



Stiching Keffiyehs: Moving Images from Palestine

Curated by Tamar Beja, Asma Kazmi and Gazelle Samizay

Palestinian Voices Take Center Stage at Worth Ryder Art Gallery, UC Berkeley



Berkeley, CA - The Worth Ryder Art Gallery is proud to announce the opening of *Stitching Keffiyehs: Moving Images from Palestine*, a contemporary film and video art exhibit curated by Tamar Beja, Asma Kazmi, and Gazelle Samizay. This important exhibition features works by renowned artists from Palestine and the Palestinian diaspora including Razan AlSalah, Zeina Barakeh, Mona Rouhana Benyamin, Samia Halaby, Mona Hatoum, Jumana Manna, Larissa Sansour, and Oraib Toukan. At a time when Palestinian voices are increasingly censored and denied platforms for expression, *Stitching Keffiyehs* provides a vital space for dialogue and reflection on themes such as land, exile, war, occupation, ecological decline, technology, femininity, and the body.

The exhibition includes film and video art spanning from 1987 to 2022, and offers a rare glimpse into the rich tapestry of Palestinian culture and experience.

Stitching Keffiyehs will run from February 28 to March 13, 2024, with an opening reception scheduled for February 28th at the Worth Ryder Art Gallery, Department of Art Practice, UC Berkeley.

Stitching Keffiyehs features two digital paintings, *Land and Niihau* (1988 & 1987), from the trailblazing abstract artist Samia Halaby, who was displaced from Palestine in 1948. Trained in the US, Halaby was an early adopter of computer coded language in the 80s, to develop kinetic paintings that combined geometric form, movement, and sound. Moreover, her works pushed the limits of the abstract painting tradition by imbuing her paintings with meaning and context as she named her paintings after places that are colonized and subjugated.

Other works in the exhibition include the feature film *Foragers* (2022) by Jumana Manna that delves into the intersectionality of ecology and land, highlighting the struggles of preserving Palestinian culture amidst settler colonial attempts of erasure. Larissa Sansour's *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2016) presents a dystopian narrative in which a resistance group creates giant deposits of porcelain to influence and forge a historical narrative.

Using storytelling and computer graphics the film examines the role of national identity, myths as a form of history and truth, while bringing to conversation the relationship between politics, archeology, and land.

Local artist Zeina Barakeh's *Projection from a Third Half* is a painstakingly crafted animation based on archival materials that invite deeper considerations of political divisions and generate reparative narratives. The main characters of the animation include centaur soldiers based on the British Mandate for Palestine (1920-48), and colonized subjects with horse heads that embody agency and resistance. The animation's aesthetics reference chaos during war to evoke the lack of clarity and truth in the face of the media onslaught of fragmentary information.

Razan AlSalah's poignant work, *Your father was born 100 years old*, and so was the Nakba (2018), confronts the trauma and grief of exile and displacement. Through the lens of Google Maps Street View, AlSalah captures the raw emotions of a Palestinian grandmother returning to her hometown of Haifa, reliving memories and expressing the heartbreak of displacement. In Mona Hatoum's autobiographical work *Measures of Distance*, the artist and her mother speak intimately about sexuality, exile, and the painful separation of their family caused by war.

Stitching Keffiyehs: Moving Images from Palestine stands as a testament to the resilience, creativity, and unwavering spirit of Palestinian artists and filmmakers. By amplifying voices that have been silenced and marginalized, this exhibition not only challenges censorship but also invites viewers to engage with the complexities of Palestinian culture, identity, and struggle. Through powerful narratives of resistance, memory, and longing, these works transcend borders and barriers, forging connections and fostering empathy. As the Worth Ryder Art Gallery opens its doors to this groundbreaking exhibition, it offers a space for reflection, dialogue, and solidarity, reminding us of the transformative power of art in times of adversity.





PRESS

'Stitching Keffiyehs' at Worth Ryder is artistic Palestinian ballad during political uncertainty



'Stitching Keffiyehs' exhibition displays art from Palestine and the Palestinian diaspora and details Palestinians' struggles and experiences.

Kylie Akiyama | Staff

Tucked inside the Anthropology and Art Practice Building is the Worth Ryder Art Gallery, where students can view a selection of artwork created by Palestinian artists from around the world.

The exhibit, "Stitching Keffiyehs," will be available to all members of the public to view for the next two weeks, according to Gazelle Samizay, a co-curator of the exhibition and the gallery director at Worth Ryder.

Samizay added that these works highlight the Palestinian struggle and diaspora with art from 1987 to 2022 telling stories of loss, nostalgia and "perpetual statelessness."

"Obviously people who are in Israel and Palestine right now are dealing with a lot right now so it was more difficult to acquire works from there although one of our artists is there currently," Samizay said. "But the Palestinian diaspora is so much a part of the experience because so many people have to leave and feel like they are exiled in the land that they are living in."

All of the art featured in the exhibition is digital art, a choice made during the curation process because of the time constraints Samizay and the other co-curators, Tamar Beja and Asma Kazmi, faced.

The works range from around a minute in length to a full length feature film Of 64 minutes and include everything from stop-motion animation to more autobiographical work.

These works are also all done by female-identifying artists, according to Kazmi, a co-curator and campus associate professor of art practice. Kazmi added that this was not highlighted in the artist statement as part of an effort to normalize this.

"All of the works are not didactic, they are poetic and they are also very personal and intimate," Kazmi said.

Samizay was motivated to begin the exhibit by a personal sense of sadness due to the conflict in Israel and Gaza, and she noticed students were out participating in demonstrations on campus.

She felt the need to create a space where students could have some sort of discourse around the conflict and show the "multiple dimensions" of what being Palestinian means.



Kylie Akiyama | Staff

The exhibition was also co-curated by two students in the art practice department who were recruited by Samizay to help screen artworks, plan installation methods and contact sponsors. One of the students, Madeleine Surh, a sophomore studying ethnic studies and art practice, said they found the themes of displacement and war very heavy but also very necessary to be discussed during this "time of cultural genocide."

"The current genocide in Palestine has really needed a spotlight and really needs to be talked about," Surh said. "With all these art institutions in the area being shut down and silencing Palestinian artists I just thought this exhibit would be really important."



Kylie Akiyama | Staff

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'Stitching Keffiyehs' at Worth Ryder is artistic Palestinian ballad during political uncertainty



Actress Pooneh Hajimohammadi's voice echoes in a sequestered viewing room throughout UC Berkeley's Worth Ryder Art Gallery. "Isn't this the reason we're having this conversation?" she retorts in Larissa Sansour's dystopian fiction film "In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain." The question sets the tone for "Stitching Keffiyehs: Moving Images from Palestine" — a contemporary collection of film and video art depicting a diverse Palestinian diaspora amid a turbulent political landscape. Alone, they're impressive feats of motion picture art, but contextually there's a graver intonation. After all, isn't there a reason we're having this conversation?

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Upon entering the exhibition, viewers are met with twin computers circa 1980s propped on brutalist clay pillars. Their screens flash geometric neon shapes while provided headphones beep video game sound effects when slipped on. Abstract artist Samia Halaby's digital paintings — "Land" and "Ni'ihau" — come from the late 1980s and are part of her work in developing computer-coded kinetic paintings combining geometric movement, sound and the ongoing aches of colonization.

The entire scene bleeds historicism — the 1985 Commodore Amiga 100 computers, 80's graphics, mid-century iterations of Grecian pillars and colonization references. The familiar "game over" sound as background music adds to the suggestion that this is a monument of the past that warns us about the future. The remainder of "Stitching Keffiyehs" artistically portrays the consequences reaped from the ignorance of the warning.

As the viewer walks through the exhibit, Zeina Barakah's three-part series of stop-motion animation stands as a colonial Russian nesting doll. "Homeland Insecurity" depicts an orchestrated dance between centaurs and horse-headed humans, though the contextual reference to colonialism is less joyful than implied. The centaurs spring from a 1933 archival image from Jaffa Square depicting mounted soldiers of the British Mandate for Palestine confronting Arab demonstrators. The aged grain of the photos blurs both the horse and rider and informs the image seen on screen. Oppositely, the horses fighting back (or in the film's case, dancing back) are avatars of the artist's body fused with a horse's head to represent agency and resistance in colonized subjects.

A conceptual continuance of the previous film, "Projections from the Third Half: [Cloud Storm]" combines stills from "Homeland Insecurity" and third installation in the series "Slam Bang Blue" to construct a hyperactive multiverse of varying war narratives, representing the volatility and unpredictability of wartime. The film's chaos and convoluted references testify to the media's tendency to only tell half of the truth, making the three-part project a collage of Palestinian frustration.

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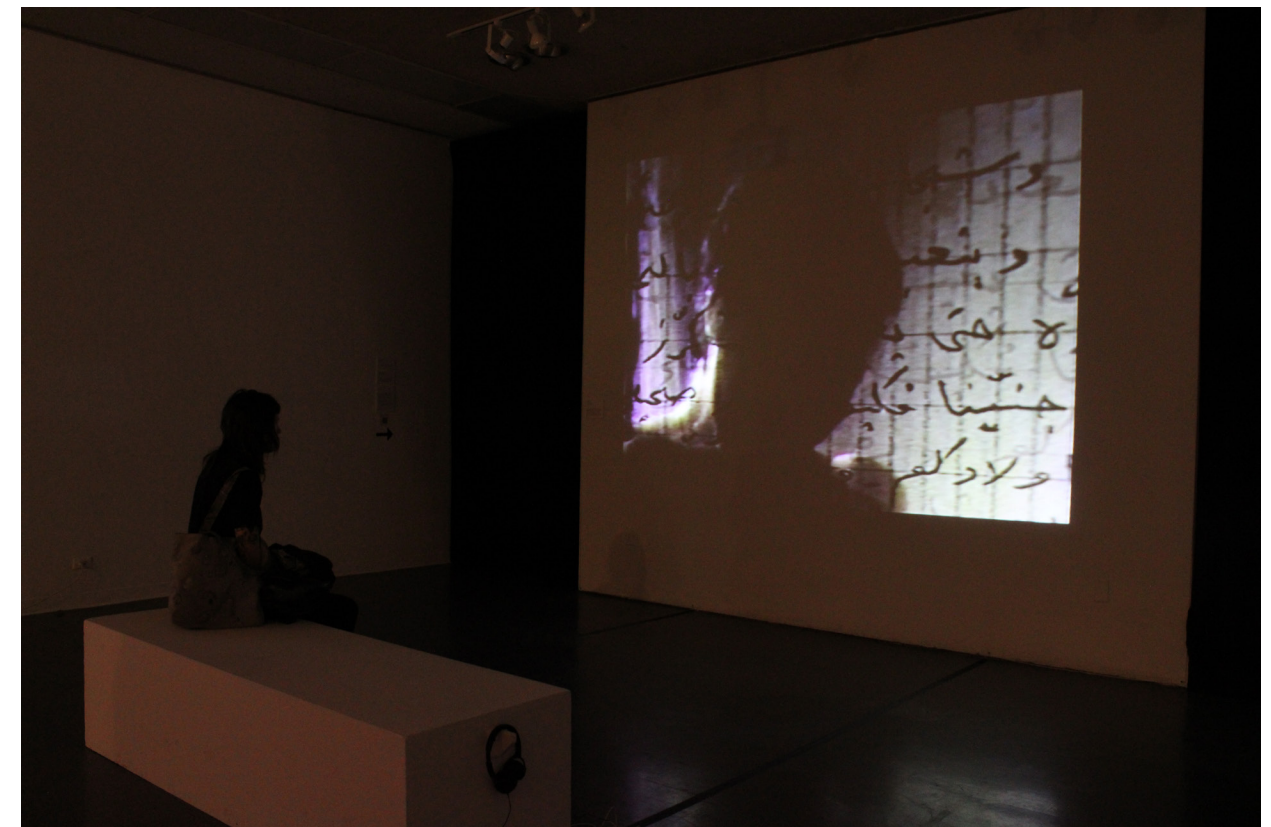
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Razan AlSalah's "Your Father Was Born 100 years old, and So Was the Nakba" gives insight into the emotional repercussions of generational trauma experienced by Palestinians. The film follows the disembodied voice of the artist's grandmother searching the streets of her hometown of Haifa via Google Street View images.

Against a backdrop of mechanical toggling through a computerized street view, her voice is disorienting — its artificial, computerized quality creates an inhuman effect that clashes with the vocal emotional humanity. She calls out to Ameen, her son, though she remains painfully oblivious to the fact she'll never be able to reach him from behind a computer screen. This chosen format is a testament to intergenerational patterns: The streets may no longer be recognizable to her grandmother, but the current events might ring a bell.

Apart from the main viewing room bearing the aforementioned displays, two curtained viewing rooms on opposing ends of the gallery host large screens and headphone-less listening for long-form films. The rightmost room is a haven of dystopian films meant to emphasize the urgency of Palestinian realities, while the leftmost room features documentary-style films as a supplement. Though they both contain the same emphasis: Palestine is hurting.

"Stitching Keffiyehs" makes space for conversations previously shoved behind closed doors. If one wishes to listen in on such conversations, headphones hang beside the exhibits at the Worth Ryder Art Gallery until March 13th.



Guest Book

"This is an amazing exhibit! Appreciate the hard work put in to represent Palestinian voices. Free Palestine!"

"This is a beautiful exhibit! Thank you for bringing Arab and Palestinian representation in the art world!"

"Seeing these videos I feel the pain of loss, not only of home and property, but identity. My heart. Thank you for the exhibition that has awakened my soul."