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# ~~Executive~~ (Dis)Order:

## Art, Displacement & the Ban

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Queens Museum

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December 15, 2018 — January 19, 2019

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organized by ARTISTIC FREEDOM INITIATIVE

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curated by Osman Can YEREBAKAN

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## Participating Artists

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**Rashwan Abdelbaki** graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts of Damascus University, Syria in 2007 with a Bachelor's degree in printmaking techniques. His paintings have been shown in Syria, Lebanon, UK, Europe and the US. One Eye Open: Paintings by Rashwan Abdelbaki is currently on view at Syra Arts Gallery in Washington DC. He had a solo show at George Mason University, School Art in Fairfax, Virginia. Recent solo shows include Little Syria at the Metropolitan College of New York, Light Up The Darkness at Dar Al Mussawir in Beirut, Lebanon, and A Moment at Al Hamra Theatre in Damascus, Syria. Abdelbaki was an IIE Artist Protection Fund Fellow in residence at AARome and ArteEast. He was recently selected for a one year residency with the New York City Artist Safe Haven Residency Program led by Artistic Freedom Initiative, Westbeth Artists Housing, Residency Unlimited, and ArtistSafety.net.

**Ali Chitsaz** was born in Tehran, Iran in 1979, and studied at the Azad University of Tehran and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has exhibited prolifically in Iran in solo and group exhibitions and has shown internationally in London, Athens, Dubai, Cambridge, Chicago, and New York. He currently lives and works in New York City. His works are part of multiple art collections in the Middle East, Europe and United States.

**Reem Gibriel** is a Libyan artist and graduate of the University of Michigan School of Art & Design's MFA program. Considered as one of the most innovative contemporary artists in Libya, Gibriel creates sculptures and installations that question universal issues, such as women's rights, poverty, conflict, and displacement. Her work has been exhibited in the U.K., Egypt and throughout Libya. Gibriel co-founded the Arete Foundation for Arts, a non-profit organization that supports young artists and promotes the arts in Libya.

**Nadia Gohar** was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1989. She received a BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art & Design in 2012. Her work has been exhibited at SOIL Gallery, Seattle, Sleep Center, New York, USA; Little Sister Gallery, Artscape Youngplace, Project Gallery, Toronto, Canada; AWAN, London, UK; Libreria Cascianelli, Rome, Italy. She has an upcoming solo exhibition at Erin Stump Projects in Spring 2019. Gohar currently lives and works in Toronto, Canada.

**Ibi Ibrahim** is a visual artist, musician, filmmaker and arts administrator from Yemen. He was born in the United States and raised throughout the Middle East, in Yemen, Libya, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates. His artwork has been exhibited widely throughout the United States, Europe and the Middle East. Ibrahim's work is part of the Barjeel Art Foundation and the Colorado College. Ibrahim lives between Sana'a and Berlin.

**Iffrah Mansour** is a Somali, refugee, Muslim, multimedia artist and an educator residing in Minnesota. Her artwork explores trauma through the eyes of children to uncover the resiliencies of blacks, Muslims, and refugees. She interweaves poetry, puppetry, films, and installations. She's been featured in BBC, Vice, OkayAfrica, Star Tribune, and City Pages. Her critically-acclaimed, "How to Have Fun in a Civil War" premiered at Guthrie Theatre and is touring to greater cities in Minnesota. Her first national museum exhibition "Can I touch it" premiered at Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Her visual poem, "I am a Refugee" is part of PBS's online film festival.

**Esperanza Mayobre** is a Brooklyn-based artist who grew up in Caracas during the Venezuelan oil boom. She is a recipient of the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, Lower East Side Printshop Keyholder Residency, Jerome Foundation travel grant, International Studio and Curatorial Program, Smack Mellon Studio Program, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She has exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, La Caja Centro Cultural Chacao Caracas, the Bronx Museum, Hallwalls, MIT, BRIC, The Art Museum of the Americas, Washington D.C., the Contemporary Museum of El Salvador, the Incheon Biennial Korea, Westchester Community College State University of New York, Museo Eduardo Sívori in Buenos Aires.

**Remijon Pronja** was born in Albania in 1984, and currently lives in Tirana. His MA in Fine Arts at the University of Milan led him to investigate cultural appropriation adopting an interdisciplinary method. He is also a co-founder of MIZA Galeri, an artist-run space in Tirana devoted to the promotion and support of emerging artists from Albania and abroad. Some of his solo exhibitions are Inno alla Gioia e Il Prezzo della Libertà at Galleria Opere Scelte, Torino (2018), Untitled in Allegro Moderato at Zeta Gallery, Tirana (2017), and rex anonymous at Ku(rz)nthalle Bregenz, Austria (2014). He took part in numerous group exhibitions, including Exgratia at Collezione Giuseppe Iannaccone, Milan (2018); Idromeno Award at Shkodër (2017); Mediterranea 18 Young Artists Biennale, Tirana (2017); The Whale That Was a Submarine at Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2015) and Post Young Albanian Artists at Fondazione Museo Pino Pascali (2013). Remijon is the winner of the 2018 Ardhje Award and was recently in residence at Brooklyn's Residency Unlimited.

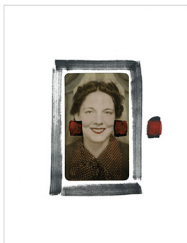
**Nooshin Rostami** is a New York-based interdisciplinary artist and educator born in Shahrud, Iran. She immigrated to the United States to pursue her graduate studies, but soon after her move, she found herself in a place of exile and uncertain about the possibility of returning to her home country. In her work, she explores the impact of displacement as physical, emotional and psychological conditions that she materializes as landscapes of abstract spatial constructs. Rostami works predominantly in performance, installation, and sculpture where a series of abstract forms mutate into an amalgam of objects, constituting personal, social & political narratives.

**Asiya Al-Sharabi** is a Yemeni artist, based in Richmond, Virginia. She started as a photojournalist in Yemen before shifting to art. As a Middle Eastern female artist, she faced many challenges as a photographer, but she has turned her lens to art photography in an effort to capture the energy and personality of Arab women who are, through cultural strictures, not allowed to be photographed. She uses a self-developed technique that expresses and focuses not only on aesthetics, but also on the underlying struggles of women surrounded by the world. Her work questions the effect of culture and religion on female identity. Asiya's work challenges the story beyond each artwork she creates, and has been painting directly on the image and on the forgotten archive material that has been lapsed from memory.

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**Osman Can Yerebakan** is a curator and art writer based in New York. Among his fields of interest are fluid states of audience interaction, kinship between literature and fine arts, and performance of identity as political declaration. His writing has appeared on T: The New York Times Style Magazine, The Paris Review, Vulture (New York Magazine), The Brooklyn Rail, BOMB, Village Voice, Harper's Bazaar Arabia, L'Officiel, Flaunt, Galerie Magazine, Cultured, and elsewhere. Osman previously organized exhibitions at The Clemente Center, La MaMa Galleria, Radiator Gallery, Equity Gallery, AC Institute, Center for Book Arts, Local Project, UrbanGlass, and Leslie Lohman Museum Project Space.

**Artistic Freedom Initiative**, a program of the SDK Foundation for Human Dignity, is a non-profit organization led by immigration and human rights attorneys, providing pro bono immigration representation and resettlement assistance to international artists at risk. In addition to these services, AFI partners with arts and culture organizations, museums, galleries, and performance spaces to create platforms for the artists in their network to showcase their work. Rashwan Abdelbaki, Ali Chitsaz, and Nooshin Rostami are AFI-supported artists.



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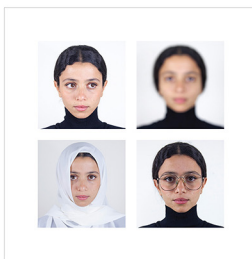
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## Executive (Dis)Order: Art, Displacement & the Ban

1. **Asiya Al-Sharabi**  
In My Cadaverous Cheeks, 2016  
Inkjet print  
6.5 in x 11 in
2. **Ibrahim Manouf**  
My Aqal, Banned & Blessed, 2018  
Mixed media  
2.5 ft x 2 ft x 2 ft
3. **Ali Chitaz**  
The Party of The Doom, 2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
4 ft x 3 ft
4. **Nooshin Rostami**  
There's No Escape From The Dust, 2016  
Ink wash on handmade paper  
22 in x 30 in
5. **Reem Gibril**  
Sense of Remembrance, 2018  
Dimensions vary
6. **Ibrahim**  
Departure, 2017  
Video  
9 minutes
7. **Remijn Pronja**  
Someone Made A Choice (detail), 2016-18  
Mixed-media installation  
Dimension vary
8. **Rashwan Abdelbaki**  
Last Supper... First Walk, 2017  
Acrylic on canvas  
78.74 in x 129.92 in
9. **Nadia Gohar**  
Passport Photos (Do's and Don'ts), 2018  
Digital C-Prints  
Dimensions vary
10. **Esperanza Mayobre**  
Antenas de Golindano, 2016  
Silkscreen  
22.25 in x 29.75 in



# Echoes in a new home...

"My life knocks at the door of a new place / It climbs barefoot up the walls searching for buried sun / Oh, confused captain, my dream / oh, eternal immigrant, my imagination / Has one of you a balsam for my despair?" writes Syrian poet Osama Esber in his poem *Exile is Born at This Moment*. Grasping at the bitter in-betweenness of displacement and longing, the poet meditates on the heartache of adapting to a new home in his exiled voice, unclear whether he is welcome or refused.

**Executive (Dis)Order: Art, Displacement & the Ban** weaves narrative threads of drift and perseverance. The artists, from diverse backgrounds and possessing uniquely crafted voices, contribute to this tapestry through distinct and varied experiences of migration. They approach displacement not only as a political issue, but also as a personal shift - one in which the body crosses to uncharted destinations while the mind lingers in a state tied between the past and the present. This exhibition's theme stems from Executive Orders 13769 and 13780 issued by the current administration, acknowledging the resulting upheaval as a socio-political and humanitarian issue, as well as an example of the repetitive nature of history. Overall, the artists respond to the complex circumstances catalyzed by restrictions on physical, intellectual, and creative mobility.

Questioning the definition of "artists impacted by travel ban," **Executive (Dis)Order** juxtaposes two articles to qualify the word ban: when preceded with "the", ban refers to the Executive Orders issued recently; however, with a preceding "a", the word carries deeper, far reaching implications about humanity's tireless struggle for autonomy throughout history. The artists' diverse biographies convey varying stories of migration molded into manifestations in paintings, sculpture, film or drawing, building a mosaic of intergenerational and cross-continental colors. The freedom to move or stay—basic human rights taken for granted by many, but unattainable for most—reverberates as revolt for some artists; for others, longing for what is left behind or for a remote destination leads to contemplation and introspection. Connecting with the political via meandering paths, the works delve into conditions and consequences of drift in the face of restraint, prejudice and discrimination, portraying the human element within our contemporary reality.

In his mammoth scale painting, *Last Supper...* First Wall, Syrian artist **Rashwan Abdelbaki** reimagines da Vinci's *Last Supper* painting both through a contemporary and timeless lens, altering the number of twelve apostles of the original with nine anonymous figures, devoid of gender, age, race or character. They each keep one eye tightly

closed, trying to visualize their surroundings built by the artist as an equally hospitable and entrapping environment, embodied by a wall standing before them in lieu of the dinner table.

There's No Escape From The Dust, **Nooshin Rostami**'s ink wash geometric drawings on handmade paper, reflect the Iranian artist's performance, *I Fell For A Building*, in India, the first country she was able to visit in more than five years due to her immigration status. The artist's movements while climbing a building—a metaphor for her joy of being free to travel—in the performance are rendered in her ghostly, but resilient gestures on paper.

**Nadia Gohar**'s *Passport Photo (Do's & Don'ts)* is a grid of "flawed" passport photos, each conveying one of the "don'ts" for a headshot photo taken for bureaucratic purposes. Inspired by her efforts as a native Egyptian to gain Canadian citizenship, the artist re-stages the mistakes that could revoke her application, questioning the notions of fear and prejudice embedded in one's display of national identity and self-fashioning.

*Antenas de Golindano*, **Esperanza Mayobre**'s prints of antennas divorced from their urban habitats, stem from her observations of her Venezuelan town, where every household uses a makeshift antenna (often times made out of fans) to receive television streaming. The crackdown on freedom of press and limitations on dissemination of information echo bitterly with her poetically-illustrated towering structures, observed through her equally familiar and foreign eyes.

**Ifrah Mansour**'s sculptural installation, *My Banned Aqal*, pays tribute to eight countries affected by the travel ban, using the structure of a traditional Somali nomadic house to embody home, refuge, and displacement. The artist hand-weaves her miniature aqals with Somali fabric, bamboo sticks and twine in a meditative process, placing her poem, *I am a refugee, inside each "dome"* to commemorate the struggles caused by political instability.

**Ali Chitsaz**'s acrylic on canvas paintings take cues from various historic and contemporary sources filtered through his witty observations of our current socio-political landscape, including in his native Iran. His approach to power dynamics and social collapse provoked by tensions of local, national and global chaos appears in the artist's tumultuous brushstrokes and bold use of color and form.

**Reem Gibriel**'s immersive installation, *In Sense of Remembrance*, invites viewers into a sensory experience prompted by stimulation through sound, smell, and tactility. The Libyan artist's dome-like

shrines each contains a pillow, sound installation and floral smell for participants to rest, listen and inhale, guiding them through personal memories and longing for home, notions that are equally personal, yet prevalently human.

**Asiya Al-Sharabi**'s photography project, *Contemporary Archive*, re-contextualizes archival photos of American families through her Yemeni experience. The artist's journalist background and artistic approach to notions of foreignness and locality appear in her ink jet prints of anonymous faces accentuated with thick waves of paint, blurring the chronological and documentary aspects of archival imagery.

In his eight-minute and fifty-five-second long video, *Departure*, **Ibi Ibrahim** depicts migration through flocks of birds freely meandering the skies. The artist bookends the images of the avian with black and white animation. A young Yemeni woman somberly walks through her village and possibly leaves her home; a bird carries a suitcase in its beak. The voice of a young woman asks: "If I had a chance to return to Yemen for one moment, how long would that moment be?" The inherent whimsy of animation contrasts with the reality of diaspora experiences and the narrator's confessional tone.

**Remijon Pronja**'s *Someone Made A Choice* is an installation of several fat-covered bags encapsulating salvaged clothing, accompanied by his drawings of beaches in his hometown in Albania. The tension of these bags, reminiscent of haphazardly-made refugee bags, sit akin to drifted bodies with their greasy yellow skins, contrasted by the exaggeratedly colorful and artificial depictions of the Adriatic beach, populated by beachgoers in states of joy and motion.

*Osman Can Yerebakan  
November, 2018*

Graphic Design: Rehan Miskci

Artistic Freedom Initiative wishes to thank Queens Museum for its collaboration on **Executive (Dis)Order: Art, Displacement & the Ban** and for providing a creative space to house this exhibition. AFI also thanks the extraordinary artists who have contributed their work to this exhibition. Your inspired art and personal stories are the foundation of **Executive (Dis)Order**, and are at the core of AFI's mission. Artistic Freedom Initiative thanks our generous donors and supporters.

## ARTISTIC FREEDOM INITIATIVE

**Mission:** The Artistic Freedom Initiative (AFI), a program of the SDK Foundation for Human Dignity, provides pro bono immigration representation and facilitates resettlement assistance for international artists at risk.  
**Programs:** AFI provides pro-bono legal services for at-risk artists, facilitates artist resettlement and reintegration into host communities, and promotes the works of at-risk artists globally.  
**AFI has:** - Provided over \$450,000 in pro bono legal and resettlement services to artists from all over the world, including Iran, Syria, Uganda, Egypt, Iraq, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Georgia & Indonesia.  
- Launched a Safe Haven residency program for at-risk artists, hosted at Westbeth Artists Community and in coalition with ArtistSafety.net, Residency Unlimited, PEN America and Fordham University.  
- Partnered with art spaces such as Dupont Underground, Queens Museum, Symphony Space, and Time Equities Art in Buildings who have donated gallery space for exhibitions and other events to promote AFI's artists.

Website: [www.artisticfreedominitiative.org](http://www.artisticfreedominitiative.org)

Contact: [ashley@artisticfreedominitiative.org](mailto:ashley@artisticfreedominitiative.org)

Donate: [www.artisticfreedominitiative.org/take-action](http://www.artisticfreedominitiative.org/take-action)



The SDK Foundation for Human Dignity is a family foundation that seeks to enhance human dignity by supporting innovative and impactful work that will lead to real social change. The foundation funds organizations and initiatives in the areas of economic development, cross-cultural understanding, and fundamental human rights.

This exhibition is presented as part of Queens Museum's Community Partnership Exhibition Program.

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### Saturday, December 15th / MUSIC

A rare musical performance by Iraqi-American composer and musician **Amir ElSaffar** with legendary, Baghdad-based **Hamid Al-Saadi**, the world's foremost living performer of the Iraqi Maqam. December 15th at 4:30 pm, [Queens Museum's Community Partnership Gallery](#).

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### Sunday, December 16th & Saturday, January 19th / FILM

Film screenings will be held on [December 16th](#) and repeated on [January 19th](#), both days at [3 pm](#) at [Queens Museum's theater \(2nd floor\)](#). Organized in partnership with **ArteEast**.

[3 pm](#): Animated Short | **Jalal Maghout, Suleima**

Syria, 2014, Animation, Color and B&W, 15 min. | Arabic with English subtitles

Suleima is a woman who has been a part of the Syrian revolution since its beginning. Twice detained, she states: "I'd rather die than see someone arrested without trying to help."

[3:20 pm](#): Feature Film | **Hala Abdalla, Ammar Al-Beik, I Am the One who Brings Flowers to her Grave**  
Syria, 2006, B&W, 110 min. | Arabic with English subtitles

This film is a monument to humankind's great resilience and love of life in the face of loss, exile and death. Interviews with three Syrian women alternate with a variety of impressions on landscape, art, and family.

Note: This film is presented as part of ArteEast's program Unpacking the ArteArchive with partial support from The Community Trust and by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

**Hala Abdalla** studied Agronomy at Damascus University, then left for France in 1981 after being detained for 14 months for political reasons. Al Abdalla has worked with many Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian directors, among them Omar Amiralay, Mohammed Malas and Oussama Mohammed. **Ammar Al-Beik** is an award-winning conceptual artist and independent filmmaker from Syria.

**Jalal Maghout** is an independent filmmaker from Syria.

Founded in 2003, ArteEast is a leading New York-based not-for-profit organization dedicated to engaging a growing audience with the contemporary arts from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and its diaspora. Through public programming, strategic partnerships, and dynamic online publications, ArteEast is a forum for critical dialogue and exchange aimed at supporting the development of a sustainable MENA art sector. [www.arteeast.org](http://www.arteeast.org)



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### Thursday, January 3rd / MUSIC

Revolutionary, internationally acclaimed musicians **Ramy Essam** and **ABJEEZ** take the stage in back to back performances at [\(le\) Poisson Rouge](#) on [January 3rd](#), presented by Artistic Freedom Initiative.

Featured in Rolling Stone, the New York Times, NPR, and in the documentary film The Square, Egypt's Ramy Essam exploded into international fame as the real voice of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, when his songs spread like wildfire among the demonstrators. Hailed as the 'Bob Dylan of Egypt' yet banned from performing in his home country, Ramy is a force of nature whose music is impassioned, explosive, and full of fight.

Hailed by the New York Times and BBC for dynamically fusing Iranian soul rhythms with reggae, rock, ska, and flamenco, sisters Melody and Safoura Safavi seek to not only transcend geographic and sonic boundaries with their songs, but to reach young Iranians through humor and rebelliousness, inspiring creativity in a country that has little exposure to musical diversity. Tickets @ [LPR.com](#).