

WE ARE
ALL
AFFECTED

FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY
21 SEPTEMBER - 11 NOVEMBER 2017

PEACOCK GALLERY AND AUBURN ARTS STUDIO
16 SEPTEMBER - 22 OCTOBER 2017

Peacock Gallery and Auburn Arts Studio
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Merrylands NSW 2160

Fairfield Museum & Gallery
Fairfield Council
PO Box 2464,
Smithfield NSW 2164

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FORWARD

I am very excited that *We Are All Affected* is one of the principal commissions for The Big Anxiety: festival of arts + science + people.

The goal of the festival is to explore anxiety, not only as an individual psychological state but as a social force. Global politics – particularly in the era of Donald Trump – is the direct and indirect source of personal and community anxiety. Since 9/11 we have experienced the intensification of a politics of fear, fueling Islamophobia and xenophobia. Scapegoating of Muslims, immigrants and refugees arises in the first instance from fear and anxiety. Racist narratives gain traction by latching onto anxieties at-large, redirecting irrational fears toward easy targets and simple answers. Muslim communities feel the effects of such phobias and confront their consequences – the very real social and psychological costs of fear and hate.

Khaled Sabsabi and Nur Shkemi, together with artists from the group, *Eleven* have conceived an intervention that goes to the heart of the community. Rather than offering dogmatic views or opinion, or even finished artworks, they take their practice to community in a way that allows for engagement and change. This is a unique project involving leading artists whose practice is at once highly developed but ever open to the shifts that occur through genuine dialogue and connection. This is a wonderful project about the whole of community, and about how people together generate hope and change.

Jill Bennett

Director, The Big Anxiety:
festival of arts + science + people.

PARTICIPATING FEATURED

Abdul Abdullah

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah

Idil Abdullahi

Cigdem Aydemir

Rusaila Bazlamit

Khaled Sabsabi

Abdullah M. I. Syed

WE ARE ALL AFFECTED

CURATED BY

**Khaled Sabsabi and
Nur Shkemi**

We Are All Affected is a commission for The Big Anxiety and this is Part 2 of a series of multi-faceted exhibitions being held across Western Sydney. Part 1 was held at the Multicultural Eid Festival in Fairfield in July 2017; this was an experimental pop-up style exhibition designed to engage members of the community through an interactive experience with the artists and their works.

What follows is an evolution of these works in response to the community. *We Are All Affected* spans across two venues, Fairfield City Museum & Gallery and Peacock Gallery & Auburn Studios where the artists share their creative interpretation of what is fast becoming a culturally specific form of anxiety.

Within the collection of works on display, which include photography, video installations, sculptures, ceramics and interactive/experimental practice, *We Are All Affected* essentially places these conversations into the heart of

our community. With this timely and topical exhibition, there is a unique opportunity to follow these works as they evolved and later relocated to the gallery spaces of Auburn and Fairfield for part two of the exhibition series.

The communion of voice and the intimate nature of experiences related to anxiety, as shared through the contemporary practice of the artists, is both an act of vulnerability and affirmation; one which invokes a type of creative reflection or reclamation of the often negatively framed public conversations about Australian Muslims.

With these often very personal and critical reflections, the artists and writers contributing to this exhibition hope to offer new ways of seeing and understanding through the universal language of the arts.

The exhibiting artists are part of *Eleven*, a collective of Australian Muslim artists, curators and writers.

For more information visit the *Eleven* website: eleven-collective.com

WE ARE ALL AFFECTED

By Nur Shkemi and Eugenia Flynn

The American-Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran famously said 'perplexity is the beginning of knowledge'.ⁱ Within the sweetness and catastrophe of Gibran's words there is a truth that manifests for many Australian Muslims as experienced amid the unravelling tale of the East and West. This evolving modern-day tale manifests through a dichotomy which Caroline Turner has described as the 'unreality of Orientalism and Occidentalism' and the 'necessity of otherness'.ⁱⁱ It is within the notion *otherness* that a culturally specific form of anxiety seems to be playing out in the minority community.

The two-part exhibition, *We Are All Affected* sensitively and intelligently explores notions of anxiety within the framework of the duality of the Australian Muslim experience. The artworks on display draw on the practice of seven artists involved in a recently formed collective of contemporary Australian Muslim artists, curators and writers known as *Eleven*. This exhibition offers a personal insight into what is fast becoming a culturally specific form of anxiety; one which is related to the current socio-political climate - Islamophobia and the unique social, emotional, political and intellectual pressures that exist within this framework.

In the essay *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, the author Arjun Appadurai details the anxiety and sense of uncertainty that minority communities create within the nation-state, particularly in the context of globalisation. He states the 'history of Muslim minorities in the twenty-first century surely is the dominant tale of this kind of fearful symmetry between the fear of small numbers and the power of small numbers'.ⁱⁱⁱ Appadurai's contextualisation of the minority community as being both at once powerful and powerless, as augmented and delivered through fear and the narcissism of small difference, provokes a powerful image of the Muslim

community as a minority community in the West, one that is both fraught with anxiety whilst also being the cause of it.

It takes nothing less than creativity to begin imagining that within this state of othering, and indeed within the condition of fear and anxiety, there is the possibility of new knowledge, of change and perhaps even renewal. This type of terror laden perplexity which has become part of our contemporary lives must also somehow escape the politicking to return to its natural sweet and sour state. Within this type of creative possibility, Abdullah MI Syed's interactive installation *Soft Target* attempts to rearrange certain feelings of anxiety through the unexpected delight of a reward. Inside each of the lucid, glossy helium filled balloons offered by Syed in his interactive work, is a brand-new US dollar bill individually hand-stamped with the words *Eid Mubarak* in stylised Arabic calligraphy. This installation in part recalls the artist's childhood and his recollections of celebrations where balloons and money are gifted to young children during the annual Eid festivities. And with that simple act of a celebratory inspired reward, Syed offers a way to turn inside-out, the expectation that anxiety almost always leads to some type of peril. However, it is not without deliberated irony that Syed, as an artist working with currency, almost exclusively works with US dollar bills.

This installation also includes Syed's self-portrait styled photographs. These photographs were shot on location within view of two iconic landmarks which have been identified by government officials as soft targets for terrorists. Syed's contribution belongs to a series of cleverly constructed photo-performances which are designed to explore his Pakistani born Muslim position as an artist in diaspora. His work provides engaging multiple entry points for both the participant and viewer; who is not yet to feel

they have been the target of some kind? Syed describes himself in his work as being, 'the traveler, the observer, and the one who is being observed from the ground and from above.' When viewed from within the frame of Islamophobia, the experience of observation, particularly for a Muslim audience, is expedited through the additional anxious ridden reality of the ongoing surveillance the community is under.

As this complex and layered narrative of 'otherness' begins to be challenged, it may be of consideration that such *difference* is not necessarily the cause of this anxiety. Perhaps this anxiety has been already enmeshed in the hyperbolic and fiercely unnatural insistence that sameness, along with continual states of happiness and comfort, is what 'normality' looks like. Within this insistent 'normality', what is familiar and known has always and continues to be the invisible thread connecting the continent to the Empire through both material and immaterial culture; that of language, food, architecture, art, literature, music and dance. As a dichotomy, normality versus otherness establishes itself as both a physical and non-physical divide; the global north and the global south as colonisers and colonised, respectively; opposing cultures and knowledge established, one as greater, the other as lesser.

Abdul Abdullah's stylised photography subverts the 'normality' of the traditional wedding ceremony, to signify the presence of the unknown. In his work, *The wedding (conspiracy to commit)*, there is a type of visual angst in play; among the pretty floral arrangements and beautifully crafted decorative costumes, the balaclavas worn by the bride and groom are highly irregular and menacing. Upon first glance, they reflect back the expectation of violence and threaten the viewer, perhaps in the same way the Muslim presence, as real or imagined, threatens

the security of society. It is here, within the staged wedding scene that we see the *othering* repurposed for the creation of a new fear, a new anxiety about that which does not sit within the limits of Australia's established 'normality'. Religion, then, becomes solidified as one of those invisible threads connecting Australia to the old Empire, replete with anxiety about the non-Judeo-Christian, Muslim minority.

Within this polarity, in the space between the old British Empire (now firmly established as the West) and the imagined other of the constructed East, sits the existing Muslim community. Woven in to Australia's migrant story and dotted across the country is the reality of the diversity of Australian Muslims in their practice of faith, their cultural background, political views, level of education, favourite television show and frequented restaurant. Despite the migrant narrative, many Australian Muslims have no migrant background at all, nor do they identify with the more recent migrant story, coming instead from a long lineage of Australian-born Muslims. Abdul-Rahman Abdullah's sculptural installation, *Wednesday's Child* is one type of art practice which sits firmly within, and between, this non-migration story. As a seventh generation Malay-Anglo Australian, Abdullah intelligently negotiates the contemporary multicultural landscape through an individual understanding of the self and what he describes as "new mythologies emerging from a contemporary multicultural context".

Within this context the cultural significance of *Wednesday's Child* shifted in the presence of the audience, from a beautifully realised conceptual and sculptural installation, to a type of innocent reality of that lived experience as determined through a culturally specific truth. It was the children who entered the space and circumvented the invisible barrier to sit cross legged in the thick,

lush sheepskin rug that unexpectedly presented as living, mirrored images of Abdullah's sculptured boy. The poignancy of this playful scene further resolved itself in the premise that not unlike the artist's own experience, these young children may also be growing up through the angst of negotiating the space between belonging *and* not belonging.

Whilst Abdullah's sculptural installation relays personal narratives of the non-migrant Muslim experience, Idil Abdullahi's work *Loss* recollects the unspoken trauma and anxiety of the more recent Somali migration. Disconnected from the public narrative is the reality that in many instances migration is forced and not unlike Abdullahi's beautifully damaged vessels, there is the present reality of what the other side of loss through migration looks like. Abdullahi's work resonates deeply, and like the women from her own community of which this work speaks, so many people have experienced that tumultuous transition of migration; one which is further complicated by past trauma which often happens alongside those moments of the bitter sweet yearning to return 'home'. However, this yearning is almost always tangled up in the reality of non-return, or more telling of this trauma, the guilt of not ever *wanting* to. Put more simply, the Muslim minority is as complex and diverse as any community.

However, it must be stated that this multiplicity of Muslim reality becomes hidden when overshadowed by the anxiety-driven need to characterise Muslims as homogenous – and as a threat. Muslim experience as nuanced, individual and authentic then becomes an important reality to explore and reveal. Artists, writers and thinkers are able to interrogate and amplify such experience firstly for themselves and then secondly with the communities within which they are enmeshed for it then to be affected

and changed. *We Are All Affected* encountered the community for the first time in the form of an elaborate pop up exhibition situated in the throng of the Multicultural Eid Festival in Fairfield. Mirroring back to the Australian Muslim community were the carefully selected works of the seven artists installed in the vacant showground warehouse, allowing for both reflection and reaction. The works as affected by this orchestrated meeting have been conceptually evolving and relocated to then be reimagined in this dual gallery context. The contextual grounding of this exhibition seeks not to explore but rather to contest these afflictions in new ways; where the experimentation becomes more about context rather than content, to then vigorously reinvent space, place and meaning.

It could be said that in the creation and reception of this exhibition, a tension is being revealed between those with lived experiences of being Muslim and those without such benefit. Appadurai's representation of the Muslim minority as both the cause of anxiety, as well as being caught up in the maelstrom of anxiety, is repeated. Anxiety plays multiple roles for the Muslim artist as they create. What aspects of the Muslim reality should be foregrounded? What challenges to such realities can be made? How will the work be received by either the Muslim community or the wider community? Likewise, the wider community may be challenged by the actuality of the Muslim experience; beyond what has been imagined, particularly if the artist chooses to foreground an aspect of their experience that feels threateningly foreign – even if that experience is challenged by the artist themselves. Importantly, Muslim artists, who are immersed in the fear and anxiety that is projected upon them, often respond. Whether directly or indirectly, Muslims are increasingly political whilst simultaneously increasingly politicised. Muslim

art and literature can ultimately become about Muslim voices answering back.

Thoughtful reflection on the Muslim experience is simply the foregrounding of the intricacies of everyday life and the honouring that there is a transcendental humanity to our shared complexity. Perth based experimental digital artist Rusaila Bazlamit offered the audience an interactive experience which connected the personal experiences of grief. This work explores empathy and sorrow and acts as a temporal and shared human experience. While Bazlamit's work seeks to reach out, internationally acclaimed time-based media artist, Khaled Sabsabi, invited the audience to venture inwards. Sabsabi's five channel video, *70,000 Veils* with its multiple layering of images, is at once beautiful and enigmatic. Whilst Sabsabi works within the Mystical belief in the Divine as being *perfection of light*, he describes the physical light we know as being restrained by its worldly limitations. This monumental work involved 10,000 captured photos that were individually manipulated to decipher 70,000 digital layers using various software; the layers were then meticulously reconstructed to create 1,000 composited moving images/animations and 3D video sequences, with the original version of this work being displayed across 100 monitors. Rather than reaching for the impossible perfection of light through his art, the artist sees this final work more as "an encompassing experience that resembles indistinct memories and dreams." It could be said that Sabsabi's work, whether the imagery seems familiar or politicised or *even hostile*, almost exclusively operates within the realm of spirituality; between that of beauty, reflexivity and transcendence.

This is not to say that transcendence is without its own anxiety; where the creative work of the 'others' is able to transcend to shared humanity

and the creative work of the normalised majority already and always resides within humanity. Cigdem Aydemir's video *Whirl* appropriates such normalised events to discharge the many associations of the veiled and also that of unveiling. The artist recounts her own experiences through the seemingly absurd and playful but personal, performative blowing drying of her veil. Aydemir describes this performance as borrowing from "the hyper-real aesthetics of shampoo commercials that often use the language of liberation to sell their products." And *Whirl*, not unlike many of the works on display, was for the first time met by a majority Muslim audience. This new reading of the work was embraced by the women for whom this depicts a somewhat familiar reality. This work is overtly feminised by Aydemir and has her trademark anecdotal and social-political elements all in play. However, the multiple messages in Aydemir's work were consumed without the expected contestation from the veiled women themselves. This engagement once again challenges the need for 'championing' the minority community feminist narratives or appropriating messaging. For Australian Muslim women, even among the pressures of Islamophobia and other such anxiety driven realities, the important conversations are already happening with much vigour and most importantly, autonomy. And clearly contemporary Muslim artists such as Aydemir have their finger on the pulse. As noted by writers Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda, creative imaginings by artists of colour or difference are not good merely because they achieve shared humanity, rather, in the presence of such imaginings, the individual "... is given something to know. Something is brought into being that might otherwise not be known, something is doubly witnessed." ^{iv}

It could be suggested that within such witnessing, one finds the poetic rendering of perplexity,

and that this perplexity often makes for great literature and no doubt great contemporary art. But for those that live within Gibran's perplexity, there remains a looming anxiety that is part of an ongoing and overlapping life experience; one that is so very present and encompassing it permeates entire communities. However, this type of affliction is rarely rewarded with any such poetic awakening and rather, there is a realisation of the ever-present knowledge which is only afforded to those willing to persist and reflect both creatively and intellectually. And within that is a visceral desire for artists to interpret such perplexity into visual manifestations of the personal; of love and strength, of intelligent resistance and subversion, but also that of fear, loss, sadness, dread or anxiety. Perhaps through the lens of perplexity can we begin to recognise the presence of the duality of the Australian Muslim experience; as one that no longer operates solely within the realm of the 'other', but one which is a composite of individual lives oscillating with much friction between that of reaction and reflection, and that of reality and imagination.

Endnotes

ⁱ Gibran further elaborates "Life would be dull and the person a pantomime, if there were no situations of tragedy to awaken us from the slumber of routine. The self gets more conscious and more involved, when he faces afflictions." *Gibran, K. 1965, A Third Treasury of Khalil Gibran*, (ed. Andrew Dib Sherfan and translated by Joseph Sheban), Open Road Media, New York (2011)

ⁱⁱ Turner, C. Ed. 1993, "Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific". Queensland: University of Queensland Press (XV)

ⁱⁱⁱ Appadurai, A. 2006, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger*, Duke University Press, Durham and London (p 113)

^{iv} Rankine, C and Loffreda, B. 2015, "On Whiteness and the Racial Imaginary." *Literary Hub* (<http://lithub.com/on-whiteness-and-the-racial-imaginary/>)

EXHIBITION WRITERS

Nur Shkembi is a Melbourne based curator and writer. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne engaging research areas in material conservation, contemporary curatorship and the application of object agency theory within post-colonial discourse.

Website: nurshkembi.com

Eugenia Flynn is a writer, arts worker and community cultural development practitioner. Eugenia runs the blog Black Thoughts Live Here and her writings on the politics of race, identity, gender and culture have been published widely. In 2016, Eugenia was named one of Australia's Top Ten Deadly Bloggers and she is currently the CEO of The Social Studio. Eugenia identifies as Aboriginal (Tiwi and Larrakia), Chinese Malaysian and Muslim, working within her multiple communities to create change through literature, art, politics and community development.

eugeniaflynn.wordpress.com



ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH
Wednesday's Child (2013)
Tinted resin, carpet, chandelier
Image courtesy the artist



ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH
Practical Magic (2016)
Stained wood, synthetic rope

Image courtesy the artist and the University of Western Australia

ABDUL-RAHMAN ABDULLAH

**FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY
PEACOCK GALLERY AND AUBURN
ARTS STUDIO**

Abdul-Rahman Abdullah is a West Australian artist whose practice explores the different ways that memory can inhabit and emerge from familial space. Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Abdullah draws on passages of personal history, articulating formative experiences of individual identity within the broader scope of family. Expanding on the narrative capacity of animal archetypes, crafted objects and the human presence, his work is intended to create a physical dialogue between the natural world and the agency of culture. His work has been exhibited recently at major institutes including the Art Gallery of South Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, South Australian Museum and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.
Website: abdulrahmanabdullah.com

***Practical Magic* (2016)**

**carved wood, stain, nylon rope
65 x 150 x 150 cm**

Trust in Allah, but tie your camel – Hadith, source Sunan At-Tirmidhi 2517

Growing up in Victoria Park during the early 1980's we had an extensive vegetable garden that included many of the staples such as corn, beans, snow peas, strawberries and sunflowers. Watching my dad sampling the produce of the backyard led me to believe that basically anything was edible, trying anything that grew out of the ground. My mother tended the garden lovingly as an extension of the kampung lifestyle of Malaysia that she knew as a child, when self sufficiency had always underpinned the household diet. Seeing me as a toddler stuffing the leaves of unfamiliar plants into my mouth set her onto a path of learning as much as she could about Australian vegetation, she undertook a Diploma of Horticulture. Since that time she has become extremely well versed in native flora, discovering and celebrating the nuances of a completely new

environment. For me it is this understanding of the natural world passed on through mothers for generations that is a fundamental form of practical magic; a depth of knowledge that provided for the dietary, medical and social health of the family on a grass roots level. My mother understood that faith can only flourish when the world is understood on the most practical level. She taught me the primacy of practical magic and I love her for it.

***Wednesday's Child* (2013)**

**tinted resin, sheep skin, low voltage LED,
variable dimensions**

Each morning began an hour before dawn, dressed in pyjamas and a topi, we would drive to the Rivervale Mosque for Quran lessons with Imam Abdul-Jalil before the Fajr prayer. I remember those morning drives home from the Mosque, watching the world awake as we returned for breakfast, changing into our uniforms and heading off for another day of school.

Wednesday's Child is a self-portrait at the age of nine, looking back at the formative era of the that marked a growing awareness of my own identity as a Muslim boy, seeking a sense of belonging in the Australian social landscape. It was during this time that I came to understand my place between two parallel worlds of learning; defined by the quiet passage of night through dawn and into the harsh sunlight of an Australian childhood. The work reflects, an early understanding that I was never going to fit neatly into the world of my school friends or the broader Muslim community. While I felt all of the same pressures as my peers growing up in a, there was a sense of both liberation and fear that came with the knowledge that, I was going to choose my own path. It was at this early age that I began to see the world as a spectacle of many truths, an outlook that would become the basis of my art practice twenty five years later.



DR. ABDULLAH M.I. SYED

Soft Target: Empire State from Greenpoint, Brooklyn, New York (2014)

UV Inkjet Print + DIASEC, 83 x 127cm

Photography: Christine Navin

ABDULLAH M.I. SYED

PEACOCK GALLERY AND AUBURN
ARTS STUDIO

Dr. Abdullah M.I. Syed (b. 1974) is a Pakistani-born contemporary artist and designer working between Sydney, Karachi and New York. His art practice weaves real and fictional narratives of east and west, seamlessly knitting together cultural and art historical references and concerns from each. Trained in diverse disciplines, Syed utilises a variety of mediums and techniques including sculpture, video installations, drawing, performance and texts to investigate the complex artistic, spiritual, economics and political collisions of hybrid identities. Syed holds a PhD in Art, Media and Design (2015) and a Master of Fine Arts (2009) from University of New South Wales, Sydney. Syed's works have been featured in ten solo exhibitions, national group shows and several international curated group exhibitions including Art Basel, Hong Kong.

Website: abdullahmisyed.com

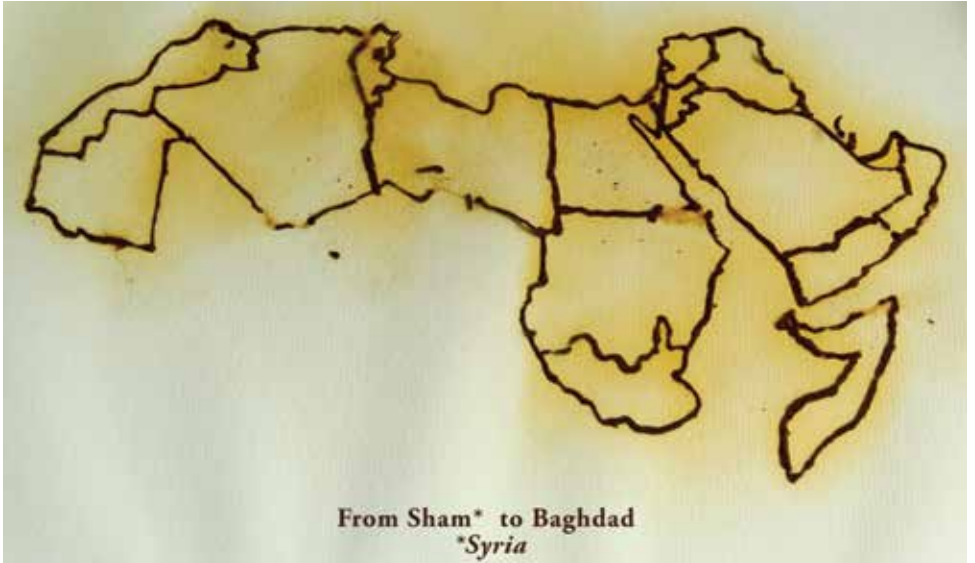
Soft Target (2012-2014)

1 x UV Inkjet Print + DIASEC, 83 x 127cm

4 x UV Inkjet Print + DIASEC, 51 x 76 cm

The *Soft Target* performances examine the construction of a cultural identity in relation to iconic sites and structures on a tourist map, which have been marked as 'soft targets' since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. Echoing Susan Sontag's notion that "*the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own,*" the photo-performances began in 2011 as an investigation of the artist's position as a Pakistani-born Muslim artist in Diaspora. It is an ongoing journey where he is the traveller, the observer and the one who is being observed from the ground and from above. In *Soft Target* the artist appears with his target at various cities around the world, including Sydney, New York, Auckland, Beijing and Dubai, where his body speaks in John Cage's silence and reverberates in Sufi zikr (dhikr), a remembrance. Some of the structures shown in the series are popular tourist spots or sites of human achievement and failure.

The works simultaneously address fixed and shifting authority; investigate the current nature of power, stereotype and the politics of freedom of speech; and question the current desire for and rhetoric of agreement and consensus in a pluralist society. The resulting photographs are markers of time and are both the message and the medium. It is up to the viewer as to how they interpret the image and experience. This shifting interpretation, misinterpretation of meaning from a site first to an individual, and then to a collective, is the essence of the resulting photographs of the performances.



RUSAILA BAZLAMIT

My Homeland, (2013)

Image still, single-channel HD video. Duration 3.34 mins, 16:9

Image courtesy of the artist

RUSAILA BAZLAMIT

PEACOCK GALLERY AND AUBURN
ARTS STUDIO

Rusaila Bazlamit is a Perth based artist and digital and interactive designer. She lectures in Architecture, Design, and Digital and Interactive Media. She has exhibited video-art projects, interactive installations and photography works in Jordan, Scotland, Lebanon, Egypt, UAE and Greece and presented a solo exhibition [Techno Me] in Amman, Jordan. Rusaila runs an online atelier "Lab Tajribi | Experimental Expressions", a nonphysical art atelier for experimental art and forms of expression. Rusaila has a B.Sc. Degree in Architecture from Jordan University, M.Sc. Degree in Design and Digital Media from University of Edinburgh and is currently completing her PhD in Design at Curtin University.

Website: lab-tajribi.com

My Homelands (2013)

single channel HD video with sound
Duration: 3min 34sec

This video art creates a conceptual tension between a map of the Arab countries with their borders deconstructing, whilst a famous Arab nationalist song is being hummed. This tension provokes the viewer to look critically and think about Arabism, Pan-Arabism, Arab Spring, Nationalism, and Identity. This work was created in 2013 when the Arab Spring was a promising prospect. Viewing this work now, over 4 years later, brings forth the absurdity of the dark turn of events leaving the viewer with deeper and broader reflections.



KHALED SABSABI
70,000 Veils (2014)

100 video composite into 5 channel installation, Full HD 1080P - MP4, 11min 40sec
5 x 55inch monitors, audio and 3D anaglyph red cyan glasses
Image courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

KHALED SABSABI

PEACOCK GALLERY AND AUBURN ARTS STUDIO

Khaled Sabsabi was born in 1965, Tripoli, Lebanon and currently lives and works in Sydney, Australia. Sabsabi's process involves working across art mediums, geographical borders and cultures to create immersive and engaging art experiences. He sees art as an effective tool to communicate with people, through a familiar language. Sabsabi makes work that questions; rationales and complexities of nationhood, identity and change. His practice speaks to audiences in ways that enlighten our understanding of universal dynamics which is more complex and ultimately more unknowable than our own selves. Khaled was awarded the *Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship in 2010*, 60th Blake Prize in 2011, MCG Basil Sellers fellowship in 2014. He is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Sabsabi holds a Master of Arts, Time Based Art major from CO-FA, University of New South Wales.

Website: khaledsabsabi.com

70,000 Veils (2014)

100 video channels composited into 5 x 55inch monitors, audio and 3D anaglyph red cyan glasses

Duration: 11min 40sec

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Concept *70,000 Veils* examines the complexity between religion and spirituality in the digital era. In Sufism it is very difficult to explain the true meaning of light. In Sufi text the Divine Self is described as being "light". Sufi mystical texts also state that true inspiration and exposure comes from knowledge, which comes from light, which enlightens an individual's heart. The physical light is only a reflection of the true light and one can only think about this light in terms of their experience in the phenomenal world. Light is the purest entity that exists. The physical light, however, has limitations posed by the virtue of its physical nature and is dependent on all energy, space and time. Mystics say there are 70,000 veils of light and darkness separating an individual from the Divine and an individual is drawn towards the Divine according to their relationship with the Divine. Sufis understand these veils to refer to degrees relating to the most general branch of metaphysics.

Process 70,000 Veils is based on memories of daily surroundings and involved the following processes; 10,000 captured photos that were individually manipulated to decipher 70,000 digital layers using various software. The layers were then meticulously reconstructed to create 1,000 composited moving images/animations and 3D video sequences. I see the final work as an encompassing experience that resembles indistinct memories and dreams.



ABDUL ABDULLAH

The wedding (Conspiracy to commit) (2015)

Digital print, 100cm x 190cm

Image courtesy the artist

ABDUL ABDULLAH

FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY

Abdul Abdullah is an artist from Perth, currently based in Sydney, who works across painting, photography, video, installation and performance. As a self-described 'outsider among outsiders', his practice is primarily concerned with the experience of the 'other' in society. Abdullah's projects have engaged with different marginalised minority groups and he is particularly interested in the experience of young Muslims in the contemporary multicultural Australian context. In 2009 Abdullah received the Highly Commended in the NYSPP at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra and won the Blake Prize for Human Justice. Abdullah has been shortlisted for the Archibald Prize four times and has won numerous prizes and awards throughout his career. He has recently completed his Master of Fine Arts at CoFA, UNSW.

Website: abdulabdullah.com

The wedding (Conspiracy to commit) (2015)

digital print, 100cm x 190cm

Being a Muslim born in Australia (with mixed Australian and Malaysian heritage) in 1986 and aged 14 at the time of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, I am on the older cusp of a generation of Muslims in the West whose entire formative period and transition into adulthood has been overshadowed by the "War on Terror". I believe the contemporary Western Muslim experience is one that is infused with the anxieties of a community under siege. This body of work, *The wedding (conspiracy to commit)* addresses these anxieties by referencing traditional Malay-Muslim wedding dress, Georgian-era depictions of Muslims as the 'monstrous, villainous other', as well as popular contemporary projections of criminality on otherwise innocent Muslim populations.

The wedding (conspiracy to commit) was conceived in 2015 after I read an article about a group of child victims of a drone strike in Pakistan. A further article justified their deaths by saying the children were going to grow up to be terrorists anyway. On further reading I found a quote from a drone pilot who described child casualties as "fun size terrorists". The dehumanization and projection of criminality on children, proved how the rhetorical reduction of a group's humanity gives license for others to treat them inhumanely, regardless of the realities of that group. Instead of explicitly using children in my images, I chose to co-opt an almost universally understood ritual of optimistic union and rebirth: the wedding. In these works I have dressed my subjects in traditional Malay-Islamic wedding attire; positioned them in a way where their postures betray their uncertainty and signified a projection of criminality by masking them in balaclavas.



IDIL ABDULLAHI

Erased (2012)

Digital print on metallic

Image courtesy the artist and Equilibrium Design



IDIL ABDULLAHI

Loss (2012)

Slip cast porcelain and found wire, variable dimensions

Image courtesy the artist and Equilibrium Design

IDIL ABDULLAHI

FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY

Idil Abdullahi is a ceramic artist who was born in Somalia and arrived in Australia in 1993 as a refugee with her family. She has completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at UNSW Arts and Design, majoring in Ceramics. Aside from her artistic practice, Idil is a community arts and cultural worker who is passionate about utilising the creative arts as a tool for building stronger and resilient communities. She works with non-government organisations as well as local councils to facilitate relevant creative projects mainly with women and youth from refugee or marginalised communities in local areas. Idil's ceramic studio practice is based in Sydney, and her current work explores individual and community ideas and anxieties about separation; from familiar places, from people and from our creator and very own nature.

Website: idilabdullahi.com

Erased (2012)

digital print on metallic

This work is inspired by the poem of the late Somali artist and activist Hawa Jibril. This work is closely looking at personal feelings of being erased from the past, present and future, as a Somali Woman, who is now living in Sydney Australia.

Loss (2012)

slip cast porcelain and found wire, variable dimensions

This work is an observation on the lack of discussion on various issues that face many Somali women who have now resettled in Australia. There seems to be no time to consider the trauma and the internal wars that changed their lives forever. No time to reflect on why they were forced out and how to survive in an unfamiliar and sometimes unsympathetic land, not just as "black" Somalis but also as Muslims. They must keep it all hidden somehow and keep it together; for all the family depends on them. Young girls born here are also beginning to consciously and unconsciously carry their mothers' losses.



CIDGEM AYDEMIR

Whirl (2015)

Video Art: 6 min 56 sec

Cinematographer: Meg White

Image courtesy the artist



CIDGEM AYDEMIR,

I won't let you out of my sight (2015)

Video Art

Cinematographer: Meg White

Image courtesy the artist

CIGDEM AYDEMIR

FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY
PEACOCK GALLERY AND AUBURN
ARTS STUDIO

Cigdem Aydemir is a Sydney-based artist working in the mediums of installation, performance and video art. Her socially and politically engaged art practice investigates possibilities for intersubjective and transcultural communication with an interest in postcolonial and feminist issues. Much of her work expands on the veil as a culturally constructed site and as material realisation, while exploring the veiled woman cipher as resistant female other and as lived experience. Through critiquing, decolonising and queering mechanisms, Cigdem questions established relations of power, while producing work that is driven equally by research, play, criticism and humour. Cigdem was the 2013 recipient of the Redlands Konica Minolta Art Prize, in the Emerging Artist category, and the Edna Ryan Award for Creative Feminism in 2012.

Website: cigdemaydemir.com

I Won't Let You Out of My Sight (2015)

dual channel HD video with sound

Duration: 10min 21sec

Concept, performance and editing: Cigdem Aydemir

Cinematography and colour correction: Meg White

Assistant camera: Dimitri Zaunders

Assist camera: Matthew Bedford Sound: Drew Bisset

Performed and presented on the 10th Anniversary of the Cronulla riots, *I won't let you out of my sight*, looks at the implications of gender in the midst of rising racial tensions, the "War on Terror", the role of surveillance and the impact it has on different bodies. It also engages with the often complicated relationship between Western feminism and Muslim women, mired by a history of subject-constitution and object-formation.

Whirl (2015)

single channel HD video with sound

Duration: 6 min 56 sec

Cinematographer: Meg White

Whirl centres on spirituality as a force that exists both in its own right and as something that can be (mechanically) produced - a simulacral spirituality, if you wish. The artist is positioned in-between the undulating veil and the hairdryer that represents her will; constantly moving and being moved. This work also borrows from the hyper-real aesthetics of shampoo commercials that often use the language of liberation to sell their products. As a personal anecdote, the encouragement I received immediately after unveiling led me to believe that removing the veil should be a shampoo commercial type experience, which it was not. *Whirl* explores that memory while throwing into question the inherent assumptions between unveiled/liberated/beautiful and veiled/oppressed/object.

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Multicultural Eid Festival Fairfield exhibition

Najia Khalil, Multicultural Eid Festival Fairfield

The Art Gallery of Western Australia





FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY

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Email

peacockgallery@cumberland.nsw.gov.au

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(Appointments for tour groups can be
organised outside these hours)

FREE admission to exhibitions

For more information

www.cumberland.nsw.gov.au/ARTS



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