

I am an artist. I am a Syrian. I am an American. I am an Arab. I was born a Christian, but I adhere to no organized religion. I am an immigrant. I am a gay man. I am a husband and a son. I am an activist. I am a critic. I am a peacemaker.

All of these descriptors inform my diverse artistic practice. Through the years, I have developed a vocabulary of symbols, colors, cultural references, and gestural mark-making that I use to reflect upon politics, world events, societal mores, culture, and beauty. I mine my personal story to produce commentary about the world, as well as to create formal works of art. I draw upon readily identifiable references such as the American flag or pages from the Torah, Bible, and Quran to support my narrative and to draw upon as visual forms. I look outward to the world and inward to my spirit.

I tend to work in series. Some explore concepts of balance and harmony emanating, for instance, from my studies of meditation and Tantric practices. I have a deep interest in the beauty of Arab visual culture—the elegance of Arabic calligraphy and the formal qualities of “arabesque” design. However, when I echo these exquisite forms in my paintings and prints, it’s for more than art for art’s sake.

In fact, these motifs, along with cultural signifiers such as the burka, are highly charged. They are built upon the memories of September 11, 2001 and current global politics. As an Arab-American, I have personally experienced the heightened tensions, the suspicions, even the outright hostilities between and within the Western World and the Middle East. The on-going war in Syria and the American debates about immigration, continue to fuel these concerns. Three major religions--Christianity, Islam, and Judaism--teach tolerance and mutual respect. Yet, they are also notable for their instances of antagonism, and at times their ill will and violent acts within and across denominations.

At the same time, I am inspired by the resiliency of the Syrian people and their abilities to find joy despite the despair of the situation in which they live. I am equally moved by the Palestinian people, and their ability to survive and maintain dignity in a situation that offers few options.

For many years, I was a closeted gay man. When I came out to my family, my parents rejected me--a trauma that continues to haunt me many years later. I am now happily married, having lived through the struggles to legalize gay marriage in the United States. Ultimately, and as a citizen of the United States, I enjoy the privilege of security, safety, and dignity as a man and as a human being. I am also privileged to use my art as a platform to fight for justice and equality.

Ultimately, my paintings, sculptures, prints and performances braid together my personal narrative as a gay man, my identity as an Arab-American, my solidarity with people of the Middle East, and my commitment to activism. I make art in the name of social justice, while I reflect upon my journey as an artist and as a human being.