



GUGGENHEIM
UBS **MAP**
GLOBAL
ART INITIATIVE

BUT A STORM IS BLOWING FROM PARADISE

CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

This Resource Unit focuses on five artists whose work is included in *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa*, the third and final exhibition of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative.

This guide suggests techniques for exploring the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. It is also available on the museum's website at guggenheim.org/artscurriculum, with images that can be downloaded or projected in the classroom. The images may be used for education purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition, read the guide, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information on scheduling a visit for your students, please call 212 423 3637.

But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa provides an opportunity for students to learn more about the ideas and strategies that contemporary artists are using to address the issues and concerns of our time.

This exhibition represents the third phase of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, a distinctive program that creates direct access to contemporary art and education on a global scale. Through in-depth collaboration with artists, curators, and cultural organizations from South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa, MAP has expanded the Guggenheim's collection with more than 125 new works, and has built physical and digital experiences that bring art and ideas to life.

Together, the Guggenheim and UBS recognize the power of contemporary art to connect and inspire communities, spark debate, enrich the present, and help shape the future. This long-term collaboration underscores a mutual commitment to supporting today's most innovative artists by increasing visibility of their work in New York and across the globe.

Learn about the artists, curators, and exhibitions at guggenheim.org/MAP

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa is the third exhibition of the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, a multiyear collaboration that charts creative activity and contemporary art in three geographic regions—South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. Organized by Sara Raza, Guggenheim UBS MAP Curator, Middle East and North Africa, the exhibition focuses on the practices of contemporary artists from the region and includes a selection of artists who either originate from or live and work in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Following its presentation in New York, the exhibition will travel to the Pera Museum in Istanbul. The artworks in the exhibition, along with others acquired through the Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund, enter the Guggenheim's permanent collection.

The exhibition underscores an important central question: How is the designation “Middle East” defined and understood both regionally and internationally? *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise* considers the impact of historical colonization and present-day globalization, and examines how the region is marked by its intertwined histories and its social, religious, cultural, and creative traditions.

But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise examines the region from a visual perspective, looking at the geopolitics of the Middle East and North Africa through the work of selected artists. The exhibition includes installation, painting, photography, sculpture, video, and work on paper, and examines a range of topics emerging from Raza's curatorial investigations pertaining to themes of origin, migration, the expression of ideology through architecture, and the excavation of buried meaning.

ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The composite region known as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) forms a geographical bridge between Europe to the north and west, sub-Saharan Africa to the south, and Asia to the east. This unique position has made it a highly contested area for thousands of years. In its broad river valleys, people first learned how to farm, later building great cities and empires governed by the rule of law. From this region came religious beliefs that still guide the lives of millions of people around the world. The area's history has at times been turbulent due to large-scale shifts in power and government. In modern times, the discovery of oil has brought wealth to some and caused powerful nations to vie for control over it. We often hear about conflict in the region, but it should not be forgotten that local peoples have contributed enormously to the advancement of art, philosophy, and science, and are distinguished by a rich and ancient culture, a tradition of friendship, and a great desire for peace and justice.

The ancient people of the Middle East and North Africa were probably the first in the world to domesticate animals and grow crops. They were the first to build walled towns and cities in which civilizations could flourish according to the rule of law. Other firsts include the division of time into sixty-minute hours, the invention of the wheel, the development of writing, and the use of iron, bronze, and glass.¹

Three of the world's major religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—began in the Middle East and are all defined in part by belief in a single God. With the exception of Israel (where the state religion is Judaism) and Lebanon (where Christianity is practiced by about forty percent of the population), Islam, which was founded by the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, is the region's dominant religion.

From 632 CE (the year of Muhammad's death) to 1258, the region was the most powerful and cultured in the world. At its height, the Islamic Empire stretched from Spain in the west to the borders of India in the east, from central Asia in the north to North Africa in the south.

Throughout the Islamic Empire, the Muslims forged a bond between the conquerors and the conquered through the religion of Islam and the Arabic language. As a result, the Islamic Empire left behind a religious, political, and cultural legacy that survives to this day.

The Islamic Empire was at its height during what is known in Western history as the early Middle Ages, dating from around the collapse of the Roman Empire in the late fourth century to the early 1100s. In Europe, this period was marked by a stagnation of ideas and culture, and for this reason it is sometimes known as the Dark Ages. At the same time, however, lands under the control of the Muslims were experiencing a golden age of learning, commerce, and civilization,² and contributing to knowledge and discovery in such fields as agriculture, astronomy, chemistry, geography, mathematics, medicine, and physics.³

One of the last great Islamic empires was ruled by the Ottomans from the thirteenth century onward, and reached from Turkey into the Balkans and Asia Minor (West Asia). After that time, many nations that had once been part of the Islamic Empire fell under European control, becoming colonies of countries such as Great Britain and France.

Following World War II, most of the colonies of the European powers gained their independence. While in many ways the region embraces both ancient traditions and modern developments, in some places there is tension between old and new. This is especially true for issues around politics and the role of women. Starting in December 2010, supporters of political and social change organized major protests in many Arab countries. This wave of protests became known as the Arab Spring (*spring* representing new beginnings).

As the region moves through the twenty-first century, the Middle East and North Africa will continue to play an influential role in world politics, and its people around the world will continue to take pride in its culture and history.⁴

*Study sounds very speculative and open. It's about trying to find something out, as opposed to a finalized work. When you call something a study, people don't feel like they are dealing with an authority. They are open to the openness of the work.*⁵

◀ ABBAS AKHAVAN ▶

Abbas Akhavan was born in Tehran in 1977, and has been living in Canada since 1992. His work is informed by this experience, and concerned with displacement, exile, and migration.

Study for a Monument is part of an ongoing series begun in 2013. The installation features reproductions of extinct plant species, selected from various natural history collections, which are native to the region known as “the cradle of civilization” where the convergence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers produced rich, fertile soil and water for irrigation. The civilizations that emerged around these rivers are among the earliest known non-nomadic agrarian societies. The area is also known as the site of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Possibly built by King Nebuchadnezzar II in 600 BCE, the gardens would have been an impressive feat of engineering, a series of ascending tiered gardens containing trees, shrubs, and vines.⁶ In modern times, this area—modern-day Iraq—has suffered immensely due to decades of social, political, and ecological turmoil, war having caused irreparable damage to the environment.

Akhavan spent years researching specimens of extinct plant life. He consulted with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, which holds more than seven million species, making it the largest in the world. This repository charts the histories of generations of plant species, and houses an archive that includes volumes on the flora of Iraq. Beginning in 1960, the Ministry of Agriculture in Baghdad sought to gather and categorize over 3,300 diverse species of flora native to Iraq's deserts, marshes, mountains, and plains. It is this archival material that Abbas Akhavan used to trace native species from the salt marshes destroyed by Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist government (1979–2003) and the Iraq war (2003–11).



Abbas Akhavan, *Study for a Monument*, 2013–16. Bronze and cotton, overall dimensions variable. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund 2015.83 © Abbas Akhavan. Photo: Nikolaus Steglich, Starnberg, 2015

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Study for a Monument* (2013–16)

- ▶ Describe in detail what you see. Does this installation remind you of anything you have seen before? Explain.
- ▶ Akhavan undertook considerable research into plants in the region that have become extinct. He rendered them at a much larger scale than their actual size. How does the scale of these plant sculptures affect their impact on the viewer?
- ▶ Akhavan has titled this work *Study for a Monument*. A monument is defined as a statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a famous or notable person or event. What person or event might this monument refer to? Explain your response.
- ▶ This work can be interpreted in many ways. The bronze plant forms can be seen as archeological artifacts, fossils, comments on ecological problems, or even as metaphors for the human cost of war. What meaning do you derive from the work? How do you interpret the various elements and materials that Akhavan has orchestrated in this installation?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Some well-known US monuments include the Washington Monument, Mount Rushmore, and the Statue of Liberty. Consider how and why monuments are built, then create your own Study for a Monument. You will first need to determine what place, event, or person your monument will acknowledge. Like Akhavan, conduct research that will inform your design, then consider the following questions:
 - o What message do you want to convey?
 - o What form will your monument take?
 - o What will it be made from?
 - o How large will it be?
 - o Will it be permanent or last for only a short time?
 - o Where is the best site for it?
 - o What inscription should it have?

When your study is complete, share it with your classmates and compare the various possibilities.

- It is ironic and sad that the land known as the “Fertile Crescent” is now so environmentally damaged. The region (also known as the cradle of civilization) was home to some of the earliest human societies, which flourished thanks to the abundant water and agricultural resources.

Recent conflicts have negatively impacted this once-hospitable environment. In addition to the immense suffering and death that resulted from the Iraq War, there has been a vast environmental cost. The climate, health, and vegetation have all been affected.

Many scientists believe the rate of loss of both plant and animal species is greater now than at any time in the history of the Earth. Select a geographical region that interests you and research the impact of human activity on its environment. Present your research to your classmates.

- As part of his work, Akhavan carried out extensive research into Iraq’s indigenous plants. Have students collect plant samples in their communities. Through research in plant taxonomy (the science that finds, identifies, describes, classifies, and names plants) learn more about the species that have been gathered. Then have students make careful drawings of some of the specimens they have identified, and display their research and drawings together.

In 2000 I discovered that Ghardaïa, the Algerian city represented in my installation, is totally made of clay; an adobe city in the middle of palm trees. I was also fascinated to find that this city influenced Le Corbusier.⁷

◀ KADER ATTIA ▶

Kader Attia (b. 1970, France) grew up in Algeria and the suburbs of Paris, and takes this experience of living as a part of two different cultures as a starting point for his work. Attia takes a poetic and symbolic approach to exploring the wide-ranging repercussions of Western domination and colonialism on non-Western cultures.

For *Untitled (Ghardaïa)* (2009) Attia modeled the Algerian town of Ghardaïa in couscous, a regional food staple originated by the Berber people of North Africa that is now popular worldwide. Almost a thousand years old, Ghardaïa is located in northern-central Algeria, in the Sahara Desert. Accompanying the artist's fragile construction are photographs of famous architects Le Corbusier (1887–1965) and Fernand Pouillon (1912–1986), and a copy of a 1982 UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) declaration that identifies the town as a World Heritage Site.

Le Corbusier visited Ghardaïa in 1931, just three years after becoming a French citizen, and made sketches of its buildings. The style of those drawings strongly resembles that of the modernist architecture he subsequently advocated in his treatise on urban planning. That a noted French architect should take inspiration from an Algerian town may seem like a historical footnote, but as Attia notes, “architecture has first to do with politics, with the political order.” As Attia is a child of Algerian immigrants and grew up partly in a Parisian suburb, this statement has a particular resonance.

The use of couscous as a “building” material is symbolic, showing the impact of the artist's native culture on that of France, Algeria's former colonizer. The work highlights the cultural impact of the colonized on the colonizer, reversing traditional thinking about the direction of influence.



Kader Attia, *Untitled (Ghardaïa)*, 2009. Couscous, two inkjet prints, and five photocopy prints, couscous diameter: 500 cm; inkjet prints: 180 x 100 cm and 150 x 100 cm; photocopy prints: 29.7 x 21 cm, edition 2/3. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund 2015.84
© Kader Attia. Photo: Courtesy Kader Attia and Lehmann Maupin, New York

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Untitled (Ghardaïa)* (2009)

- ▶ Make a list of questions about this work, then read the short essay about Kader Attia. How has learning more about the artist and his intentions changed your view of his work?
- ▶ Look at photographs of Ghardaïa online. How does seeing images of the place to which Attia is making reference influence your response to this work?
- ▶ Couscous has long been a staple of North African cuisine—references to it date back to the thirteenth century, and it remains known as North Africa's national dish even as its popularity has spread worldwide. In 2011, couscous was voted France's third-favorite dish.⁸

Attia's choice of material ensures that the installation will change over the course of the exhibition. Photos of previous installations of this work confirm that it cracks and deteriorates over time and needs to be made anew whenever it is shown. How do the ephemeral, cultural, organic, and nutritional qualities of the work add to its meaning?

- ▶ In transferring ownership of this work, Attia also provided a recipe, moulds, and instructions for constructing the sculpture. Imagine that you were part of the museum staff charged with constructing this installation. What questions would you ask the artist?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Kader Attia has become known for installations that use nontraditional materials. In his 2007 video *Oil and Sugar #2*, Attia poured thick black crude oil over a stack of brilliant white sugar cubes that were configured into a giant block. You can view this short video on YouTube.

Think about how a material can be symbolic, then make a work that uses a nontraditional material or materials to convey meaning in a symbolic way.

- Relations between Algeria and France span more than five centuries. During this extended period, Algeria has been part of the Ottoman Empire, conquered and been colonized by France, played an important role in both world wars, and finally gained independence. Over time, relations between Algeria and France have suffered as tension between their peoples has increased. Have students research the history of both nations with half the class taking the Algerian point of view and the other half adopting the French perspective. What suggestions do students have for improving relations between the two countries and their peoples?
- Set up in 1945, UNESCO strives to establish links between nations, promoting world peace through moral and intellectual solidarity. Part of UNESCO's mission is to build intercultural understanding through the protection of heritage and support for cultural diversity. UNESCO created the status of World Heritage to protect sites of outstanding universal value. To date, UNESCO has named 1,031 World Heritage Sites around the world. You can view and navigate an interactive map of these sites at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>. Have each student select and research a site and report on its significance to the class.

I'm interested in landscape voids; those voids resonate some sort of presence. If you go to a place where you know something significant happened, that affects your experience. There is something about the landscape, as if the space is radiating something . . . One of my interests is how you can go to a landscape and capture, bring to life, something that is already gone by the time the viewer sees it; it's a seemingly impossible feat. I am interested in this tension and impossibility.⁹



◀ ORI GERSHT ▶

Working with film, photography, and video, Gersht investigates how natural landscapes and human memory bear witness to conflict. Rather than simply documenting the rubble of war, his work captures the resilience of nature and its ability to repair itself. Addressing themes of migration and movement of people and ideas, Gersht explores the primal struggle between a solitary individual and the elements.

Evaders (2009) is a two-channel video that opens with a quote from philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin's essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940). Benjamin's text articulates an anachronistic reading of notions of "progress," stating: "Where we perceived a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe." The video

chronicles the author's own experiences at the time of writing, when he set off on foot to flee Nazi persecution and reach neutral land in Portugal (he ultimately took his own life having been denied entry).

Gersht did not want to reenact the event. "I wasn't trying to make a sentimental reenactment. What interests me . . . is making a journey."¹⁰ Although we are tracing the same route that Walter Benjamin traveled, we are doing it in the present time. It is a parallel journey with one fundamental difference, today there is no physical border. Gersht's work raises questions about the continued existence of cultural and psychological borders and the overlaps between metaphorical and actual border crossings.

ABOVE Ori Gersht, *Evaders*, 2009. Two-channel color video projection, with sound, 15 min., edition 6/8
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund 2015.86 © Ori Gersht

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Evaders* (2009)

- ▶ Have students watch the video together. Encourage them to compile questions they have about the artist and this work.
- ▶ According to Gersht, while the film references the historical event of Walter Benjamin's journey to escape Nazi-controlled France, "I wasn't trying to make a sentimental reenactment. What interests me—is making a journey. That is the only connection with the past. We are tracing the route, but we are walking now, in the present. It's a parallel journey. I want it to be an expedition. I don't want to try and imagine what Benjamin was going through, which will emerge from our walking the same route. But there is one fundamental difference: now there is no border, while when Benjamin made the journey there was a border that separated life from death."¹¹

Describe how Gersht has created a parallel journey rather than a reenactment.

- ▶ It has been noted that *Evaders* uses landscape images reminiscent of the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), who is linked with the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century style of German Romanticism. Research Friedrich's work and discuss both the similarities and the differences you uncover.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

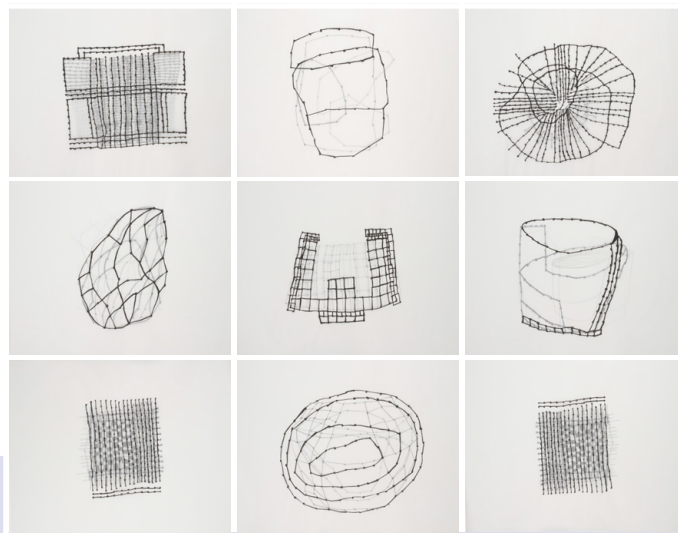
- Gersht's film *Evaders* was inspired by Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (*Angel of History*, 1920), which was referenced by Walter Benjamin in his final essay, "Theses on the Philosophy of History." The film opens with a quote from Benjamin:

... an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while piles of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. — Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, p. 249.

Read the passage carefully and discuss its meanings. For Walter Benjamin, a German Jewish literary critic and philosopher, the notion of historical progress was an illusion. Do you agree or disagree with Benjamin's assessment of the possibility of progress? Explain your response.

- Paul Klee's (1879–1940) painting *Angelus Novus* (1920) is now in the collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, but was owned and treasured by Walter Benjamin from 1921 until his death in 1940. Find an image of the work online and write a paragraph describing your response to the work and compare it to Benjamin's description of the angel in the opening passage of *Evaders*.
- For Gersht, Walter Benjamin was of interest both as an artistic influence and due to his shared cultural heritage. Is there someone whose work you admire who also shares part of your personal history? Once you have identified that person, learn more about him or her and formulate a project to articulate the connection.

... a drawing has no nationality,
and has no time and space.
It is its own universe.¹²



< SUSAN HEFUNA >

Susan Hefuna ponders the intersection of location and identity in a practice that includes drawing, installation, performance, photography, sculpture, and video.

Hefuna lives and works in multiple locations: Cairo, Düsseldorf, and New York City. Her work is influenced by these and other places, by their architecture, culture, and politics. “My work is always influenced by life,”¹³ she says. But these relocations also allow her to be a detached observer: “I have a view from the outside.”¹⁴

Building (2009) is a sequence of nine drawings on tracing paper that Hefuna began by taking numerous long walks through New York City, deriving inspiration from its dynamic architecture and general vitality. “I’m walking

through the city for many days until my mind is totally empty.”¹⁵ After several days, she began drawing, but without a vision of the completed work. She began each drawing with a dot and a line, then added more and more, gradually connecting them in a fluid, spontaneous, and unedited grid that she allowed to take its own shape. Rather than depicting a single, static location, the final work presents an accumulation of stimuli.

Hefuna often uses layering in her drawings. Since 1991, for example, she has used tracing paper to create the impression of visual depth and suggest complexity. In *Building*, she uses this technique to suggest both architectural renderings and the schematic appearance of maps. The delicate ink lines of her drawings can be interpreted as a reflection on structure.

ABOVE Susan Hefuna, *Building*, 2009. Ink on tracing paper, nine parts, 21.5 x 62.5 cm each. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund and partial gift of the artist and Pi Artworks 2015.90 © Susan Hefuna. Photo: Courtesy Susan Hefuna and Pi Artworks, London

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *Building* (2009)

- ▶ Ask students to look carefully at this work, which is comprised of nine drawings, but don't tell them its title. Ask them what they think might have inspired these works and create a list of their responses.
- ▶ *Building* (2009) was inspired by Hefuna's long walks around New York City. Is there anything in the drawings that suggests to you something that you might encounter strolling around a big city?
- ▶ Hefuna has commented: "All my work is inspired by structure."¹⁶

As far back as the early Greeks, scientists and philosophers have studied structures in an attempt to explain order in nature. There are many structures that recur throughout the visible universe at different scales, including spirals, cracks, waves, concentric circles, and radial patterns.

As you study Hefuna's drawings, make a list of celestial, microscopic, organic, manufactured, and handcrafted structures that contain similar structural elements. Compare your list with those of your classmates.

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- As a child, Hefuna spent summers visiting her father's family on the Egyptian Delta. When she returned to school in Germany, her friends often had difficulty understanding the vivid rural scenes she recreated with her pencils and paints, inspired by her memories of Egypt. Have you ever visited a place that would seem foreign to your friends at school? Make a drawing, painting, poem, or essay about this place. Share it with your classmates and an invite them to ask you questions about the place you have described.

- Hefuna has described the way she prepares to make a drawing:

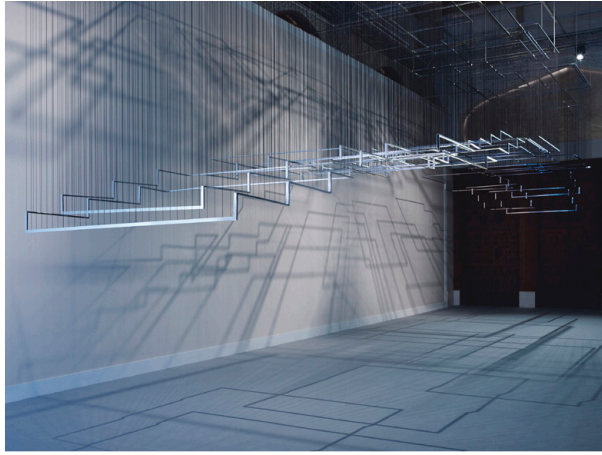
I need time to prepare before doing a drawing. The active time of "not doing" is as important as the activity of actually "doing" the drawing, especially for my ink drawings on layers of tracing paper. With these, my method is to start with one dot and from there connect more dots and lines. When I start, I do not have an image in my mind, and I do not make a sketch beforehand. The drawing unfolds in front of me. I don't correct or redo it. This method needs a high level of concentration.¹⁷

Make a drawing that adopts Hefuna's approach. When it is complete, think about how it felt to draw in this way and what you learned from the experience.

- Hefuna's dual heritage as the child of an Egyptian father and a German mother has afforded her the opportunity to know two cultures deeply; her father's (along the rural Nile Delta) and her mother's (centered in Germany).

Talk to someone who has lived in more than one country. What questions do you want to ask them to find out about their experience and how it has shaped their identity? Record their responses and share them with your classmates. Another possibility is to invite that person to your classroom to have them discuss their experiences and knowledge of more than one culture.

- Many of Hefuna's works are made by superposing a drawing on tracing paper over another drawing so that the layered images interact with one another. Experiment with this method by making two ink drawings of the same size, one on drawing paper, the other on tracing paper. Consider them individually and then layer the tracing paper drawing on top. How do they change? Which do you prefer and why?



My work is very much about seeing everyday life and the things that surround us in a different way, encouraging us to question what we take for granted.¹⁸

Nadia Kaabi-Linke, *Flying Carpets*, 2011. Stainless steel and rubber, 420 cm x 13 m x 340 cm, edition 2/2. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund 2015.92 © Nadia Kaabi-Linke

◀ NADIA KAABI-LINKE ▶

Nadia Kaabi-Linke (b. 1978) works in photography, painting, installation and sculpture to reflect on notions of place and identity. Having divided her childhood between Tunis, Dubai, and Eastern Ukraine, Kaabi-Linke has repeatedly investigated the theme of migration, unveiling the hidden histories of immigrants in disparate locales. Her work raises questions about the disparity of wealth in post-Arab Spring societies, and explores the sometimes antagonistic relationship between Europe and North Africa.

Flying Carpets (2011) responds directly to the theme of migration. It was inspired by Kaabi-Linke's personal experience and study of the Il Ponte del Sepolcro bridge in Venice, where she observed a group of illegal street vendors from North and Central Africa and the Indian subcontinent selling their wares to tourists from carpet-like mats, which they could easily bundle up and walk with across the bridge. The work consists of a suspended structure made of superimposed rectangular shapes of the same proportions as the carpets the peddlers use. Pairing the immigrant's plight with the idea of the flying carpet—a symbol of freedom and travel to exotic places—Kaabi-Linke conjures a

poignant representation of the immigrants' vulnerable status. In stark contrast to the freedom embodied by the flying carpet, the mobility of the street sellers is greatly restricted.

Hovering in the gallery space like a cage, the artwork also mimics the shape of the bridge, where Kaabi-Linke spent eight days gaining the trust of the street sellers and documenting their activities. The work emphasizes the day-to-day sense of confinement and fragility experienced by the hawkers as they move clandestinely from place to place.

Kaabi-Linke has said "I want to express both the idea of floating flying carpets but also imprisonment and cages. The metal geometrical profiles recall the bars of a prison and the black vertical threads enable the hovering but also give the effect of imprisonment." On the sellers, she states: "These people [. . .] suffer from being either invisible or considered as a troublesome element in society when they become visible. Their hopes and dreams are real, they took the risk to immigrate and they are living with the risk of being arrested every second of their existence."¹⁹

VIEW + DISCUSS

Before showing students this work, tell them that they are about to see a work titled *Flying Carpets*. Ask them what they associate with this idea. What do they imagine a work with that title might look like?

Show: *Flying Carpets*

- ▶ How is this work similar to or different from what they imagined?
- ▶ Although this work has a title that suggests the freedom to travel and explore, it actually relates to the lives of illegal immigrants who risk imprisonment if detected. How does Kaabi-Linke convey the urgency of this condition?
- ▶ In addition to stainless steel that traces the outline of the carpets and the threads that suspend them in the shape of the bridge, the work's lighting adds to its meaning. Discuss how the artist's orchestration of materials, space, and light contributes to the impact of the work.
- ▶ Listen to a short interview with Kaabi-Linke at <http://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/10>.²⁰

The artist talks about the street vendors as being “almost invisible, although at the same time they are very present and everywhere.” Are there people in your community who are also “almost invisible”? Discuss any parallels to your own community.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Immigration is an important issue throughout the world, and the recent exodus of thousands of people from Syria continues to polarize opinion. In a 2011 interview, Kaabi-Linke states:

I think that one should have the right to be able to move freely all over the world . . . We know from the theories of Darwin and others that we survived because we were able to adapt and move from one place to another when the environment was too harsh . . . So this process of moving from one place to another continued, it's in all history, during antiquity and then in the Middle Ages, there were never boundaries the way we now know them today. This phenomenon of having harsh, controlled borders happened after the Second World War. It is very, very recent but we have the impression that it was always like this and that it is natural to always be asked for a visa and to get refused and to struggle and to not know how to get into some places.²¹

Have students research the various reasons that people decide to migrate. Do students agree with Kaabi-Linke's statement?

- Nadia Kaabi-Linke is drawn to social justice issues and has undertaken research and made work focused on domestic violence, the border between the United States and Mexico, and the precarious lives of immigrants who sell goods on the streets of Venice.

Ask students to compile a list of social justice issues that concern them. Have them each select an issue they would like to explore and challenge them to make an artwork, in any form, that addresses this issue.

- From the beginning of recorded history, the theme of flight can be found in myth and legend, as well as in art, literature, and organized religion. Almost every culture has its own version of winged angels and devils, horses and dragons, as well as flying carpets and chariots.

With the introduction of hoverboards, drones, and self-driving cars, the means of transportation available to us are beginning to converge with fantasy. Invent a mode of transportation that you would like to become reality. Draw up plans and describe its use.

BOOKS

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Kader Attia
kaderattia.de

Ori Gersht
crgallery.com/artists/ori-gersht

Susan Hefuna
susanhefuna.com

Nadi Kaabi-Linke
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NOTES

- ¹ Philip Steele, *The Middle East* (New York: Kingfisher, 2009), p. 16.
- ² Robin Doak, *Empire of the Islamic World* (New York: Shoreline Publishing Group, 2005), p. 5.
- ³ Saima S. Hussain, *The Arab World Thought of It: Inventions, Innovations, and Amazing Facts* (Buffalo, NY: Annik Press Ltd., 2013), p. 9.
- ⁴ Hussain, *The Arab World Thought of It*, p. 41.
- ⁵ Marina Jordan, *It's a Kind of a Domesticated Wilderness: An Interview with Abbas Akhavan*, Jadaliyya.com, April 14, 2015. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21368/it%E2%80%99s-a-kind-of-a-domesticated-wilderness-an-interv>
- ⁶ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanging_Gardens_of_Babylon.
- ⁷ "Kader Attia with Noah Simblist," *Coronagraph*, November 2014. <http://coronagraph.pastelegram.org/Kader-Attia-with-Noah-Simblist>.
- ⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Couscous>
- ⁹ Interview with Ori Gersht, *Musée Magazine*, vol.2, no. 7, <http://museemagazine.com/art-2/features/interview-with-ori-gersht/>, February 20, 2014.

- ¹⁰ From a conversation between Ori Gersht and Ronni Baer, William and Ann Elfers Senior Curator of Paintings, Art of Europe, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, November 18, 2011.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Alex Greenberger, "Susan Hefuna on Mingling East and West in her Art," *Artspace*, September 17, 2013. http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/artist_to_watch/susan_hefuna-51606
- ¹³ Interview with Susan Hefuna for Guggenheim multimedia guide, December 22, 2015, transcript p. 4.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 2
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 8
- ¹⁶ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patterns_in_nature.
- ¹⁷ See http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/artist_to_watch/susan_hefuna-51606.
- ¹⁸ <http://www.nadiakaabilinke.com/work/2011/fc/flyingcarpets.html>
- ¹⁹ See <http://www.nadiakaabilinke.com/work/2011/fc/flyingcarpets.html>.
- ²⁰ "Suspended Lives and Emerging Voices, Nadia Kaabi-Linke in conversation with Lina Lazaar," *Ibraaz*, no. 2, December 5, 2011.
- ²¹ Ibid.

(adapted from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, eleventh edition, unless otherwise noted)

ORIENTALISM

A term used by art historians to refer to the imitation or depiction of aspects of Eastern cultures by artists from the West. These works frequently exhibit patronizing attitudes towards these societies.

CULTURAL HEGEMONY

In Marxist philosophy, this term describes the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, who manipulate the culture of that society—its beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and mores—so that their own worldview becomes that which is imposed and accepted.

COUSCOUS

A traditional North African dish of semolina (granules of durum wheat), which is cooked by steaming. Couscous is a staple food throughout North Africa and the Mediterranean.

THE IRAQ WAR

A protracted armed conflict that began with the 2003 invasion of Iraq by a United States-led coalition. The invading regime succeeded in toppling the government of Saddam Hussein but the conflict continued for much of the next decade as an insurgency emerged to oppose the occupying forces and the post-invasion Iraqi government.

PLANT TAXONOMY

The science of finding, identifying, describing, classifying, and naming plants.