



diwan

A Forum for the Arts

March 26 - 29, 2009



**Arab American
National Museum**

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The 2009 DIWAN is dedicated to the memory of the Palestinian poet, author and activist **Mahmoud Darwish** (1941-2008).

Mahmoud Darwish was regarded as the national poet of Palestine. He published over 30 volumes of poetry and eight books of prose and won numerous awards, including The Lotus Prize; Lenin Peace Prize (*USSR*); Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters (*France*); and The Lannan Foundation Prize for Cultural Freedom. The concept of *watan* or homeland is a central theme in Darwish's work, which has been published in 20 languages. Many of his poems, including *Rita*, *Birds of Galilee* and *I Yearn for My Mother's Bread*, were set to music by Arab composers and became beloved anthems.

"Mahmoud Darwish is the Essential Breath of the Palestinian people, the eloquent witness of exile and belonging, exquisitely tuned singer of images that invoke, link, and shine a brilliant light into the world's whole heart. What he speaks has been embraced by readers around the world - his in an utterly necessary voice, unforgettable once discovered."

– Naomi Shihab Nye

DIWAN: A Forum for the Arts unites Arab American artists, scholars and performers representing myriad academic fields and artistic genres. Activities include presentations of new research into Arab American arts; poetry and prose readings; film screenings; and musical performances. This weekend dialogue reinforces the Arab American National Museum's commitment to providing a place for community members and artists to meet, exchange ideas and exhibit their work. It also encourages audiences to explore the boundaries of art in addressing social issues related to Arab Americans and the community at large.

ALL SESSIONS TAKE PLACE AT THE MUSEUM AND ARE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

The Arab American National Museum (AANM) documents, preserves, celebrates and educates the public on the history, life, culture and contributions of Arab Americans. It serves as a resource to enhance the knowledge and understanding about Arab Americans and their presence in the United States. The AANM is a project of ACCESS.

2009 DIWAN Committee

Alise Alousi *InsideOut Literary Arts Project*

Holly Arida *Cranbrook Educational Community*

Lynn Blasey *College for Creative Studies*

Adnan Charara *Artist*

Annie Higgins *Wayne State University*

Mike Mosallam *Writer/Actor/Director/Producer*

Kevin Rashid *Wayne State University*

FROM THE ARAB AMERICAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

Thomas Abowd, Devon Akmon, Anan Ameri,
Suzy Mazloun, Celine Taminian

Lama Mansour, Jumana Salamey *Co-Chairs*

Schedule

THURSDAY 3.26.09

7:30 p.m.

PERFORMANCE BY SUHEIR HAMMAD

A Palestinian American poet, author and political activist, Hammad has won numerous awards including NYU's 2001 Emerging Artists Award and a 2003 Tony Award for Special Theatrical Event for her work as an original cast member and writer for *Russell Simmons Presents Def Jam Poetry on Broadway*.

Presented in collaboration with InsideOut Literary Arts Project and Springfed Arts

FRIDAY 3.27.09

9:30 a.m.

OPENING REMARKS

Anan Ameri PhD Director, Arab American National Museum

Suheir Hammad Artist/Activist/Poet

10 a.m. - noon

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS:

Getting the Audience for Arab American Art On Board

- Various ways to effectively engage audiences for Arab American art

Wafaa Bilal New Media Artist and Assistant Arts Professor, Tisch School of the Arts, New York NY: *Domestic Tension: Dynamic Encounter*

Mohannad Ghawanmeh Senior Instructor, Arts & Sciences Department, Dunwoody College of Technology, Minneapolis MN: *A Picture is Worth More Than a Thousand Words, Especially an Animated One*

Remi Kanazi Palestinian American Poet/Writer/Editor/Actor, Astoria NY: *Art as Empowerment*

Moderator Devon Akmon Curator of Community History, Arab American National Museum

NOON - 1 p.m. • LUNCH

1-3 p.m.

WHAT IS ARAB ART AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

- New ways of thinking about the utility, meaning and form of Arab American art

Karim Nagi Teacher and Performer of Arab Music and Dance, Boston MA/Cairo, Egypt: *LAUREN of ARABIA: The Americanization of Arab Dance in America*

Hassan Sassi Senior Structural and Earthquake Engineer, URS Corp., Los Angeles CA: *Art of Structural Engineering*

Scott Zuniga Film and Music Video Director, Austin TX: *Digital Youth: A Cross-Cultural Generation*

Moderator Annie Higgins PhD Assistant Professor of Arabic Language and Literature, Wayne State University, Detroit MI

3 - 3:30 p.m. • BREAK

3:30-5:30 p.m.

ART VS. ART

- *Palestinian, Iraqi and Lebanese artists use their mediums to deal with war*

Rijin Sahakian Graduate Student, New York University, New York NY:
Trauma and Creative Practice in Iraq

Joe Namy Conceptual Artist and Activist, New York NY: *Strange Fruit*

Helen Zughaib Visual Artist, Washington, D.C.: *Women's Art, Women's Vision:
A Month in the West Bank as an Artist and U.S. Cultural Envoy*

Moderator Kevin Rashid Poet and University Curriculum and Research
Coordinator, Honors College, Wayne State University, Detroit MI

7:30 - 8:30 p.m. • DINNER

8:30-10:30 p.m.

OPEN MIC NIGHT

Show us what you've got! All DIWAN participants are invited to share a poem, song, dance or other performance art with their enthusiastic and appreciative peers.

SATURDAY 3.28.09

10 a.m.-noon

OUT OF PLACE: How Arab American Art Helps Us Find Our Way Home
- *Navigating hybrid identities and conceptualizing homeland*

Fayeq Oweis PhD Artist/Educator/Community Activist, San Francisco CA:
Visual Narratives of Palestinian Diaspora: The Mural of Edward Said

Aseel Sawalha Professor of Anthropology, Pace University, Brooklyn NY:
Being an Arab, a Woman and an Artist in New York: Then and Now

Happy/L.A. Hyder Fine Artist in Color Photography, San Francisco CA:
Being Artist. Being Aware. Being Arab American.

Moderator Thomas Abowd PhD Professor of Anthropology at Wayne State
University, Detroit MI and researcher, Arab American National Museum

NOON - 1 p.m. • LUNCH

1-3 p.m.

FROM BEIRUT HILLS TO MUSLIM: THE MUSICAL!: What's So Funny About Arab Americans? - *Using comedy to battle Arab stereotypes*

Alia Tarraf Woodside NY and **Tamar Vezirian**, New York NY, Comediennes:
Beirut Hills and Beyond!

Negin Farsad Comedic Performer, New York NY: *How to Make White People Laugh*

Mike Mosallam Writer/Actor/Director/Producer, Dearborn MI: *MUSLIM: The Musical!*

Moderator Kim Silarski Communications, Arab American National Museum

3 - 3:30 p.m. • BREAK

3:30-5:30 p.m.

PRESENTERS OF ARAB CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES:
Local and National Perspectives - *Issues challenges and strategies in presenting Arab cultural expression*

Debbie Smith Cultural Events Coordinator, Arab Cultural and Community Center, San Francisco CA: *Curating Arab Culture in a Non-Arab Cultural Landscape: The Presenter's Role*

Nicole Macotis Folk Arts Associate, Brooklyn Arts Council, Brooklyn NY: *Beyond Brooklyn Maqam: Reflections on Presenting Local Arab Music Traditions in Brooklyn*

Ralph Valdez Curator of Cultural Programming, Arab American National Museum:
Education Through Entertainment: The Importance of Arab Culture in the U.S.

Leili Kashani Director of Operations, Alwan for the Arts, New York NY: *The Integration of Arts, Culture, Scholarship and Politics into an Organic Whole*

Moderator Ismael Ahmed Prominent Activist/Music Promoter/Director, Michigan Department of Human Services, Dearborn MI

7:30 - 8:30 p.m. • DINNER

8:30-10:30 p.m.

LIVE PERFORMANCES

Najla Said Actress/Comedienne/Writer, New York NY: *PALESTINE!*

Karim Nagi Teacher and Performer of Arab Music and Dance, Boston MA/Cairo, Egypt:
Sounds That Dance & Dances That Make Sound

Mizna Entertainment's Arab American Comedy Showcase

Sketch comedy and a short video, *NEXTED*, directed by Mike Eshaq and starring Ali "Bulldog" Abdallah

SUNDAY 3.29.09

9:30 - 10:15 a.m. • BREAKFAST

10:30 a.m.-noon

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD:

Multiple Views of Arab American Literature - *A closer look at the current state of Arab American memoir and literature*

Adnan Salhi PhD Writer/Activist, Dearborn MI: *Seeing the Past, Identifying the Present, Shaping the Future*

Raff Ellis Freelance Writer, Orlando FL: *Using the Literary Memoir as an Arab American Art Form*

Moderator Alise Alousi Associate Director, InsideOut Literary Arts Project, Detroit MI

Noon-1 p.m.

REFLECTIONS & CLOSING REMARKS

The Museum is located at 13624 Michigan Ave., Dearborn, Michigan. Free parking is available in the municipal lot behind the Museum. For further information, call 313.624.0219 or email diwan@accesscommunity.org.



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BIOGRAPHIES

Thomas Abowd PhD is professor of anthropology at Wayne State University, where he teaches a wide range of courses. He is the author of "National Boundaries/Colonized Space: the Gendered Politics of Residential Space in Contemporary Jerusalem" and a soon-to-be-published book, *Colonial Jerusalem*.

Ismael Ahmed is a highly regarded human rights activist and music promoter who is currently director of the Michigan Department of Human Services. He co-founded the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services and led it from 1983-2007. Ahmed created the Concert of Colors, the largest free diversity music festival in the U.S.

Devon Akmon is Curator of Community History at the Arab American National Museum, responsible for researching, planning and implementing humanities programming and exhibitions. He holds an MS in Preservation Planning from Eastern Michigan University.

Alise Alousi is an Arab American poet and associate director of InsideOut Literary Arts Project, a creative writing program serving Detroit youth. Her work recently appeared in *Inclined to Speak: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Poetry* and will appear in *Mutanabbi Street Starts Here* later this year.

Anan Ameri is the founding director of the Arab American National Museum, the only institution of its kind in the world. A Palestinian American from Jordan, Ameri is a widely respected scholar and author. She holds a PhD in sociology from Wayne State University.

Wafaa Bilal is a new media artist focused on Iraqi issues and a professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. His 2007 installation *Domestic Tension*, in which Internet users could trigger the shooting of paintballs at the artist, was described as "breathtaking" by *Newsweek* magazine.

Raff Ellis is a first-generation Lebanese American who spent his career in the computer industry, rising to CEO of a research and development company. He is now a freelance writer whose memoir *Kisses From a Distance* was an Honorable Mention in the 2007 Arab American Book Award non-fiction category.

Negin Farsad is the director and executive producer of the upcoming feature film *Nerdcore Rising*, a documentary about a subgenre of hip hop music that appeals to “nerds”. She is also writing comedy for a new MTV series and has directed, produced and performed on cable TV’s Comedy Central channel.

Mohannad Ghawanmeh is film aficionado who acts, produces, teaches and promotes the medium. He has been involved in the Twin Cities Arab Film Festival since its inception and curated the 2007 festival. Ghawanmeh is currently co-coordinating Minnesota’s first Italian film festival, set for March 2009.

Suheir Hammad is a Palestinian-American poet, author and political activist whose honors include a 2003 Tony Award for Special Theatrical Event for her work as an original cast member and writer for *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*.

Annie Higgins PhD is assistant professor of Arabic language and literature at Wayne State University in Detroit. She has received grants from Fulbright, Fulbright-Hays and the Center for International Business Education and Research. Her research follows her desire to let small voices from history and the present speak.

Happy/L.A. Hyder’s grandparents all arrived in the U.S. around the turn of the century; her parents were born in 1909 and 1912; she turned 13 in 1960, left home for San Francisco in 1969, purchased a camera and declared herself ‘Artist.’ Her mixed media and installation work speaks to identity and to our world gone mad.

Remi Kanazi is a Palestinian-American poet, writer, editor, and actor. He is co-founder of www.PoeticInjustice.net and editor of the anthology *Poets for Palestine*. He has appeared in the New York Arab American Comedy Festival and is a regular contributor to *The Listening Post* and various other Al Jazeera English programs.

Leili Kashani is a PhD student in the joint program in history and Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at New York University and a senior editor at *Arab Studies Journal*. She also serves as director of operations at New York’s Alwan for the Arts.

Nicole Macotis is folk arts associate at Brooklyn Arts Council (BAC) where she manages Folk Feet – a project on traditional dance in Brooklyn – and was involved in production of the 2008 Brooklyn Maqam: Arab Music Festival. Macotis came to BAC from UNESCO’s Culture and Development Section.

Mike Mosallam was a New York-based performer, director and producer until earlier this year, when he became director of film initiatives for Wayne County, Michigan. He was featured on Comedy Central’s short-lived yet acclaimed show *The Watch List* and appears in the upcoming comedy film *Stags*, directed by Jamie Greenberg.

Karim Nagi is a native Egyptian and a pioneer in the “Dancing Drummer” esthetic, combining choreographed movement with articulate drumming, done in unison. His group Turbo Tabla crosses traditional Arab music with modern electronica; its two CDs have been distributed internationally by Universal Records.

Joe Namy is a graduate art student at New York University and an interdisciplinary artist whose creations reflect and connect the social realities derived from the communities to which he belongs. Namy’s work has been exhibited in galleries, factories, museums, gas stations, classrooms, bookstores and public restrooms.

Fayeq Oweis PhD is an artist and professor of Arabic language and culture at Santa Clara University in California. He is the author of *Encyclopaedia of Arab American Artists* and created the Arabic calligraphy that adorns the AANM’s dome interior and its external mosaic signage.

Kevin Rashid lives in Detroit where he manages a city-focused curriculum for Wayne State’s Honors College and the university’s Office of Undergraduate Research. He teaches creative writing and his poems have appeared in numerous books and journals.

Rijin Sahakian has produced multidisciplinary arts programs with cultural institutions and individuals in the U.S. and abroad. Recently, she curated *Iraq: Reframe* at the Montalvo Arts Center. Sahakian is pursuing an MA at New York University in creative practice and development, focusing on Iraq.

Najla Said is a Lebanese Palestinian American actress, comedian and writer. As an actress, she has performed regionally and internationally, and is a founding member of NIBRAS, the Arab-American Theatre Collective. Said is a graduate of Princeton University and the daughter of Edward Said.

Adnan Salhi PhD teaches reading and Arabic at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn MI and is a co-founder of the school's Arab cultural studies program. He received the 2008 Adult Educator Award from the Michigan Reading Association. Salhi writes poetry and fiction in English and Arabic.

Hassan Sassi is a senior structural and earthquake engineer with URS Corporation in Los Angeles, with 42 years of experience in structural dynamics, structural mechanics and earthquake engineering. He has taught at the university level for over 26 years and authored many technical papers.

Aseel Sawalha is associate professor of anthropology at Pace University in New York. She is an urban anthropologist whose subject matter has included memories of war in Beirut, Lebanon and Palestinian refugee women in Amman, Jordan. She is currently studying women artists in New York.

Kim Silarski is a veteran journalist and media aficionado. She worked at Detroit's National Public Radio affiliate, Detroit Symphony Orchestra and ArtServe Michigan before joining the AANM in communications. She's a cum laude graduate of Wayne State University.

Debbie Smith is a cultural events coordinator for San Francisco's Arab Cultural and Community Center. She received her BA in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. Smith is an active member of the arts community who has shared her time and expertise with numerous artists and venues.

Alia Tarraf is a New York City-based stand-up comedienne and sketch actress who has been featured on MTV, in *Glamour* magazine and in commercials and industrial films where she has played every ethnicity known to man. She recently finished writing her first screenplay, *Dairy Queen Rania*.

Ralph Valdez graduated from Detroit's Cass Technical High School with a scholarship to Parsons School of Design. He has applied his creative spirit to film and music journalism and a long-running music program at Detroit Public Radio. At AANM, he books diverse artists for live performances.

Tamar Vezirian was raised in the bomb shelters of Beirut. Her bold, brassy personality is central to her standup comedy and successful one-woman show *You've Neva' Met a Bitch Like Me Befo'*. Her work has been featured on MTV and in *Glamour* magazine. She also lends her vocals to the Cedar Lake Ballet Company.

Helen Zughuib, visual artist, was born in Beirut, Lebanon and lived in the Middle East and Europe before earning her BFA from Syracuse University in New York. She has exhibited widely and her work is included in the collections of the Library of Congress, the World Bank and the White House.

Scott Zuniga is a young filmmaker enjoying the success of his recent collaboration with the Palestinian hip-hop collective Ramallah Underground. Their music video *Nateejeh Bala Shugl* began airing on MTV Arabia last fall, making it one of the first featured independent productions in that network's history.



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