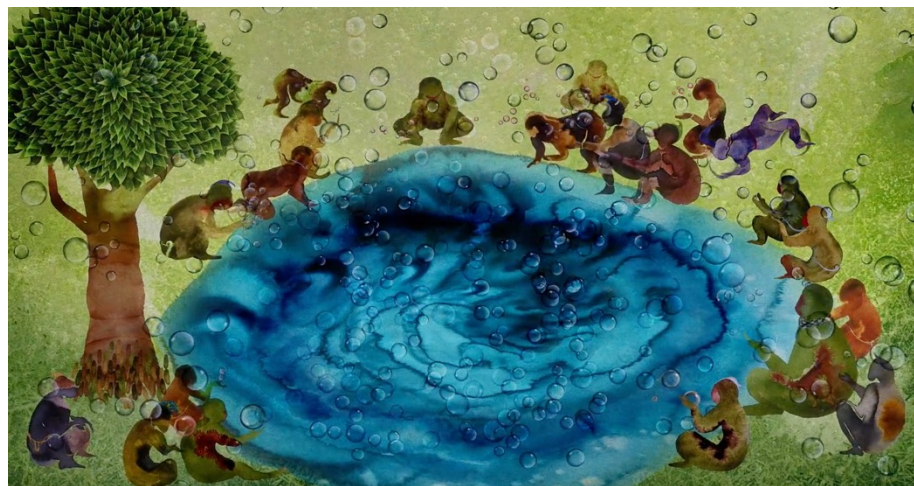
“The now hollowed-out luggage reflects the impossibility of containing or carrying one’s possessions. The tangible spaces and keepsakes that provide a sense of belonging — homeland, home, or many personal items of significance, cannot be transported.”

– Sama Alshaibi

An Act of Possession, 2019
Sama Alshaibi (b.1973), Iraq/USA

“The haunting images of faceless monkeys and a bubbling pool is inspired by a 2015 news story about Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old boy who drowned while he and his family were fleeing Syria, and his body washed up on a beach in Turkey. The sobering reality of this image is situated within my own experiences with the effects of war, chaos, and violence instigated by political and religious leadership.”

– Shiva Ahmadi



Ascend, 2017, single channel animation
Shiva Ahmadi (b.1971), Iran/USA

Power

The third and final theme of the exhibition is an exploration of compelling artworks that confront the brutality of those holding the reins of power, from patriarchal and corrupt political regimes to the discrimination against LGBTQ+ communities or acts of gender-based violence. This section also encompasses works that underscore individual agency and empowerment.



Illustrative example. The exhibition will include a **specially commissioned work** by Shamsia Hassani (b.1988), Afghanistan

“I try to show [my female figures] bigger than they are in reality, and in modern forms, shaped in happiness, movement, maybe stronger. I try to make people look at them differently... I think that I change people’s minds with my artwork and by sharing my ideas with people.”

– Shamsia Hassani

“I describe my work with the feminist slogan: Personal is political. I start from the point of view that ideological systems attempt to control our personal lives. I question the governing power of institutions such as religion, government, society and family on our private lives. My *Falname* series, though inspired by old traditions, represents empowerment... fate lies within one’s own agency and personal happiness is a political act.”

– CANAN



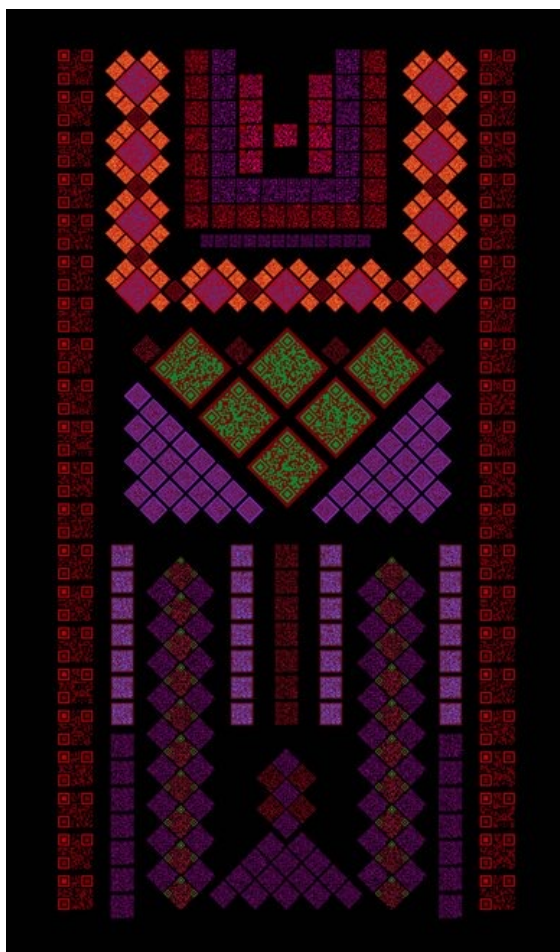
Sun from the *Falname* 71 spell cards series, 2020
CANAN (b.1970), Turkey

The Artists

Anahita Norouzi • CANAN • Dilyara Kaipova • Hana Elmasry •
Hayv Kahraman • Huda Lutfi • Jamelie Hassan • Lalla Essaydi •
Lubaina Himid • Maïmouna Guerresi • Manal AlDowayan •
Maryam Izadifard • Mona Hatoum • Nina Rastgar • Reeta Saeed
Sama Alshaibi • Shahzia Sikander • Shamsia Hassani •
Shirin Neshat • Shiva Ahmadi • Sulafa Hijazi • Sumaira Tazeen •
Tayeba Begum Lipi • Tazeen Qayyum • Titarubi

“My interactive digital dress, comprising 372 QR codes, evokes the cross-stitched embroidered motifs on traditional dress from the Levant. Each code links to an article, picture, video, sound or artwork, bringing together women’s collective narratives and their social and regional connotations. Like traditional embroidery, these QR codes are also loaded with political and historical significance.”

– Sulafa Hijazi



Dress, digital print on fabric, 2019
Sulafa Hijazi (b.1977), Syria/Germany

“A lotus floats over the central figure and acknowledges the umbilical cord as the literal life force of the mother. This multi-layered avatar gives form to the heterogeneity of South Asia, which includes Jain, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Sikh, Zoroastrian, and Christian cultures. The central character’s attempt to pin down with its one foot the ghostlike female suggests the paradox of rootedness. The Uprooted Order series addresses the fallacy of assimilation versus foreignness.”

– Shahzia Sikander



Uprooted, 2021, mosaic series
Shahzia Sikander (b.1969), Pakistan/USA

Visitors will...

- Encounter the diversity, richness, and creativity of works by living women artists from, and connected to, the Islamic world
- Be emotionally and intellectually challenged by the complex social and political issues of our time addressed from the perspectives of women
- Rethink their preconceptions about Islamic cultures and women’s roles within them
- Find personal connections to the artists, their works, and the ideas in their work

Curatorial Team



Dr. Fahmida Suleman is Curator of the Islamic World collections at ROM and cross-appointed as Associate Professor at the University of Toronto (status only). She recently curated, *Unmasking the Pandemic: From Personal Protection to Personal Expression* (2021). Fahmida was formerly Phyllis Bishop Curator for the Modern Middle East at the British Museum for ten years and co-curated the museum's groundbreaking 2018 permanent gallery, the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World. Her publications include *Textiles of the Middle East and Central Asia: The Fabric of Life* (2017).



Dr. Silvia Forni is Director of UCLA's Fowler Museum and was formerly ROM's Senior Curator of Global Africa. Her recently curated exhibitions include *Kent Monkman: Being Legendary* (2022); *Elias Sime: Tightrope* (2021); and *Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art* (2018). Among her recent publications are *Art, Honor, and Ridicule: Fante Asafo Flags from Southern Ghana* (2017, co-authored with D. H. Ross) and *Africa in the Market: 20th Century Art from the Amrad African Art Collection* (2015, ed. with C. B. Steiner).

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