

Large print exhibition text



The Albukhary Foundation Gallery
of the Islamic World

Artists making books: poetry to politics

Large panel to the left:

Artists making books: poetry to politics

The book is a timeless art form, as relevant in the age of the internet as it is in the age of the illuminated manuscript ... the book is an enduring human technology.

Al Braithwaite, British artist (born 1979)

Artists often make books as part of their wider practice. Unique and handcrafted, or produced in small printed editions, artists from across cultures have been attracted to this genre. Wherever they are made, these remarkable creations encompass diverse subject matter from the stories of **The Arabian Nights** and mystic poetry to the politics of today. The books displayed here are drawn from the British Museum's collection.

For more information on the individual artists or objects, please visit the British Museum's collection online at britishmuseum.org/collection and type the name of the artist or the registration number into the search box.

For large print guide of the exhibition and further information, scan the QR code or visit britishmuseum.org/artists-books



Case to the right:

A convergence of traditions

The artist's book is a rather hybrid form. It turns a story or a poem into an object; it lends the weight of materiality to the metaphorical weight of narrative.

Camille Mathieu, University of Exeter

From New York to Damascus artists make books that combine illustrations with text in multiple languages. They tap into the richness of global literature, such as Persian and Chinese Tang poetry, or use published books as their canvas. Rooted in the French tradition of the **livre d'artiste**, artists' books originated in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century with painter André Derain an early advocate. The first modern artist of the Middle East to make such books was Lebanese painter Shafic Abboud.

1. Abed Al Kadiri (born Lebanon, 1984)

My Father's Grave, 2020

Al Kadiri conceived this autobiographical artist's book during the first month of the Covid pandemic to explore his family history. Shedding light on the complex relationship with his father, it revolves around an archival photograph taken about 1934 in Beirut. The broken up Arabic text contains the words: 'One day I will visit my father's grave. It will be like it used to be in the past when he was alive. We won't exchange a single word'.

Book (unique), graphite on paper Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6008.1

2. Dia al-Azzawi (born Iraq, 1939)

Adonis LX, 1990

Dia al-Azzawi made **Adonis LX** to celebrate the 60th birthday of the Syrian poet Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said, born 1930). Each page is inspired by a different poem, extracts of which Azzawi has written in his own hand.

A convergence of traditions

The compositions are abstract and in bold colour, each containing a haunting face, sculptural in form. For Azzawi making books, for which he likes to use the Arabic word **dafatir**, has long been an intrinsic part of his overall practice.

Book with hand-coloured lithographs, Serif Graphics, London, edition 1/6 1990,1123,0.1

3. Fadi Yazigi (born Syria, 1966)

Untitled, 2021

Figures, often couples, sit, float, stand, or stare at the sky. They are painted over a facsimile edition of poetry by Tamer Mallat (1856–1914) written in the Ottoman **diwani** script in brown ink. Mallat was a Lebanese judge and poet known for taking a stand against corruption. Yazigi's anonymous figures echo the people he sees on the streets of Damascus. Occasionally dated, the pages act like a diary.

Ink and watercolour, original book edited by Shibli Mallat, published Beirut, 2009
Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6012.1

4. Alan Reynolds (born UK, 1926–2014)

Six Poems of the Tang Dynasty, 1970

'In solitude sitting in the hidden forest of
the bamboos / To the sound of the lute I whistle
suspended notes...'

Reynolds was struck by the economy of thought
and words of the poetry of Wang Wei (699– 759)
– artist, musician and poet during the Tang dynasty
of China. In this, the first of his ventures into
printmaking, Reynolds' abstract compositions in
single blocks of colour echo the poems' subtleties.

Book with lino block prints, Circle Press

Publications, artist's proof IX; (extract translated by
Jerome Ch'en and Michael Bullock)

Gift of Vona Reynolds, 2015, 7060.2.1-6

**5. Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh
(born Iran, 1978 and 1975) and Hesam
Rahmanian (born USA, 1980)
Her Majesty?, 2016**

For the 60th anniversary of the reign of HM Queen Elizabeth II (1926–2022), Taschen published a chronicle of her life. In their version the Dubai-based artists covered the images of royal events with playful satire moving beyond the formality of the rituals.

Taschen edition, 2012; Facsimile edition, Patrick Frey, 2016

Gift of the artists, 2022,6013.1

**6. Shafic Abboud (born Lebanon, 1926–2004)
La Souris (The Mouse), 1954**

Abboud has illustrated and written the text in his own hand for **La Souris**, a French folktale about a couple unable to have children.

A convergence of traditions

The wife pleads with the sky to bless her – even if it is with mice. Her wish comes true and she gives birth to 1,000s of mice. Her enraged husband kills them all except for one who hid in a cupboard and whom they grow to love.

Book with silkscreen prints, edition 8/20 Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2007,6012.1

7. Etel Adnan (born Lebanon, 1925–2021)

Nahar mubarak (Blessed day), 1990

Written by Etel Adnan across this book, the Arabic words tell the story of Antigone, the heroine of a Greek tragedy by Sophocles from about 440 BC. She dies for the love of her brother who had been condemned as a traitor. In a modern retelling by poet Nelly Salameh Amri (born 1953), the story is set in the Lebanese Civil War (1976–90) and begins: 'Today is a blessed day. A day off for the snipers'.

Book (unique), ink and watercolour

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 1990,1117,0.1

8. Christine Khonjie (born Iran, 1947)

The poet's coat, after Hafez, 2021

'I said I long for thee, you said your sorrows will end. Be my moon, rise up for me, only if it will ascend.' These are among the verses by Persian poet Hafez (1315–1390) inscribed across one side of the book. It was through Hafez that Khonjie learnt Persian while living in London and she often recites his poetry to herself. The text on the other side is French 'automatic' writing – words written spontaneously, often without obvious meaning.

Book (unique), ink, graphite and collage Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6010.1

9. Zao Wou-ki (born China, 1920–2013)

Le livre réfléchi (The well-considered book), 1987

Poet Pierre Lequire (1922–2013) loved to collaborate with artists to make books, including Paris-based Zao Wou-ki.

A convergence of traditions

‘The painters he invites are not asked to illustrate his texts, but rather to accompany the texts through the means of their art, to amplify the resonance of language, to deepen the creative process’.

Lecuire’s words are interspersed with Zao Wou-ki’s Chinese signs, including the characters for ‘book’.

Book with stencils on Mexican amate paper, Pierre Lecuire editions, Atelier du Lys, Paris, edition 31/50
Gift of Françoise Marquet-Zao, 2021,3011.14

10. André Derain (born France, 1880–1954) Les Oeuvres Burlesques et Mystiques de Frère Matorel mort au couvent, 1912

This, the second in a trilogy recounting Victor Matorel’s conversion to mysticism and sainthood, is by French poet Max Jacob (1888–1944) echoing his own conversion. The publisher Kahnweiler (1884–1979) was an enthusiast of artists’ books and worked with several artists, including Derain.

The woodcuts here are in the Fauvist style, characteristic of Derain’s early work.

A convergence of traditions

Book with 64 woodcuts, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler,
Paris, edition 80/106
2001, 1125.40

11. Jim Dine (born USA, 1935)

The Picture of Dorian Gray, 1968

Dine's script adaptation of Oscar Wilde's 1891 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the first of his many book projects. Robert Kidd, a director at the Royal Court Theatre, London, asked him to design the costumes and sets for a play based on the novel. Dine used the drawings from the unrealised project as the basis for a series of lithographs to accompany a typewritten text of the script in a lavishly produced book.

Book with lithographs and etchings within velvet cover, edition B, artist's proof
Presented by the artist in honour of Alan Christea,
2014, 7067.2.1

12. Al Braithwaite (born Germany, 1979)

Museum No.1: Hizbollah's Caviar, 2008

Containing scraps of memory, photographs and objects from his travels across the Middle East, Braithwaite likens his book to a museum: 'I wanted my museum to be small enough to fit on the back of a camel, or a human, perhaps neatly contained in a small Nike rucksack or cotton **kefiye** (traditional head covering) – for adaptability in a changing world. You could consult it, like a sacred text. It could tell you something about the world'.

Hand-bound book with hollowed out chamber,
edition 7/28

Gift of Rose Issa, 2022,6011.1

Case to the right:

Rachid Koraïchi (born Algeria, 1947)

Koraïchi's work highlights his deep engagement with the histories and cultural traditions of Algeria, making art that ranges from textiles and ceramics to installations and books.

Throughout, he uses a characteristic vocabulary combining Arabic text, magical signs and symbols, many recalled from the traditional facial tattoos or pottery designs of Ain Beida, where he grew up. Koraïchi often works with writers and poets and the books displayed here are concerned with two major events in the recent history of Algeria. The first, *L'enfant jazz et la guerre* by Mohammed Dib, relates to the Algerian War of Independence when France invaded Algeria in 1830 beginning a process of colonisation. Only after eight years of brutal warfare did Algeria win its independence in 1962. The second book is a set of seven volumes recalling the assassination of seven monks in 1996. From 1991 until 2002 violent conflict between government forces and armed Islamist groups cost the lives of

tens of thousands of people in Algeria.

1. L'enfant jazz et la guerre (Jazz boy and war), 1998

The story is by Algerian novelist and poet Mohammed Dib (1920–2003) whose writings are concerned with the French colonial repression of the Algerian people. **L'enfant jazz et la guerre** is an abstract narrative poem about life, loss and war seen through the eyes of a young boy – jazz represents the unexpected, while the boy evokes conscience. The shape of the box is a deliberate evocation of a container for a gun out of which the lines of poetry and drawings emerge.

Unbound book, 28 lithographs and 28 pages of text with calligraphy by Abdelkder Boumala, edition 4/98

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2005,0709,0.3

2. Les Septs Dormants (The Seven Sleepers), 2003

On 21 May 1996, seven monks were assassinated by an Islamist group at the monastery of Tibhirine in Algeria. Named after each of the monks – Christian, Christophe, Bruno, Luc, Célestin, Paul and Michel – these seven books are Koraïchi's homage to them and a response to hate and intolerance. The title recalls the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus whose miraculous story is known in Christian and Muslim traditions.

For each volume Koraïchi invited contributions from different writers. The open volume is a poem (right) by John Berger marking the moment of the assassination. The multiple unbound sections of each of the books are made up of French or English texts with Arabic calligraphy by Tunisian calligrapher Abdellah Akbar. The separate white pages with copperplate etchings by Koraïchi are in the form of Qur'anic writing boards. Similar designs can be seen on the metal amulet displayed here.

Seven unbound books with copper plate etchings
Gift of the artist, 2016,6057.1-7

16.15 The firing squad
By John Berger (1926–2017)

The dog carried the day in her mouth
over the fields of the small hours
towards a hiding place
which before had been safe.

Nobody was woken before dawn.

At noon
the dog sprawling in the shade
placed the pup between her four paws,
and wailed in vain
for it to suck.

A line of prisoners hands knotted
fall forward
into the grave they have dug.

Belly to the earth
the dog carries the day
which has never stirred,
back to its dark.

Under the stars the bereaved
imagine they hear
a dog howling too
on the edge of the world.

This piteous day was born
stone-deaf and blind.

Case to the right:

Poetry

You cannot lie or cheat with poetry, it is the only thing that comes from the heart.

Lassaâd Métoui, Tunisian artist and calligrapher (born 1963)

From the mystic poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273) to Shakespeare (1564–1616) or Issa Makhlouf (born 1955), poetry provides an unending source of inspiration for artists who love to make books. Contemporary artists often work directly with poets, discovering together formats that best convey the spirit of the text. The works of two poets of the Arab world – Syrian-born Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said) and the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish – have generated dozens of such books, as artists respond to their sentiments about the human condition or the state of exile.

Similarly inspirational, and providing continuity with the tradition of the **livre d'artiste**, was French poet Yves Bonnefoy, who worked with artists from around the world.

**1. Shafic Abboud (born Lebanon, 1926–2004)
Maraya li-zaman al-inhiyar (Mirrors for a time of decline), 1978**

Abboud's handwritten texts of poems in Arabic by Adonis – Syrian-born poet Ali Ahmad Said (born 1930) – are inscribed over a series of abstract backgrounds.

'The Beginning of the Poem / ... It is the nakedness that uncovers the corpses of words
/ It is existence that shrivels / I lost my fire / My language is another one / My footsteps / are no longer my footsteps...'

Book with 10 lithographs, edition 10/15; extract translated by Fergus Reoch
2007,6012.2

2. Amar Dawod (born Iraq, 1957)

Untitled, 2006

For inspiration, Dawod has turned to the writings of Sufi mystic al-Hallaj (858–922). Abstract motifs, lines and signs take shape across the openings of the book. As expressed by Dawod, ‘the images are not an explanation or a visual rendering of al-Hallaj’s vision but rather, reflect some of the communications and ambiances of his book that resonate within it’.

Mixed media book

Gift of Dia al-Azzawi, 2017,6006.2

3. Himat Mohammed Ali (born Iraq, 1960)

In the forest of love, 2021

In the forest of love is a new collection of lyrical love poems by Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), and Himat’s book is the result of a direct collaboration between artist and poet.

The pages of Arabic text, written in Adonis's distinct hand, alternate with the richness of Himat's abstract paintings. In describing his 30-year friendship with Adonis, Himat comments: 'We work with each other as though we are talking to one another.'

Book within hard covers, edition 3/20 Gift of the artist, 2022,6023.1

**4. Rafa Nasiri (born Iraq, 1940–2013) t
To describe an almond blossom, 2009**

Nasiri was greatly inspired by poetry and here his abstract compositions accompany **To describe an almond blossom** by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008). 'To describe an almond blossom no encyclopedia of flowers is any help to me, no dictionary. / Words carry me off to snares of rhetoric that wound the sense, and praise the wound they've made. / Like a man telling a woman her own feeling...'

Book with silkscreen prints, edition 9/10; extract translated by Mohammad Shaheen

Gift of May Muzaffar in memory of Raza Nasiri,
2015,6019.1

5. Lassaâd Métoui (born Tunisia, 1963)

Le mont Fuji (Mount Fuji), 2012

In this collaborative work, calligrapher Lassaâd Métoui accompanies extracts from **Ni d'Ève ni d'Adam** (Neither from Eve nor Adam), a novel by Amélie Nothomb (born 1966) set in Japan. During the story Amélie climbs Mount Fuji: 'for six hours of sun and the blue of the sky, I had Mount Fuji all to myself'. Métoui's calligraphies echo both the spirit of the text and a Japanese aesthetic in the colours and backgrounds. There are no words to be read, but simply shapes evoking script.

Book within wooden box, Imprimerie du Pré Battoir,
Paris, edition 14/15

Gift of Lassaâd Métoui and Amélie Nothomb,
2017,6038.1

6. Ziad Dalloul (born Syria, 1953)

Kitab-al Mudun (The Book of Cities), 1999

Kitab-al Mudun is a collaborative work between Paris-based painter and printmaker Ziad Dalloul and the poet Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), the result of their long friendship. Poems featuring cities from Marrakesh to New York are evoked by Dalloul in a series of abstract etchings. The earthy colours recall memories of a childhood spent in Syria and Algeria.

Etching, drypoint and carborundum, from a portfolio of nine etchings and one aquarelle, editions de Unesco, La Teinturerie, Paris, edition 44/90 Funded by CaMMEA, 2017,6008.7.1-9

7. Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said) (born Syria, 1930)

Untitled, 2004

Adonis' poetry is widely read across the Arab World and has been much translated. He has worked with numerous artists and began making collages such as this in 2004.

Here he has written verses from one of the most important early Arabic poets Umar Ibn Abi Rabia (644–719).

Rabia's poetry celebrates battles, tribal lore and his love affairs with the noble Arab women who came to Mecca on pilgrimage.

Mixed media collage 2007,6012.3 ©

8. Ghassan Ghaib (born Iraq, 1964)

Untitled, 2019

Ghaib, like many Iraqi artists, began making books when artists' materials became difficult to obtain after the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions in 1991. Here, he links the ancient philosophy of 'the eternal return', the circular movement of everything in the universe, to the poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi (1203–1273).

Discovering that movement and rotation are present in Rumi's poetry, he echoes this theme in the shape of the book.

Mixed media book (unique)

Gift of Dia al-Azzawi, 2022,6014.1

9. Farid Belkahia (born Morocco, 1934–2014)

Atours Autours, 1980

Each section of this book consists of a poem in French by contemporary Czech poet Natacha Pavel (born 1946), a translation into Moroccan dialect by Mustapha Nissaboury (born 1943) and an abstract drawing by pioneering artist Farid Belkahia in the centre. Founding the Casablanca School, Belkahia abandoned his European training, drawing inspiration instead from traditional Moroccan art and working with natural materials like henna and saffron.

Book with 14 lithographs, Presses de Michel Cassé, Paris, edition 5/100
2007,2005.1

10. Kamal Boullata (born Jerusalem, 1942–2019)

Beginnings, 1992

Accompanying poems by Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said), this is the first book Boullata made.

He wrote: 'My main concern was how to design a graphic space that would reflect the poetry's formal elements and serve as a tangible representation of Adonis' poetic voice. Would it be possible to design a book in two separate halves so that the geometric whole would act as a mirror reflecting the rhythm of the poems within it?'

Book with lithographs, Pyramid Atlantic, edition 27/40

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 1997,0716,0.1

11. Assadour (born Lebanon, 1943)

Egarements 1 (Distractions), 1993

To accompany the poems of Issa Makhlouf, Assadour deploys his characteristic dreamlike settings within which are geometric shapes and a recurring figure of a woman.

‘Then I sat down and drew a person in a waiting room and I drew a man waiting for a woman and a woman waiting for a child and I drew children waiting for children and I drew a dark abode; an eye inside the darkness.’ Book with six etchings, edition 56/75; poems of Issa Makhlouf translated from Arabic to French by Jamaledine Bencheikh; extract above translated by Issa Makhlouf

Funded by CaMMEA, 2017,6008.2

**12. Mehdi Qotbi (born Morocco, 1951)
Plus loin plus vite (Further and faster), 1996**

**13. Zao Wou-ki (born China, 1920-2013)
Vingt-quatre premiers sonnets de Shakespeare dans la traduction de Yves Bonnefoy (Twenty-four early sonnets of Shakespeare translated by Yves Bonnefoy), 1994.**

Mehdi Qotbi and Zao Wou-ki are among many artists who have collaborated with French poet Yves Bonnefoy (1923–2016).

(12) Book with a series of etchings, L'atelier RLD,
edition 26/75

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2006,0307,0.1

(13) Book with seven etchings and aquatint,
Bibliophiles de France, edition 8/195

Gift of Françoise Marquet-Zao, 2021,3011.15

Case to the right:

Histories of the present

Out of mud we were first made; out of mud we dreamed we were made. Later we forgot, or sought to forget, and declared ourselves the makers.

Ali Cherri, Lebanese artist (born 1976) and Lina Mounzer, Lebanese writer (born 1978)

In this section artists invite us to enter worlds of conflict, violence, displacement and exile. They explore how dictatorships, occupation, the role of foreign powers and the questioning of the place of the individual affect the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa. Through their eyes, we see the harm inflicted on the citizens of Iraq and the destruction of its heritage, as well as the legacies of the 2011 Arab Spring. Beginning in Tunisia, that initial simple desire for justice and change rippled out across the region, including Syria, where a civil war has now raged for over a decade.

1. Hanaa Malallah (born Iraq, 1958)

Three Black Stars, 2007

Malallah creates work using 'Ruins Technique', a concept she developed as a reaction to the destruction suffered by Iraq for many decades. An essential part of this practice is the burning and distressing of material. 'This does not mean that I am reproducing the idea of war. Instead I am utilising its intrinsically destructive process to engender the visceral experience of the reality of war.'

Calico and oil colour on wood 2007,6020.2

2. Mohammed al-Shammarey, (born Iraq,1962)

Baghdad, 2006

Shammarey's book places the attacks on Baghdad during the Iraq War of 2003 within a historical context. Against a fiery background there are phrases in Arabic and runs of numerals.

The stamped English text is from an account of the Siege of Baghdad in 1258 when the city fell to the Mongol ruler Hulagu Khan (reigned 1256–1265).

This cataclysmic event ended the centuries-old caliphate.

Book (unique), wood within wooden case Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2007,6008.1

3. Khalil Rabah (born Jerusalem, 1961)

Dictionary work, 1997

An English dictionary is covered with nails obliterating all but the word **Phi.lis.tine** defined as 'inhabitant of ancient Philistia (Palestine): a materialistic person; esp. one who is smugly indifferent to intellectual or artistic values'. Art historian Angit Ankori wrote: 'from afar the nails that penetrate the dictionary seem jewel-like, since they glisten with deceiving sheen'.

Mixed media, edition 3/4

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2006,0306,0.1

4. Ali Cherri (born Lebanon, 1976)

The Book of Mud, 2019

A modern brick encases an animal jawbone, a silkscreen print shows a field of mudbricks drying in the sun, a book imagines the history of mud. For Cherri this work is 'a manifesto, a reverie, a story of earth and water'. He writes: 'From floods and deluges to droughts and water scarcity, mud is the materialisation of the aquatic reality of our world'.

Mixed media, Dongola projects, edition 12/65
Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6009.1

5. Issam Kourbaj (born Syria, 1963)

Sound Palimpsest, 2003

Reacting to the Iraq War of 2003, Kourbaj created this work from the pages of a fragmentary old book. Graffiti, X-rays, words and Arabic songs emerge out of the yellowing paper evoking notions of fragility during wartime.

As though tossed up into the air, the wreckage of the book also symbolises for Kourbaj the dramatic destruction of the National Library of Baghdad that took place in that year.

Mixed media on second-hand book fragments
2008,6018.1

6. Kareem Risan (born Iraq, 1960)

Every Day, 2005

Risan evokes the violent aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War. Broken eye-glasses, tyre marks, fragments of a passport, hospital gauze and clothing are pasted onto a blood-red ground.

Risan writes: 'I saw my city wailing under vicious bombardment, its skies full of missiles, being destroyed, burned, looted, violated in all its being, details, history and structure'.

Book (unique), mixed media

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2007,6005.1

7. Maysaloun Faraj (born USA, 1955)

History in Ruins, 2005

In the words of the artist: 'From the land between the two rivers, I pick up in my mind's eye the remnants of pages from an ancient past scripted on clay tablets, where man first recorded his deeds and victories and recreate my own. I "sew" them together in an act of healing and hope. I stand them tall and proud, like an open gate, defiant and dignified like our precious date palms, like our people, like our spirit'.

Earthstone and oxides with raffia

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2006,0202.1

8. Zaid Shawa (born Jordan, 1978)

Encounter, from the series The Game, 2022

As this book unfolds one figure of a bull meets another. The artist explains: 'I imagine life and death meeting. I picture a journey in two opposite directions, coming to a place where both become one'.

The bull represents 'a burdened human that attempts to rebel but soon continues to take more and more of these burdens upon himself'.

Book (unique), mixed media
Gift of Dia al-Azzawi, 2022,6015.1

**9. Muhammad Zeeshan (born Pakistan, 1980)
A Colligation (Isolated facts), 2008**

Within this book are 10 flags, each symbolising a country that in Zeeshan's view has experienced an unwelcome political connection with the USA. Within each painting, vultures hover. The flags are made up of thread-like painted lines, which resemble embroidery. It is unclear whether the individual paintings are being stitched or unpicked.

Book (unique), gouache on **wasli** paper Brooke
Sewell Permanent Fund, 2010,3021.1

10. Sigil Collective (Beirut & New York)

Current power in Syria, 2016 (open);

Excavating the Sky, 2014; Birdsong, 2019

Art and design collective Sigil, explore the effects on Arab landscapes of struggles across time with works that are 'creative acts of resistance'.

Current power in Syria is about electricity. 'For over a century, electricity has cast its brilliant spell upon this landscape. These episodes acknowledge not only the powers that will electricity into being, but also those who choose to imagine its potential otherwise.'

Limited edition books

Gift of Sigil Collective, 2022,6023.1-3

11. Nidhal Chamekh (born Tunisia, 1985)

Mnémé, Le bâtiment des ailes (The beat of the wings), 2021

This collection takes its name from **mnémé**, the Greek word for memory, which sounds like the Arabic **manama**, sleep or dreaming.

Chamekh's work reflects upon colonial domination and Tunisia's recent history. Birds, faces, scenes of violence emerge out of the drawings as though random images in dreams.

Box No III, collection of drawings and an original lithograph, Zaman Books
Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6017.1

Case to the right

1-3. Yasmine Seale (born UK, 1989)

Sleepless, 2022; Mirage, 2022; Of the sea, 2022

These images are part of a series of cut-ups made from Edward Lane's translation of *The Arabian Nights*, first published in 1838. Seale began creating these in 2020 alongside her work on a new translation ***The Annotated Arabian Nights***, 2021. They are gestures of both homage and dissent toward her predecessor.

Seale comments: 'The history of *The Nights* in English is largely one of misrepresentation ... translators have truncated or embroidered the text to suit their own concerns. Visual language allows me to confront these issues more concretely than I can do in writing. Scissors, paint and white-out are efficient instruments of critique. Cut up and reshuffled, the text finds new things to say'.

Prints on Hahnemühle paper, (1) Sleepless, 2022, edition 57/100, made to mark the publication of The Annotated Arabian Nights; (2) Mirage, 2022, edition 1/1; (3) Of the sea, 2022, edition 1/1
Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6020.1-3

4. Nja Mahdaoui (born Tunisia, 1937) La volupté d'en mourir: conte d'Ali ibn Bakkar et de Shams al-Nahar (The Lovesickness of Ali Ibn Bakkar and Shams Al-Nahar), 1992

Over the course of 13 nights, Shahrazad narrates this story from **The Arabian Nights**, evoking the atmosphere, luxury and tensions of life at court.

Set during the caliphate of Harun al-Rashid (ruled 786–809), it concerns the ill-fated love affair between a Persian boy and the caliph's favourite courtesan. Mahdaoui complements the text with his characteristic calligrams – shapes that resemble calligraphy – which appear in the margins or on separate pages.

The text was translated from Arabic into French by Algerian writer and scholar Jamel Eddine Bencheikh (1930–2005) from a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Book with silkscreen prints on Arches paper,
edition 40/40
Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2005,0709,0.2

5. Dalziel's illustrated Arabian Nights' entertainments London, 1878

The Arabian Nights is one of the most popular works of world literature and has delighted readers for generations.

Dozens of stories, such as the adventures of Sinbad, Aladdin and Ali Baba, have been published and illustrated extensively or made into films. Written in Arabic between about 800 and 1300, it is a collection of tales that were added to over subsequent years. It opens with the murderous story of King Shahriyar who ruled over kingdoms in China and India with his brother.

Both were betrayed by their wives. In vengeance, Shahriyar marries a different woman every night and then has her killed the next morning. Shahrazad, daughter of Shahriyar's chief minister, volunteers to marry the king to save the lives of the women in his kingdom. Each night, she offers the king a wondrous story that cannot be completed in one night, thus delaying her execution from one day until the next.

British Museum library copy

Case to the right:

Conflicted lives

If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore, and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God?

Ralph Waldo Emerson, American writer and philosopher (1803–1882)

From the inspirational writings of science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov (1920–1992) to meditations on displacement and disappearance, thought-provoking stories unfold across the pages of these books. Sadik Alfraji's animation, **Ali's Boat Diary 1**, takes us into a world of dreams and a longing for home echoed in Mahmoud Obaidi's simple suitcase, **Compact Home 7**. In these books, painful narratives are made powerful by being rendered lyrically and gently.

Nalini Malani, her life and art informed by her experience as a refugee of the Partition of India in 1947, describes the book as 'a carrier of experience', which also characterises so many of the books in this exhibition.

1. Ipek Duben (born Turkey, 1941)

Manuscript X, 1996

The title of the work alludes to Duben's early interest in the decorative richness of the manuscript traditions of Ottoman Turkey, which she evokes in the colours of the background. At the centre of a black frame, two women face one another. Based on a self-portrait, these drawings recur in much of her work. They refer to what she describes as 'my identity as a modern woman in relation and in opposition to Islamic morality and codes of being'.

Mixed media within a decorated frame

Gift of Gallery Zilberman, Istanbul, 2010,6011.1

**2. Sadik Kwaish Alfraji (born Iraq, 1960)
Ali's Boat Diary¹, 2014 and Ali's Boat
(animation), 2015.**

'I was like you, Ali I had a boat it was the colour of gold in dreams and studded with lapis lazuli ... this boat will lead to delusion after delusion after darkness.' Alfraji left Iraq in 1991, returning only in 2009. He then met his young nephew Ali, who wished to follow his example. The book and film (screen right) are meditations on the nature of exile.

Book (unique), Indian ink and charcoal Funded by CaMMEA, 2015,6022

**3. Fulya Çetin (born Turkey, 1970)
Trace I, 2018**

Over the pages of the book we see a child's face gradually fading away. The writer Pınar Öğünç (born 1975) has collaborated here with Çetin. She writes: 'We believe in children.

Unable to forget the children whose moments the states stole forever, we look at the remnants of life through their eyes, resentful and angry.

We are rotting’.

Book (unique), marker, Indian ink, alcohol and water
Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6022.1

**4. Ala Ebtekar (born USA, 1978)
Nightfall, after Asimov and Emerson,
2017– 2020**

A second-hand copy of the book New York 2140 by Kim Stanley Robinson, and individual pages from an edition of the science-fiction novel Nightfall by Isaac Asimov (1939-1992) are treated with chemicals in a process known as cyanotype. Ebtekar has exposed the pages to the UV-light emitted by stars from dusk to dawn. In Asimov’s story, an eclipse brings darkness to the planet once every 2000 years, revealing only the stars. Upon realising their insignificance, the inhabitants lose their senses.

New York 2140 and pages from 1941 edition of
Nightfall
Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6021.1.1-11

5. Mahmoud Obaidi (born Iraq, 1966)

Compact Home 7, 2015

Preoccupied by the stress of moving from place to place over years, this is one of a series of suitcases created by Obaidi inside which he places his scrapbooks. 'I do not know what homeland means. Is it the place where we are born? Or to which we belong? Or in which we are buried? I believe that all countries are homelands for their inhabitants, so why should they not be homelands for me?'

Metal box and mixed media book (unique) Gift of Dia al-Azzawi, 2017,6006.3

6. Ipek Duben (born Turkey, 1941)

Refugee, 2010

In **Refugee**, Duben tackles the issue of migration from a global perspective.

Within the book, newspaper images (right) are printed onto a fine nylon, documenting scenes of families and individuals on the move, escaping conflict. Overlaid by embroidery, the delicate quality of the fabric belies the pain experienced within.

Book (unique) mixed media Funded by CaMMEA,
2011,6029.1

**7. Laila Muraywid (born Syria, 1956)
Le Livre des suppliques (The book of
supplications), 2015**

Inspired by the poetry of Lebanese poet Venus Khoury-Ghata (born 1937), Muraywid explains:
'My book is about birds that cannot fly, about death, life, exile. The work is not intended as an illustration, but is how a poet and an artist deal with the same obsession ... how to go on in spite of death ... how to continue living, when all these people that are parts of us exist no more'.

Etching from a portfolio of prints, mixed media,
edition 4/10

Funded by CaMMEA, 2019,6026.1.1-11

8. Farkhondeh Shahroudi (born Iran, 1962)

Third script, 2005

Across the pages in different fabrics and through drawings and text, Shahroudi questions the stereotyped representations of women in Iranian society. Her sculptural figures are rendered as simple shapes and while seeming to echo poetry, her words are not intended to be read. Brought up in Iran, Shahroudi has lived in Berlin since 1990.

Book (unique), painted on cloth

Brooke Sewell Permanent Fund, 2006,0303,0.1

9. Nalini Malani (born Karachi, 1946)

Dreamings and Defilings, 1991

A pioneer of video art, Malani began making artists' books in 1988, as she felt her subject matter was too large to be caught in a single frame. Her vibrant drawings extend across both sides of the book, directly onto the paper on one side and on mylar, a thin plastic, on the other.

They reflect her own direct experience of Partition, and the richness of India's history and culture, while also exploring themes of violence, feminism and racial tension.

Book (unique), mixed media within painted hard covers

2003,0723,0.4

10. Akram Zaatari (born Lebanon, 1966)

Book of all collections. Against Photography: an annotated history of the Arab Image Foundation, 2019

This book acts as an index to the Arab Image Foundation's archive. Founded in 1997 in Beirut, it collects photographs from studios, as well as individual families in Lebanon and elsewhere.

The archive includes photographs of Lebanese in diaspora, many of whom began settling abroad from the early 20th century in countries such as Senegal, Cuba, Mexico or Brazil.

Publication of the Arab Image Foundation Beirut, edition 1/50

Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6016.1

Wall to the left behind you:

Issam Kourbaj (born Syria, 1963)

The Damascene Collar of the Dove, 2019

Through this work Kourbaj explores the devastating effects of the civil war in Syria that began in 2011 to 2012. The pages here are from a found diary, some of it written in Esperanto, a universal language of communication created in the 1880s. Traces of photo corners indicate the ephemeral presence of photographs, which Kourbaj has replaced with contemporary images of destruction and human suffering. In a further intervention, in red crayon, are the verses in Arabic of Mahmoud Darwish's ode to Damascus, The Damascene Collar of the Dove.

Mixed media on second-hand book fragments
Funded by CaMMEA, 2022,6019.1.1-24.

The Damascene Collar of the Dove, 1988
By Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008)

In Damascus:
the doves fly
behind the silk fence two . . .
by two . . .

In Damascus:
I see all of my language
written with a woman's needle
on a grain of wheat,
refined by the partridge of the Mesopotamian
rivers

In Damascus:
the names of the Arabian horses have been
embroidered,
since Jahili times
and through judgment day, or after,
. . . with gold threads

In Damascus:
the sky walks
barefoot on the old roads,
barefoot
So what's the poet's use
of revelation
and meter
and rhyme?

In Damascus:
the stranger sleeps
on his shadow standing
like a minaret in eternity's bed
not longing for a land
or anyone . . .

In Damascus:
the present tense continues
its Umayyad chores:
we walk to our tomorrow certain
of the sun in our yesterday.
Eternity and we inhabit this place!

In Damascus:
the dialogue goes
on between the violin and the oud
about the question of existence
and about the endings:
whenever a woman kills a passing lover
she attains the Lotus Tree of Heaven!

In Damascus:
Youssef tears up,
with the flute,
his ribs
Not for a reason,
other than that
his heart wasn't with him

In Damascus:
speech returns to its origin,
water:
poetry isn't poetry
and prose
isn't prose
And you say: I won't leave
you so take me to you

and take me with you!

In Damascus:
a gazelle sleeps
besides a woman
in a bed of dew
then the woman takes off her dress
and covers Barada with it!

In Damascus:
a bird picks
at what is left of wheat
in my palm
and leaves for me a single grain
to show me my tomorrow
tomorrow!

In Damascus:
The jasmine dallies with me:
Don't go far
and follow my tracks
Then the garden becomes jealous:
Don't come near
the blood of night in my moon

In Damascus:

I keep my lighthearted dream company and
laughing on the almond blossom:

Be realistic

that I may blossom again
around her name's water

And be realistic

that I may pass in her dream!

In Damascus:

I introduce myself to itself:

Right here, beneath two almond eyes

we fly together as twins

and postpone our mutual past

In Damascus:

speech softens

and I hear the sound of blood

in the marble veins:

Snatch me away from my son

(she, the prisoner, says to me)

or petrify with me!

In Damascus:
I count my ribs
and return my heart to its trot
Perhaps the one who granted me entry
to her shadow
has killed me,
and I didn't notice . . .

In Damascus:
the stranger gives her howdah back
to the caravan:
I won't return to my tent
I won't hang my guitar,
after this evening,
on the family's fig tree . . .

In Damascus:
poems become diaphanous
They're neither sensual
nor intellectual
they are what echo says
to echo . . .

In Damascus:
the cloud dries up by afternoon,
then digs a well
for the summer of lovers in the Qysoon valley,
and the flute completes its habit
of longing to what is present in it, t
hen cries in vain

In Damascus:
I write in a woman's journal:
All what's in you
of narcissus desires you
and no fence, around you, protects you
from your night's excess allure

In Damascus:
I see how the Damascus night diminishes
slowly, slowly
And how our goddesses increase
by one!

In Damascus:
the traveller sings to himself:
I return from Syria neither alive

nor dead
but as clouds
that ease the butterfly's burden
from my fugitive soul

Translated by Fady Joudah

The exhibition Artists making books: poetry to politics continues in Gallery 43.

Artists making books: poetry to politics

Continuing the theme of artists making books, the focus of the current exhibition in Room 43a, this case features a tribute by the Sudanese artist Mohammed Omar Khalil to Tayeb Salih's (1929–2009) **Season of Migration to the North**.

Regarded as a cornerstone of post-colonial literature, the novel tells the story of a man who goes abroad to study and discovers on returning to his village that another man, Mustapha Sa'eed, has taken his place. The book navigates between cosmopolitan 1920s London and the rural countryside of northern Sudan.

First published in Arabic in the 1966 edition of the journal **Hiwar**, it has been translated into over 20 languages, including an English edition by Denys

Johnson-Davies and the Heinemann African writers series in 1969.

Season of Migration to the North, 2017–19

Mohammed Omar Khalil

(born Burni, Sudan, 1936)

For this edition, Mohammed Omar Khalil made a series of black and white etchings evoking the story. Khalil is a prominent Sudanese painter and printmaker. Educated in Khartoum, he studied and taught at the School of Fine and Applied Arts until 1963. He later pursued studies in fresco painting and printmaking at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, Italy. He lives in New York.

Artist's book, 2019, edition 28/30

The prints and the secondhand novel come in a beechwood and zinc box with a reproduction of the original Arabic novel.

Produced by Dongola editions

Funded by CaMMEA (Contemporary and Modern Middle East Acquisitions group), 2022,6006.1

Artists making books: poetry to politics

Continuing the theme of artists making books, the focus of the current exhibition in Room 43a, the three books displayed here are by artists from Iran who use a variety of formats to tell their stories. Working with Vahid Davar, the Dubai-based group Rokni Haerizadeh, Ramin Haerizadeh and Hesam Rahmanian adapt an **Atlas of the World** to speak of the contemporary issue of migration. Parvaneh Etemadi, in **Fish and Moon**, evokes the allegorical poem **Conference of the Birds** by Farid al-Din Attar (1145–1221). Ali Akbar Sadeghi's **Book of Lovers** draws on classical Persian love stories and the manuscript tradition.

1. Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Hesam Rahmanian and Vahid Davar Atlas of the World, 2022

A copy of Philips **Atlas of the World** is re-ordered and re-bound according to the patterns of movement of refugees from around the world.

While the 'normal' Philips atlas starts with the countries of Europe and ends with South America, this version begins with the Philippines and the Middle East and finishes with Iceland, the country with the least number of refugees leaving. The book includes two texts by Vahid Davar: 'Nassim's Testament', an epic poem about the asylum journey of two friends from Iran to the UK, and 'A Chimerical World with a Nomenclature of its Own' which is a commentary on the poem. The texts are set into pages made from gold emergency rescue thermal blankets with the original Persian version of 'Nassim's Testament' in a separate cutout. Interspersed throughout are a series of prints on Japanese paper which provide an echo to the refugee story.

Artist's book, edition 1/10, with separate leaves from the book

Produced by In Situ Fabienne Leclerc; made by Laurel Parker Book

Funded by CaMMEA (Contemporary and Modern Middle East Acquisitions group), 2022,6025.1

2. Fish and Moon, 2014

Parvaneh Etemadi

(born Tehran, Iran, 1948)

'The shadow of a hundred thousand birds fell on the fish of the sea and across the moon.'

(Farid al-Din Attar)

References to the fish and the moon occur frequently in Attar's poem, in which a group of 30 birds go on a mystical quest to discover who should be their king. The words above are inscribed in black on the tracing paper to the left. For Etemadi, the fish is a metaphor for the human condition, while the moon stands for the birds losing their senses as their impossible quest ends in failure.

Artist's book with etchings, 2013, edition 24/50

Produced by ABBOOKNESS projects, issue 2

Gift of Ali Bakhtiari, 2017,6035.2

3. Book of Lovers

Ali Akbar Sadeghi

(born Tehran, Iran, 1937)

'When the lover falls in love with the beloved, there are lots of obstacles and battles ahead and the winner shall have the lover in his bosom.'

Drawing on the rich traditions of Persian art, from classical miniature painting to 19th and 20th century lithography, each page evokes a moment in a classical love story. Persian myths and folk tales have been the subject of Sadeghi's work from paintings to animations. In his renditions, the dense black and white compositions with their splashes of red become fantastical.

Artist's book within painted velvet cover, edition 33/50 Produced by ABBOOKNESS projects, issue 3

Gift of Ali Bakhtiari, 2017,6035.1

Bitá, from the series Blank Pages of an Iranian Photo Album, 2014–15

Newsha Tavakolian

(born Tehran, Iran, 1981)

Tavakolian imagined completing albums of photographs that were left empty, focusing on a single character to tell a story of everyday life. Bitá is pictured as a teenager, perhaps on her birthday. As the book unfolds, different aspects of her later life are glimpsed. She first undergoes a lip enhancement operation accompanied by her friend Shabnam.

She is then shown at home or with friends – an ordinary existence in contrast to her hopes and dreams.

Newsha Tavakolian is a self-taught photographer and visual artist, based in Tehran. She began working professionally for the Iranian press aged 16 and has since covered regional conflicts, natural disasters and created social documentary projects.

She works with Magnum photos and was the principle laureate of the 2015 Prince Claus Award.

Artist's book; inkjet prints on Hahnemühle rag paper mounted on Dibond Funded by Art Fund, 2017,6020.1

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