

Habibi,
revolutions
in love

English
texts and
labels

INSTITUT
DU MONDE
ARABE

معهد
العالم
العربي

Habibi

حبيبي

حبيبي

Artists

- Alireza Shojaian
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Introduction

How are sexual and gender identities represented in the contemporary creation of artists from Arab cultures? What aesthetic and socio-political conscious strategies do they use to describe, inspire, and confront today's societies?

In the Arab world, as on all continents, artists embody and convey the commitments and struggles to freely express love, gender identities, and sexuality. The Arab Spring and social movements since 2011 have enabled the strengthening of LGBTQIA+¹ activism. Activists are now speaking out against the laws that criminalize homosexual acts, questioning conservatism, and proposing societal alternatives. While their mobilization remains limited and in the minority, it nevertheless signals a break away from the prevailing repudiation of homosexual and transgender identity.

LGBT+, queer² and ally artists, whether in their country of birth or in the diaspora, are participating in this movement. Originating from the Arab world, but also Iran and Afghanistan, the artists presented here propose aesthetics and emancipatory models of narration.

The artists witness, question, affirm themselves by creating works of art that are tender, overwhelming, intimate, resilient, exuberant, sentimental, or political. They explore the intimate dimension of amorous feelings, the relationship to the body, to language, to domestic and public spaces, the visibility of gender, activism, and narratives of exile. By doing so, they imagine other ways of living in more inclusive societies.

1. LGBTQIA+: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and +.

2. Queer: a person who does not identify as having a heterosexual sexuality or does not feel that they belong to a defined gender. Queer is an umbrella term for the ensemble of different sexualities and genders.

First Room

A story to be told

The necessity of preserving the memory of a relationship, of a feeling, or of a gentle caress is a recurrent theme in the works presented, often linked to the personal experiences of their creators. The artists bear witness to joy, but also the fragility of these intimate moments constrained by the time and space in which they are deployed. The question of a sense of security and the risks run, knowing that homosexuality remains a crime in most Arab countries, expands the scope of queer territorialities. The artists question domestic space, the relationship to the city, to society and its dangers. They examine virtual relationships and the use of instant messaging and dating apps.

These intimate landscapes also draw on certain important themes in cultural history thanks to the fictionalization and reinvention of symbols. The artists revisit collective memory, at the intersection of historical, feminist and decolonial questions... Their non-linear approaches to time through emancipatory narration modes allow them to play with classic imagery as well as to claim the future.

Alireza Shojaian
*Yannick, Blossom at the mention
of your name*

—
Paris, 2020
Acrylic and colored pencil on wood
—
Paris, Collection of Delacroix Montier

Tristan, Persian Garden
Paris, 2020
—
Acrylic and colored pencil on wood
—
Paris, Collection of the artist
Courtesy of the gallery La La Lande

Alireza Shojaian is a painter and activist born in 1988 in Iran. After studying at the Islamic University of Art and Architecture Azad in Tehran, he hid his work and his sexuality for many years. He left Iran to settle in Beirut in 2016 and then in 2019 he obtained with the help of the French Embassy in Lebanon an artistic residency with the Beaux-Arts in Paris, the city in which he currently lives and works.

Alireza Shojaian represents his subjects nude or partially nude in intimate compositions that can highlight their vulnerability. His work tends to combat prejudices while creating a space for expression dedicated to non-normative masculine identities. His paintings are a hymn to the beauty of masculine bodies. The realism of his drawings, the attention he gives to skin level details or to hair tend to convey the very experience of touching.

Revisiting the norms of orientalist paintings while questioning idols of virility widely accepted by our modern societies, Alireza Shojaian's paintings highlight men with hairy and toned bodies. In *Blossom at the mention of your name* and *Persian Garden*, the subjects are placed in lascivious and vulnerable poses, the opposite of standard representations of virility.

Alireza Shojaian

The Mirror

Beirut, 2018

—

Acrylic and colored pencil on wood

—

New York, Collection of Ramzi Abufaraj
& Keith Nuss

Part of Alireza Shojaian's work is organised around narrative undertakings that draw on his personal history and experiences, such as the self-portrait *The Mirror* which stages the pain of breaking up and the loss of loved ones. In this work that borrows the title of Tarkovsky's 1975 film, Alireza Shojaian also pays homage to the queer history of Lebanon and the fight for LGBT rights in the United States. A photograph of Shojaian in military dress is juxtaposed with one of two young women kissing taken in Beirut in the 1950s, and a photograph of Harvey Milk.

Alireza Shojaian
Under Shiraz's sky, Arthur
Paris, 2020

—
Acrylic and colored pencil on wood

—
Paris, collection of the artist,
courtesy of the gallery La La Lande

Shojaian considers questions relating to queer identities in Western Asia, and more broadly in countries with Muslim cultures. The cultural, artistic, and historic dimensions in his work are expressed most fully in his series *Under Shiraz's Sky*. The work pays tribute to the famous miniature school of Shiraz. Alireza Shojaian bears witness to his personal journey linked with exile, between Asia and Western Europe, between his Persian heritage and his current life in Paris.

Soufiane Ababri

Bed works

Paris, 2022

—

Pencil drawings on paper

—

Paris, collection of the artist.

Courtesy of the gallery Praz Delavallade,
Paris, Los-Angeles.

Soufiane Ababri was born in 1985, he works between Paris and Tangier. *His Bed works* investigate the ambivalence of a society marked by tensions that are less the reflection of its contradictions so much as its complementarities. His legacy resides in his own personal history, constructed in successive layers of personal events and itineraries. An amateur of sociology, his work plays with the notion of gaze: the artist observes a world that looks back at him. This form of introspection mixes his subjective perception, shared representations, and social conventions. This exercise recalls Persian miniatures and their subtle play between what is hidden and what is revealed.

"The three drawings I submitted for this exhibition are part of the series *Bed work*. The drawings are literally made in bed with colored pencils and offer a new dialectic and new strategies for resistance techniques.

How to denounce violence and dismantle the mechanisms of domination while refusing to use the tools of the dominant? How to reclaim insults and incorporate them in the reconstruction of the self beyond the margins, which is to say, far from the center and normativity?

This series tries to stage all of THAT, which is to say, the complexity of such a process. The ambiguity between social domination and erotic desire linked to games of domination. The fragile link between the sexual fantasy about the system (the police, prisons, institutions...) and the violence that this fantasy represents in real life.

I put in place this construction site to illustrate this pull between an art institution that gives voice to a queer artist from an immigrant background who belongs to a post-colonial generation. A construction site, by definition, is something that is not finished, something to be wary of, since accidents are frequent, collapses are very frequent, and we are currently experiencing them with the return of anti-abortion laws and the laws banning homosexuality in Lebanon, examples among many others...

The desire for the institution and the concomitant distrust is an interminable game that I try to problematize here with voluntarily ambiguous scenes. Between consent and domination, multiple readings demonstrate the impossibility of establishing categories, and especially over the long run."

Kubra Kadhemi

Untitled

Paris, 2020

—

Gouache on paper

—

Paris, private collection

Kubra Khademi is an Afghan artist and performer born in 1989. Her practice explores her life as a refugee and as a woman. A feminist activist, her work revisits patriarchal codes and constructions and proposes frescoes glorifying the feminine body, sorority, matriarchy, and lesbian experiences. She studied fine arts at the University of Kabul before joining The Beaconhouse National University in Lahore, Pakistan. In Lahore, she began creating public performances, a practice she pursued on her return to Kabul. Following her performance *Armor* in 2015, she was forced to leave Afghanistan. After seeking asylum in France, she obtained French citizenship in 2020. Today, she lives and works in Paris.

These two gouaches are above all about desire. The feminine figures indulge in erotic pleasures, at first in a collective movement, drawing pleasures shared between women, and then in a solitary practice. Khademi often represents these scenes simply, playfully, with a touch of humor. Her figurative landscapes herald new entirely feminist imaginaries where the body takes a central place, its nudity being irrevocable and frontal. By creating a repertory of erotic feminine poses, she advocates for their widespread acceptance in an activist practice.

Kubra Kadhemi

Untitled

Paris, 2020

—

Gouache on paper

—

Paris, private collection

Kubra Kadhemi

In the Realm

Paris, 2020

—

Gouache and goldleaf on paper

—

Paris, collection Benoit and Irina Sapiro

The work is taken from the series "From the two-page book", completed in 2020. This large format represents two feminine characters in an erotic scene. The lovers touch one another in an almost acrobatic position. However, their expression is fixed and neutral and projects us headfirst (and peacefully) into their intimacy, as if to indicate the normalcy of this scene. The bodies are painted in large flat ochre strokes and are outlined by thin lines that separate them from the background. Verses taken from the Rubayiat of Rûmi, the famous 13th century Persian poet, frame the composition and evoke the idea of absolute love. It is to the magnificence of this same emotion that Khademi pays tribute in the scene proposed here, brought to the height of its beauty in this embrace between two women.

Aïcha Snoussi

Self-portrait

Paris, 2021

—

Paper, pigments, blood, and personal archives on bare canvas

—

Paris, Collection of Jean Marc Decrop

Aïcha Snoussi is a Tunisian artist born in 1989. After receiving a diploma from the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Tunis and the Sorbonne University, she now lives and works in Paris. In 2020, Aïcha Snoussi was awarded prizes from the Rambourg Fondation as well as the Sam Prize for contemporary art.

Through her work, Aïcha questions notions of identity and the validity of norms and classifications, through drawings and installations that mix fiction and feminist and queer archives.

In *Self-portrait*, Aïcha Snoussi manipulates paper like skin and uses her personal archives that have been dissected, sequenced, and assembled to propose a more intimate version of herself. She offers her self-portrait composed of ink, blood, archives, notes, drawings, and remains of daily life. These fragments of the self form the body of her work, the background of a canvas where traces of language have accumulated. Through this strata-based approach to portrait making, she attempts to erect her own personal archeology. If the lines of her face and her expression are not clearly rendered, the portrait remains nevertheless a history of the body that she makes visible in this monumental piece.

Aïcha Snoussi
Sépulture aux noyées
(Sepulcher to the Drowned)
Paris, 2021

—
Glass bottles, water, paper, alcohol-based
inks and charred black wool, organic
elements

—
Paris, collection of the artist,
courtesy of the gallery La La Lande
The work in its initial installation
was made with the support of Mo.Co
and The Fondation Zinsou.

"The archeological expedition LIXE unearthed one of the most ancient sepulchers on the Mediterranean coast, but also the oldest site dedicated to drowned lovers between the two shores. These results were published in the journal Motawasit in June 2021. Situated off the island of Zembra, today, the sepulcher of the drowned brings together the first elements of ritual practices of a queer civilization in prehistoric Cape Bon.

More than 7000 years ago, Zembra was a camp of lovers in the Tchech culture, also called Zindiennet, whose sepulchers in the form of stepped bazinas were rediscovered. Poetry, the principal activity of the inhabitants of the site, is practiced in a mix of distilled ink and charred black wool, applied with amberjack bones. The Tchechs from Zembra had, dating from this period, travelled from one side of the Mediterranean to the other and maintained numerous relations around the Basin. When lovers didn't come back, bottles containing drawings, dream narratives, and desires of crossing were positioned in circular mounds as effigies to the lost, to keep their memory alive and their strength in the heart of the waves."

Jeanne and Moreau
(Lara Tabet and Randa Mirza)
*Will you be angry at me if I keep falling
each time?*
2017 – 2022

—
Installation, bed, screen, wallpaper,
photography, video, flowers, 2022

—
Marseille, Collection of the artists

*Coucher de soleil aux deux signes
(Sunset with the two swans)*

—
Inkjet printing on Blue Back paper, 2022

Sieste (Nap)

—
Inkjet printing on fabric mounted on a
folding screen, 2022

Neighbour

—
Digital format on iPhone, 2022

*Photography Lies but I have other romantic
ideas*

—
Short Film, HD, 13mn

—
Marseille, 2022

<< Artists

Jeanne et Moreau is the pseudonym of the artist duo composed of Lara Tabet and Randa Mirza. Lara Tabet is a doctor and visual artist born in Lebanon in 1983. Randa Mirza is a visual artist born in Beirut in 1978. The two have collaborated since 2017 on a work that chronicles their amorous relationship and considers the process of the creation of images in the articulation of desire.

Between a bedroom and an exhibition space, this installation offers a meditation on the tension between idyll and domesticity. It bears witness to the instant of breaking apart, the fragility of separation and the race towards a disappearing future. When home is the entry point to disaster, how can the codes of living together be renegotiated in the absence of stability?

After the destruction of their apartment due to the explosion in the port of Beirut, Jeanne and Moreau left their home. The improvised bouquets in each of these ephemeral spaces where they lived were subsequently photographed at the end of their stay. At once a *momento mori* and a metronome, they bear witness to a time spent in a same place. The projected work is a film-poem based on editing short videos that the two artists sent one another through instant messaging. The music is produced by transcoding a cat.

A cell phone containing images from their shared personal archives is made available to visitors. This work questions what is made public and what remains private when sharing on social networks.

Omar Mismar
A Hands Routine
Beirut, 2012

—
Poster printed on mat paper

—
Beirut, Collection of the artist

Omar Mismar is an artist born in 1986 in Lebanon and based in Beirut. His practice is centered around projects that probe the entanglement of arts, politics, and the aesthetics of disaster. He taught at the California College of the Arts, The University of San Francisco, and The American University of Beirut as well at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts. He is the editor in chief of the Beirut based artistic and literary journal *Rusted Radishes*.

In *A Hands Routine*, Omar Mismar creates the cartography of a gesture: his hands holding or delicately detaching themselves from those of his lover's on a drive through the streets of Beirut.

"He is driving and I am sitting next to him, sometimes I reach to his side and put my hand in his, other times he reaches to my side and puts his hand in mine. We roam, we talk, and we look. Holding hands becomes a risk, a secret act, fun for being dangerous. We hold and unhold, depending on where we are, who is next to us and what is next to us. The holding is interrupted, always. By a traffic light, a higher adjacent car, a rose seller, a beggar, a delivery boy, a passer by, a heated conversation, a jealous gaze..."

Omar Mismar

The Path of Love, Day 21

San Francisco, 2013-2014

—

Red neon and digital printing

—

Paris, Museum of Institut du monde arabe

With this series, Mismar proposes a cartography of desire and an amorous quest in San Francisco where he currently works. For thirty days, he submitted to a performance in which he walked the streets with the help of Grindr, a gay app that indicates to users the proximity of potential partners around them. Every day, he chooses a man he desires and tries to get as close as possible to him using the application. He then notes these itineraries and transforms them into paths, which are converted into a neon structure.

Omar Mismar

The Man Who Waited for a Kiss

San Francisco, 2014

—

Newspaper and printing inks

—

Beirut, Collection of the artist

Mismar continues to explore the performance and its transcription. In, *The Man Who Waited for a Kiss*, he positions himself under security cameras scattered across San Francisco. He puts an announcement on Craigslist, as well as on Grindr and Scruff (two of the most famous cell phone applications which use GPS tracking to allow gay men to meet and to seduce one another) that he's waiting for a kiss. He waits for thirty minutes in his position and then leaves. The wait is mapped out by a pinhole camera and its exposure is relative to the time spent waiting. A detective that he met on one of the applications is invited to look through the photos and sort them according to the narrative he sees unfolding. The final iteration of the work is a pile of newspapers available to visitors.

Tarek Lakhrissi
Out of the Blue
Paris, 2019

—
Short film, HD, 13mn

—
Paris, collection of the artist with the
courtesy of the gallery VITRINE

Tarek Lakhrissi is a Franco-Moroccan artist and poet born in 1992. He works in the fields of installation, performance, film, text and sculpture. He is interested in political and social issues related to stories of transformation of language, magic, strangeness, codes and love. Each project initiated by Lakhrissi grows out of text and poetry, which are his principal obsessions, before he translates the ideas that these mediums convey into the visual arts. His profound use of language engages in performativity and convokes queer, poetic, erotic, and nostalgic futures.

With *Out of the Blue*, his first film made in 2019, Tarek Lakhrissi proposes a psychedelic tale of social anticipation. His futuristic narrative takes place in a crucial moment in History when a conservative era is suddenly coming to an end.

Queer futurism is the essence of *Out of the Blue*. It is at the tipping point of the world, as an apocalyptic tension culminates, that the artist develops his poetic and political word on the springs of struggle, freedom, self-determination and queer futures. The struggle against economic, moral and sexual oppression is embodied in the main character who, through poetry and narration, proposes the foundations of a future for humanity in a fascinating monologue. In this work, Lakhrissi eschews traditional apocalyptic narratives to meditate on the very nature of transition by using fiction to develop a disruptive, utopian and bizarre tale.

Second Room

Performing gender

The experiences and realities of sexual diversities manifest themselves across the Arab World and in Arab diasporas, just as here in France. The artists' 'hyper-contemporary' vision questions individual emancipation: the freedom to make choices about their bodies, the freedom to live their differences, the freedom to love as they wish. In reflecting on how to remake society and putting these forms of thought into action they unlock new possibilities for all of us, together. If some of the artists present continue live in their native countries, many have been forced to uproot themselves and live in exile.

By creating alternative narratives, the artists lay the foundations for an aesthetic, cultural, even political revolution. With humor, they overturn certain cultural codes and representations, transform them, and perform them. Their activist approaches affirm their right to assert themselves. They seek to make history, to bear witness to what has been hidden or denied, to offer homage to alternative cultures in the Arab speaking world in all their complexities.

Mohamad Abdouni

"Treat Me Like Your Mother: Trans Histories From Beirut's Forgotten Past", 2022

Unidentified photographer, Photo of Em Abed operating an "editing" machine at J. Saroufim S.a.r.l.

Printing and conversion, Matn, Lebanon, 1994

Unidentified photographer, Photograph of Em Abed during a masquerade ball in Saframarine, Keserwan, Lebanon, 1995

Unidentified photographer, Photograph of Em Abed during a trip to Aqoura, Keserwan, Lebanon, date unknown

—
Photographic prints on coated mat paper, 2022

Mohamad Abdouni

Studio photograph of Em Abed
Photographic print, 2019

—
Beirut, Cold Cuts magazine and the Arab Image Foundation

Mohamad Abdouni is a photographer and director born in Lebanon in 1989. He lives and works between Beirut and Istanbul. He is the editor-in-chief of the photography magazine Cold Cuts, that explores queer cultures in the SWANA region (South West Asia and Northern Africa).

For the past several years, he's devoted a large part of his work to creating what is probably the first archive of trans history in an Arab country. This project entitled *Treat Me Like Your Mother: Trans Histories From Beirut's Forgotten Past* celebrates the stories and lives of trans women in Lebanon. This archival work also gave rise to a publication in Arab and English in which Abdouni compiled studio portraits, unpublished photographs, and interviews from Beirut's trans community in the 1980s and 1990s. This collection is now conserved by The Arab Image Foundation in Beirut.

"This work pays tribute to trans* women, and femme men who have been largely erased from Beirut's history. Working with LGBTQI+ NGO Helem, we spoke to and photographed ten ladies aged between their late thirties and late fifties, all with very different stories that collectively paint an unprecedented picture of Beirut's past. The importance of this project lies in memory and remembrance, in the fact that older members of the LGBTQI+ community are often invisible in a city where LGBTQI+ people are increasingly under the spotlight."

Léa Djeziri x SHIFT
Excerpt from the publication
"SHIFT, Ici et maintenant", SHIFT
editions, 2019
Marseille, 2019

—
Original drawings, paper and ink

—
Marseille, collection of the artist

Born in 1991, Léa Djeziri is a French artist, author, and illustrator.

In 2019, she collaborated with the Tunisian feminist collective SHIFT to produce a publication of the same name. The book focuses on five illustrated stories, all inspired by the biographies of Tunisian women who forged their own paths.

Léa Djeziri and the writer Rym Amami met the activist and actress Rania Amdouni who entrusted them with her story. Her life is told in four acts over forty pages. The story recounts the ups and downs of a difficult childhood, good and bad encounters, moments of fragility and grace. The graphic novel sketches out the outlines of a passionate and generous personality, far removed from any kind of determinism.

The last chapter presents Amdouni as a queer feminist activist and founder of the movement Falgatna (which means "we've had enough"), and former president of the organization Shouf, which advocates for the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as the founder of the Brigade of activist clowns. Today Rania Amdouni lives in exile in France and remains an important figure in Tunisian civil society.

Sido Lansari

Papa suce et maman coud
(*Papa sucks and Mama sews*)

Paris, 2013-2019

—
Embroidery in cross stitches on screen
and Aida cloth

Je pourrais devenir actif pour toi, 2013
(*I could become active for you*)

*Je cherche un CDI (et un plan Q régulier),
2013*
(*I'm looking for a full-time job (and a
regular fuck buddy)*)

Ça donne quoi sans le cockring ?, 2014
(*How does this look without the cock-
ring?*)

*C'est une alchimie étrange de changer
le foutre en or, 2019*
(*It's a strange alchemy to change cum
into gold*)

*Un caca, une maman. On veut du porno
allemand, 2013*
(*A poop, a mom. We want German porn*)

C'est bien ici la partouze ?, 2014
(*Is the gang bang here?*)

Sido Lansari is a multidisciplinary artist born in 1988 in Casablanca, in Morocco. His artistic practice is articulated around questions linked to identity, gender, and sexuality by exploring memory's blind spots from the point of view of linguistic, artistic, and archival legacies. Through mediums like photography and video, he investigates collective narratives in a meditation on individual memories.

In 2013, protests in France began opposing the bill that would open up marriage and adoption to same sex couples. It's in this context that Sido Lansari began his first creative project with "*Papa suce et Maman coud*", a series of needlework designs embroidered with salacious phrases presented as slogans that play with French vocabulary related to homosexuality. Using crude language, accompanied by childlike patterns, this series of needlework intends to call out to the reader and place this jargon in context in a society that is more conservative than we often like to believe.

Sido Lansari
"Sissy that walk"
Morocco, 2016

—
Ink-jet printing and embroidery

Sissy That Walk
Paris, collection of Elena Jimenez

Shade
Paris, collection of Vincent Héritier

Power Bottom
Tangier, collection of the artist

That Bitch is Fierce
Paris, collection of Rémi Bigot

In 2016, having settled in Morocco, Sido Lansari created the series "*Sissy That Walk*" echoing the TV series Rupaul's Drag Race, a reality show where participants compete to be "America's Next Drag Superstar". Broadcast on television over several seasons, the show was added to Netflix's global roster of shows. Among the countries that had access to it were: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran. Even if homosexual acts are illegal in these countries, the show was neither censored nor monitored.

Using the Arabic subtitles as a starting point, this series questions the place of cross-dressing and the relationship between masculine and feminine identities in the Arab and Muslim world. Halfway between graphic design and embroidery, this work is hand-stitched on printed paper.

Joseph Kai
Excerpt from the comic book
"L'intranquille", Casterman, 2021
France, 2021

—
Original drawings, India ink on paper

—
Paris, collection of the artist

Marginalization, sexuality and gender are among the favorite subjects of Lebanese illustrator Joseph Kai, born in 1989. His style mixes the Franco-Belgian language of illustration with a Beirutian experimental tendency.

In 2021, he published *L'intranquille*, his first graphic novel. He chose an introspective tone, delicate lines, and saturated colors to speak about anxiety, sex, and dreams in a Lebanon foundering in catastrophe. Following in the footsteps of Samar, a thirty-something gay man in Beirut, the author explores the doubts of a young generation suffocating by violence, unemployment, lack of opportunities, and homophobia. The author and illustrator creates a poetic and intimate graphic novel, casting a jaded gaze on Lebanese society.

In a crucial point in the story, told in a series of twelve tableaux, Joseph Kai questions the place each one of us has in creating change, self-acceptance and the role of art in the visibility and affirmation of community. Throughout this sequence, he describes his growing awareness as an artist and as a queer individual that "something has to be done". He expresses his doubts, the fear of death, self-censorship, the loss of self, his daily fight to exist and his choice to affirm himself and stop giving in, to no longer be silent and to act. This decisive moment is highlighted through a *mise en abyme* effect using a dystopian science fiction narration, where the actions of the protagonist are projected by his unconscious and dreams into a political sphere and a space-age environment worthy of Star Trek.

Raed Ibrahim
Gayom, series "*For Every Ailment
There is a Remedy*"
Amman, 2009

—
Posters and medical boxes

—
Amman, collection of the artist

Raed Ibrahim, born in Saudi Arabia in 1971, is an artist and teacher based in Amman, in Jordan.

This work is taken from the series "*For Every Ailment There is a Remedy*", in which Raed Ibrahim ironically plays with major issues that crystallize tensions in the Middle East. In this project, the artist first tries to tackle subjects considered taboo. He identifies twelve problems, and invents a solution for each one of them in the form of a pill, gel, cream, etc. The equation is set: for each ailment there is a corresponding schematization.

The Gayom suppositories have the power to "make you normal". The promise is announced by harping slogans. The order is delivered: take Gayom, be normal. The installation's heavy use of marketing tropes and its dark humor hammers the message in, to avail ourselves of this shock therapy when faced with social and cultural norms. The work throws injunctions in our face that mandate normalcy in an almost too simplistic "miracle" cure, by hiding and concealing what society refuses to accept.

Chaza Charafeddine
"Divine Comedy"

The Fish-Angel, in the background:
Portrait of the Emperor Akbar, c.1630,
signed Govardhan

Guardian Angel II, in the background: "The
flight of Simurgh", c. 1590, signed Baswan

Guardian Angel I, in the background:
"Angel Tobias", c. 1590, signed Hosein

Beirut, 2010

—

Pigmented photographic prints on
Enhanced Mat paper

—

Beirut, collection of the artist

Chaza Charafeddine is a writer and artist born in Lebanon in 1964. After having explored the fields of pedagogy and dance, she devoted herself to photography and writing. "*Divine Comedy*" is inspired by the art of Islamic miniatures. The artist uses the codes of figurative representation in Persian and Mongol worlds where gender is often evoked ambiguously. The extravagance of these images recalls aesthetics from the Lebanese alternative scene who themselves were inspired by Arab pop stars. In this series, these different personalities are invited to pose with the rich iconographic tradition of miniatures in the background. Gender performativity is present directly through these models who become protagonists of these timeless scenes and take on the roles of mythical characters. The photographs renew links with lost traditions where gender representation goes beyond determinism to concentrate on individuals, new fashions, and new eras. This triptych of guardian angels plays with religious iconography while taking into consideration the desires and aesthetic universes of the models.

Khookha McQueer
Self portraits
Excerpts from Instagram
Tunis, 2019 – 2020

—
Photographs, prints on glossy paper
—
Tunis, collection of the artist

Bechir Zayene
Portrait of Khookha McQueer
Tunis, 2020

—
Photograph, print on glossy paper
—
Tunis, collection Khookha McQueer,
courtesy of Bechir Zayene

Khookha McQueer is a transgender non-binary digital and performance artist born in 1987 in Tunisia. She began her career as a graphic designer. She has been recognized for her work as a columnist and activist for LGBTQIA+ rights, and since 2013 for her queer and feminist columns and particularly her posts on social networks, and for her drag and queer performances since 2017. Khookha McQueer is a major figure in Tunisia's alternative scene.

To publish her work, she almost exclusively uses digital platforms like Instagram. Her work questions identity and non-binary status. The artist also seeks to raise awareness of the struggles of the Tunisian LGBTQIA+ community in a heterosexual society that she considers normative. She accepts that her work is qualified as drag but she considers herself primarily as a living experience, each piece offering new variations in aesthetics and genres. She is deeply inspired by Tunisia's cultural heritage, but her principal muses are Middle Eastern and Latin American pop stars from the 1980s and 1990s like Sherihan, Thalía, and Nawal Al Zoghbi.

Camille Lenain
"DJINN"
(GENIE)
France, 2020-2022

—
Photographic prints on silver paper

—
Paris, New Orleans,
collection of the artist

Camille Lenain is a Franco-Algerian photographer born in Paris in 1990. She divides her time between Paris and New Orleans. In her practice, she is interested in themes of representation, of collective memory, and multiple identities.

"This project is an homage to my uncle Farid who died in 2013. At the time, Farid was the only Algerian gay man I knew, up until I heard about Ludovic-Mohammed Zahed, a gay imam living in Marseille, which sparked this work and allowed me to understand my uncle's past, without having the possibility of speaking with him. In the summer of 2020, I encountered a community that held many plural identities, often underrepresented or misunderstood. France has the largest portion of Muslims in the Western World and Islamophobia is omnipresent. LGBTQIA+ individuals from Muslim origins experience discrimination linked to sexual orientation and racism and their intersections, and actively fight against these inequalities while redefining their own religious heritage. If some of them had to cut links with their family, others have interpreted the Koran and have found ways to ease tensions with their family. There's not only one story to be told."

"[Our rage], is not only a response to violence that we have endured or that we endure and for me, it's important to recreate a chronology of rage and violence, because we often forget that they are only reactions. They are not *ex nihilo*, they are not attacks, this is rage born out of self-defense."

Habibitch, Paris, 2020

"It's through the gaze of others that you can say I am a trans, Moroccan and Muslim woman, or *whatever the fuck you see*. But for me, I am just an incredible chick whose name is Lalla Rami."

Lalla Rami, Bologna, 2020

"I thank God every day that I am not hetero. \When you love a person outside a norm, you leave behind this norm."

Rizlaine, Paris, 2022

"\We know what it is, but we don't name it. Furthermore, in Muslim culture, we have this knee-jerk reaction: "That doesn't exist in our home." I don't run the risk of being accused of that in my home because, "that doesn't exist in our home."

Kacim, Lyon, 2022

"I am very melancholic, but that's my life. Like many gay men, it's not an easy life. \We're always looking for a small corner to stay safe."

Bouchta, Marseille, 2020

"It's like a knot in your stomach, like you were burning up from the inside, like you felt your heart burning, and then you ask yourself : what is going on ?"

Djalil, Lyon, 2020

Khaled Takreti

Joujoux, Hiboux, Cailloux
(*Toylies, Owlies, Rockies*)

Paris, 2007

—

Watercolor, gouache, collage on paper

—

Brussels, collection of the artist

Khaled Takreti was born in 1964 in Beirut to a Syrian family. He first studied architecture, design, and engraving, before devoting himself to painting.

Joujoux, Hiboux, Cailloux was made in 2007. Khaled Takreti had just moved to Paris where he joined his partner. Takreti needed time before confronting the city. He locked himself in their apartment and entered into a creative introspection that gave birth to nine paintings made during these months cut off from the world.

This seclusion also produced a final, monumental, and masterful painting, which is a true synthesis of this inner quest. *Joujoux, Hiboux, Cailloux* depicts the face of the loved one who becomes father, mother, brother, friend, child, day after day over nine months. These colorful, picturesque and sometimes preposterous characters barely hide the deep melancholy that seeps out of their gaze and postures. These impassive faces reveal nothing of their traumas or what forges the relationships between them.

Fadi Elias

"520"

Germany, 2020-2022

—

Photographic prints on glossy paper

—

Duisburg, collection of the artist

Fadi Elias is an independent Syrian photographer born in 1994 and based in Duisburg in Germany. The artist defines himself as a "storyteller". An immigrant in Europe, he questions exile and its consequences.

"520" is a documentary project on the Syrian queer migrant communities residing in Germany. It's composed of sixteen portraits accompanied by interviews.

"520" is also the article in the Syrian penal code that stipulates: "Any sexual act that is considered unnatural is punishable by up to three years in prison." This law, adopted under French colonial rule, along with many social and political factors, combine to create an atmosphere of fear that weighs heavily on the queer community in Syria.

This series uses a technique known as multiple exposure, which consists of superimposing several photographs from the same portion of a roll of film. The accumulation of shots creates a final deformed image of the photographic subject. The artist uses this procedure to simulate the diversity and complexity of cultural, sexual, ethnic, and religious identities. To create each photograph, he can expose them between twenty and thirty times, depending on the need to hide the identities of his protagonists.

Salih Basheer
"The home seekers"

Essam,
2018-2021

—
Photographic prints, drawings and texts

—
Aarhus, collection of the artist

Salih Basheer is a documentary photographer born in 1955 in Sudan.

His project *"The home seekers"* explores the complex point of view of refugees in their quest to find a new home. Basheer experienced exile himself as a student in Cairo, where he met a number of his fellow citizens. They wrestled with the same tensions, between homesickness and introspective strategies in order to try to create a semblance of an internal refuge.

This black and white series, recalling the form of a diary, explores the journey of a young Sudanese refugee, Essam, and his life in Cairo and then his move to Gothenburg in Sweden. As a homosexual man, Essam was confronted with oppression in Sudan, and was thrown out of his family home; he was forced to leave the country after his grandmother died, as she was only member of his family who offered him a place in her home. Believing to have found a more tolerant society in Cairo, the Egyptian metropolis only amplified his feelings of alienation. He even thought about returning to Sudan, when his visa application to Sweden was accepted, initiating a second odyssey up north.

RIDIKKULUZ

*Sultana (Fares) applying Nivea
before bed*

New-York, 2021

—
Acrylic painting and oil on canvas

—
New York, collection of the artist

RIDIKKULUZ, born in 1994, is a multidisciplinary Jordanian-American artist and autodidact based in New York. They concentrate on the intersections between Arab and queer identities.

RIDIKKULUZ considers that after September 11th, 2001, Arabs were perceived negatively, and they decided to respond by creating works that highlight the Middle Eastern culture they grew up cherishing. As part of this activity, they had to confront that they had kept an important part of their identity secret. This confrontation led them to the discovery of the New York night life. Voguing became a catalyst for their autonomy and their homosexual orientation. The practice of painting is transformed to recount the experiences of queer Arab individuals by offering a visibility to marginalized identities.

"In this particular painting, Sultana is seen sprawled on the couch applying their nighttime skincare routine after a night of performing. A blue tub of Nivea can be brightly seen on the left while a red and white keffiyeh hides behind a pillow on the right. This symbolizes the sacrifice a lot of Arab Queers have to make in choosing between their culture or sexual/gender identity but not both."

Sultana, *The Drag Queen
From the Middle East*
WYNC, Published by
"Know Your Neighbor"
by Jennifer Hsu

—
Video, 4:08 min

—
BMI - Broadcast Music Inc.,
and 2 music rights societies

"When I started living in my truth, I googled "Arab queer NYC" and the first link that appeared was a video of Sultana (Fares Rizk) on a PBS special. I heard the words "During the day, I am in a conservative business suit and by night I am the queen of the Middle East Village" and I was hooked. The very next week I caught her Najwa Karam lipsync performance at the iconic NYC drag staple, Lips. She quickly took me under her wing and come to find out Sultana was one of the first Arab Drag Queens to come to NYC performing with the likes of Amanda Lepore and Sophia Lemar in the 1990s. Sultana is a shining light and a great example of living unapologetically in your own truth. I call her "mother" as she mentors me in both art and feminine expression; Not to mention she bought me my first pair of fishnets."

RIDIKKULUZ, 2022

Ballroom

Habibi's ballroom proposes a selection of music videos from unique and creative musicians and performers that savvily mix references specifically related to Arab pop culture and global contemporary music. These artists offer a reflection on questions related to gender in this exalting immersive screening.

Anya Kneez X My Kali magazine*
Digital Drag Performance, Anya Kneez -
Nawal X Pascale, 2021

—
Video, 4:16 min

—
Music: Elly Etmanetoh by the singer Nawal
El Zoghbi, 2003

Artistic direction, directing and
participation: Alex Khalifa
Performance, hair, makeup, styling, artistic
direction, post-production and editing: Anya
Kneez

Anya Kneez is one of the emblematic figures of the alternative Lebanese scene and one of the most famous Arab Drag Queens. After having spent more than 23 years in the USA, she came back to live in Lebanon in 2012 and presented the art that she had honed in Brooklyn. She regularly offers homage to pop icons of Arab music and the aesthetics of their music videos. Revisiting the song Elly Etmanetoh by the singer Nawal El Zoghbi released in 2003, she proposes a digital perspective on the perception of the internet's future in the Arab world at the beginning of the 2000s.

Presented as a preview as part of the My Kali Magazine X Yalla! event entitled, << Hopefully Tomorrow / Inshallah Bokra >> on February 20th, 2021.

**My Kali* is an online intersectional queer and feminist zine founded in 2007 in Amman, Jordan. The magazine attempts to raise awareness about sexuality and gender in Arab speaking countries and their diasporas, and to create a safe space for queer and feminist authors and artists to document their experiences and share their creations.

Darvish x My Kali magazine*
Performance, homage to the Egyptian
star Ruby, 2021.

—
Video, 4:24 min

—
Music: Enta Aaref Leh by the Egyptian
singer Ruby, 2003

Costumes: Nana Glam, filmed by Bojo
Chaya in Berlin in October 2021.

My Kali magazine*

The Darvish is an oriental queer Syrian dancer who is today a refugee in Berlin. For six years, he used his art to highlight the critical situation of LGBTQ+ communities in Syria and The Middle East. In this video, he performs the first single by the Egyptian singer Ruby, Enta Aaref Leh. After the clip was released in 2003, the media widely criticized Ruby for appearing in provocative attire, that of a belly dancer, walking the streets of Prague.

"This video is dedicated to the singer Ruby who helped me during my adolescence through dance and music."

Presented for the first time officially at the magazine's Digital Party My Kali x Club Quarantine entitled << Ya Leil Ya Eyein >> on October 16th, 2021.

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SHANIDAFLOVA, Turtle White,

Lalla Rami

Lakali!, 2021

—

Video, 1:46 min

—

Production: Zuri!, Raaji and John Raays'.

Filmed in in Saint-Denis, in the installation
"PixelAvenue", by the artist.

© Fred Sapey-Triomphe

Born in Kenitra in Morocco, this young 21 year old trans woman is the new phenomenon in the French and Moroccan rap scenes. Her lyrics mix intimate and political references and are written in three languages: Darija (the Moroccan Arabic dialect), English, and French. She experiences writing as a catharsis that allows her to face obstacles and even violence. Lalla Rami means Madame Archer or Princess Archer. Rami is a part of her "dead name", Rami is part of her 'dead name', which she displays as a claim to her Moroccan origins.

Mashrou' Leila
Radio Romance, 2019

—
Video, 3:39 min

—
Music by Firas Abou Fakher, Ibrahim Badr, Carl Gerges, Hamed Sinno, Haig Papazian. Video produced by Mathematic Studio, writing and directing: Vladimir Mavounia-Kouka. With the participation of the National Center for Cinema and of the animated image.

Created in 2008 by students at The American University of Beirut, the band Mashrou' Leila is known for their activist lyrics. Social and LGBT+ issues are at the heart of their songs. In 2017, during a concert in Cairo, spectators held aloft rainbow flags, including Sarah Hegazi, and a wave of repression against the homosexual community followed, with the authorities making several arrests. Subsequently, the band, which is very popular in the region, had many of its concerts canceled in different countries.

'New York to Amman'
Performed by Sultana
Directed by Jacob Burkhardt, 2016

Fares Rizk is a multidisciplinary Jordanian-Palestinian artist who lives in New York and works in drawing, video and performance. Rizk was born in 1961 in Cairo. He graduated from The Parsons School of Design in New York. His alter-ego is a drag artist named Sultana, who is the self-proclaimed queen of the Middle East Village.

New York to Amman is a music video and performance that offers homage to his love for these two cities: New York and Amman. The video tries to bridge the gap between the Middle East and the West, just like the gap between Fares Rizk and his alter-ego Sultana.