

INTERNATIONAL ART CONTEST

MINORITY ARTISTS WORKING
ON STATELESSNESS THEMES

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

NOVEMBER 2022



International Art Contest for Minority Artists
Working on Statelessness Themes
Exhibition Catalogue

November 2022

Foreword

A stateless person is someone who is not considered a national by any state. Some stateless people are also refugees. However, not all refugees are stateless, and many people who are stateless have never crossed an international border.

The artists in the International Art Contest for Minority Artists Working on Statelessness Themes are ethnic, religious, national or linguistic minorities working on statelessness themes. They are currently stateless, have suffered statelessness, or may be threatened with it. These artists silhouette their realities, most significant concerns and obstacles imposed by the process of denied citizenship through their art. Their artistic communication explores the notion of belonging, of fragmented existence, how it impacts their translation of the world and how the world relates to their status. In their art, the element of their coerced vulnerability is ever-present. The feeling of not-belonging arises when the state denies certain people or communities with the right to a legal identity and rejects their legitimate ties to a state. At the same time, it also forces these people to occupy a place they do not want to be in, whether a physical or subjective place.

According to one of the award-winning artists, Abdullah, there is a heavy weight of a vagabond lifestyle present in the Kutupalong refugee camp, one of the world's largest refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Here, predominantly Rohingya individuals are ostensibly passing through and have no idea when they will leave or where they will be relocated. With his photography, he captures the raw depth of sentimental grief, optimism, and sheer bravery of the residents of this camp. Jean Philippe Moiseau, another award-winning artist, has mastered embedding his political message into his mosaic-like art pieces. For instance, he depicts a 2013 ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic that resulted in the revocation of nationality for thousands of Dominicans, most of them of Haitian descent.

Brang Li, a Kachin artist, in turn, portrays this feeling of not-belonging through the shadows of people. In his artwork, the shadow people live among the crowd in Myanmar, but do not belong to the community. A political barrier separates them and makes them invisible in their stateless condition. The concept of fragmentation is particularly underlined by other artists, Mawa Rannahr, Naser Moradi and Amin Taasha, whose work embodies daily challenges and emotional relationships shattered by the tragedies of racism, war, and societal disputes. Finally, Zahra Hassan Marwan offers one of the most poignant tales of statelessness, sharing her personal experience of embracing culture to heal holistically while creating new emotional ties in a foreign place after being forced to migrate.

The artworks presented in this catalogue have powerful imagery that evokes emotional impacts and compels the viewers to empathise with the daily challenges of stateless people. With this competition, we would like to acknowledge the immense power held in art as a tool for positive social reform in the global legal and political landscape. In using art as a communication medium, artists consciously or unconsciously initiate social, political or symbolic change.

Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo & Aline Miklos

Members of the Judges Panel of the International Art Contest
for Minority Artists Working on Statelessness Themes



#IBelong



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

#AllIn4MinorityRights
UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON
MINORITY RIGHTS

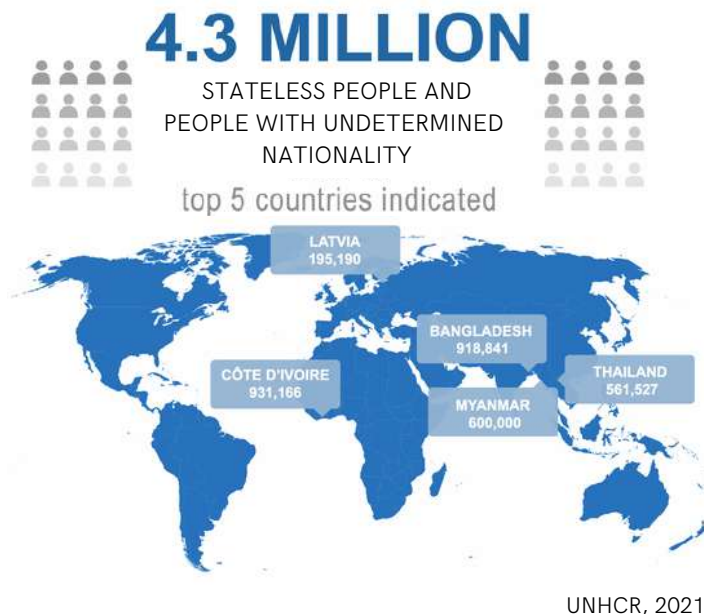
AVEC LE SOUTIEN
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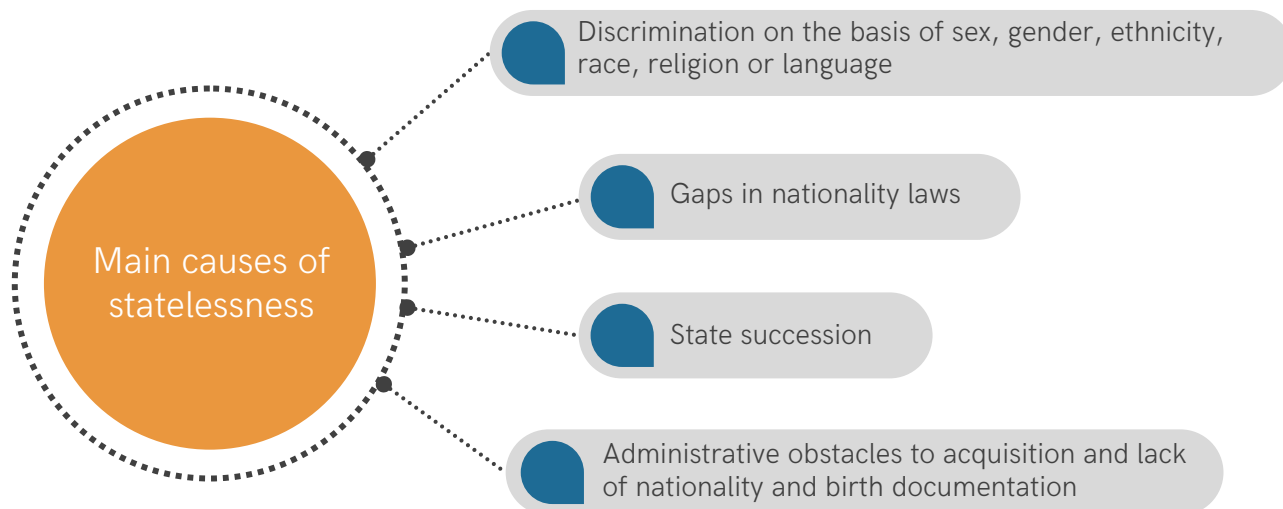
STATELESSNESS AND MINORITIES AROUND THE WORLD

STATELESSNESS AROUND THE WORLD

A stateless person is someone who is not recognized as a national of any country. UNHCR data received from 96 countries indicates that, at the end of 2021, there were an estimated 4.3 million stateless people or persons of undetermined nationality. However, it is recognized that the real number of stateless people is much higher. Based on these figures, the largest known populations of those who are stateless or of undetermined nationality can be found in Côte d'Ivoire (931,166), Bangladesh (918,841), Myanmar (600,000), Thailand (561,527) and Latvia (195,190).



The main causes of statelessness are diverse and include:



The right to a nationality is a fundamental human right that implies the right of each individual to acquire, change and retain a nationality. States have a responsibility to remove discrimination from their nationality laws, put in place safeguards to prevent statelessness, take action to reduce the number of stateless persons and provide adequate protection to stateless persons in their territory.

To learn more about UNHCR #IBelong Campaign



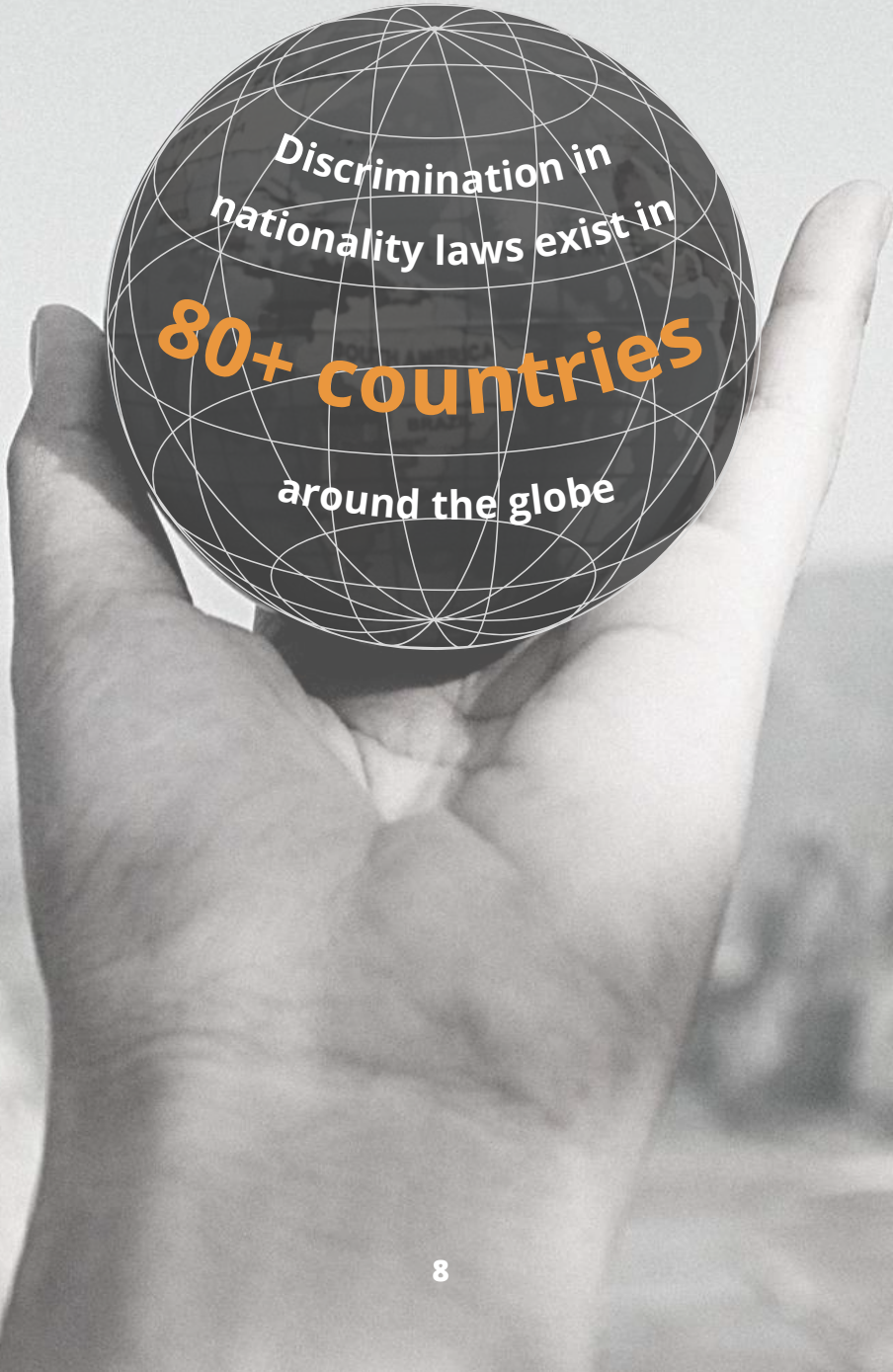
“ You are just a shadow. You pass by and no one sees you.”

– Nusret, aged 49 is a stateless person living in Montenegro



“ Just like my friends and others, I wish to live a normal human life.”

– Kavita, aged 22 is a stateless person living in Malaysia



Discrimination in
nationality laws exist in

80+ countries

around the globe

DISCRIMINATION IS A KEY CAUSE OF STATELESSNESS

Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity; race; religion; age; sex; gender; disability; language; or sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) is one of the main causes of statelessness. Direct or indirect discrimination on these grounds can be found in the nationality laws of more than 80 countries around the world. Even when nationality laws contain no explicitly discriminatory provisions, discrimination in practice can result in additional barriers to access nationality and prevent stateless persons from achieving naturalization.



Rohingya father and son in Kutupalong Camp-5, Bangladesh after fire broke out to that camp in June 2022. Photo credits: Abdullah.

Racial discrimination in nationality laws leading to statelessness is highly visible in some countries such as Myanmar, where the 1982 Citizenship Law excluded the Rohingya and other minority groups from the list of ethnic groups that are eligible for citizenship, rendering them stateless. Other stateless populations affected by discriminatory laws and policies include, for instance, persons of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic, ethnic Kurds in Syria, and Romani populations in Europe.

Gender discrimination in nationality laws is a significant cause of childhood statelessness. There are currently 24 countries which do not allow women to pass on their nationality on an equal basis with men. This can result in statelessness where, for example, the father is stateless, unknown, or unwilling or unable to take the administrative steps needed to confer his nationality. Another 50 countries deny women equal rights with men in their ability to acquire, change or retain their nationality, or to confer nationality on non-national spouses.



To read more about "Equality and Non-Discrimination in Nationality Matters" →



STATELESSNESS DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTS MINORITIES

Minorities are disproportionately affected by statelessness, with more than 75% of the world's stateless individuals belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities (UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, 2018). A joint stocktaking on national laws, policies and practices undertaken by OHCHR and UNHCR in 2021 found that the laws and policies of several countries limit access to nationality through requirements that are either explicitly discriminatory against certain individuals belonging to minorities, or that have discriminatory impact or effect on particular minority groups.



For instance, some national laws contain restrictive criteria for granting citizenship such as language requirements, which places minorities at greater risk of statelessness. Individuals belonging to minorities may also face practical obstacles in accessing nationality due to unduly burdensome administrative requirements or onerous costs involved in obtaining civil documentation. The lack of State responsiveness to the needs of stateless individuals or the invisibility and stigmatization of stateless minorities also constitute barriers to the access the right to nationality.

As the right to a nationality is often key for the enjoyment of other human rights, statelessness exacerbates obstacles already faced by minorities and vulnerable groups, including women, older persons, migrants, displaced persons and refugees, persons with disabilities, children and youth. Once denied or deprived of citizenship, minorities are inevitably denied protection of their basic rights, including minority rights as established in the 1992 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Stateless people suffer daily battles to meet their most basic needs, including to access clean drinking water, food or healthcare. Without a nationality or documentation to prove nationality, they remain invisible and on the margins of society, often without access to public services, legal employment, housing, schooling, education or property ownership. In some cases, stateless individuals are also more vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation, expulsion, forced removal, mass displacement, arbitrary detention and trafficking.

To learn more about OHCHR work on minorities, discrimination, and statelessness





Photo credits: Gabriel Adebayo, Hakim x Korakrit,
Zsolt Balla, Mirfozi Khasanov, Roger Arnold.

"Give Me A Chance"

The Almighty has made me a human being
I inhale oxygen.
My parents brought me up.
These are not enough for me.
Give me a pen to write.

I belong in the country where I was born.
My parents have given me a name.
The society has introduced me to the culture.
These are not enough for me.
Give me books to read.

When we sought refuge,
Bangladesh gave us space.
The UN provides food for us.
These are not enough for me.
Give me a school to learn.

I have two eyes to see.
Two hands to touch.
Two legs to walk.
These are not enough for me.
Give me a chance to be educated
In order to change the world.

Abdullah

Nationality.

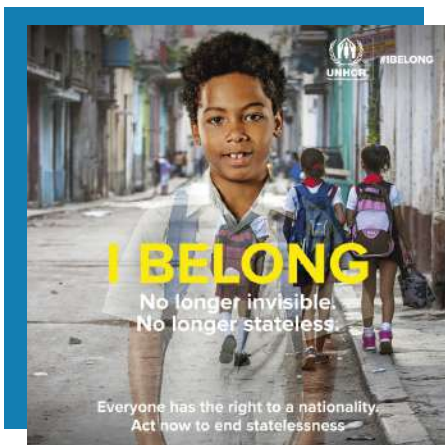
It's not a privilege.

It's a **human right.**



PROGRESS SINCE THE START OF THE #IBELONG CAMPAIGN TO END STATELESSNESS

On 4 November 2014, UNHCR launched the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness together with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness as a guiding framework. Together with States, stateless persons, civil society and other UN Agencies, the #IBelong Campaign and the Global Action Plan seek to resolve existing statelessness situations, prevent new cases from emerging and better identify and protect stateless populations around the world.



The #IBelong Campaign has played a catalytic role in raising the profile of the problem of statelessness and in encouraging the international community to take action. For example, since the launch of the Campaign, more than 400.000 stateless persons have acquired nationality or had their nationality confirmed, 28 States have acceded to one or both of the UN Statelessness Conventions, and more than 13 States have introduced safeguards to prevent childhood statelessness. A further three countries have reformed their nationality laws allowing women to confer nationality to their children on an equal basis with men and 21 States have established statelessness determination procedures to enable identification of stateless persons.

In 2019, at the mid-point of the Campaign, UNHCR organized the High-Level Segment on Statelessness (HLS), bringing together States, international and regional organizations, and representatives of civil society. The HLS provided an opportunity to acknowledge the progress made, and to re-double commitments and efforts to work towards ending statelessness once and for all. As a result of the HLS, a total of 360 pledges were made by States, international and regional organizations, and civil society. 252 pledges were made by 66 States, a clear sign of broad-based political will and shared determination.

Despite these achievements, a lot more needs to be done to eradicate statelessness once and for all. The rise in xenophobia, ethno-nationalism and religious nationalism in many parts of the world threatens to create new situations of statelessness, unless action is taken to avoid it. Climate change and increased forced displacement emphasize, now more than ever, the importance of States, UN Agencies and civil society to galvanize international support and work together to end statelessness.

Statelessness is a problem that can be solved, and it is clear how: by reforming laws, establishing procedures to identify and protect stateless persons and putting them on a pathway to naturalization, ensuring universal birth registration and eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices that prevent so many from enjoying their rights. If there is international resolve, it is possible to find a solution for the millions of people who are denied a nationality and make sure that everyone can say: I Belong.

For more information about what can be done to resolve statelessness





#IBELONG

I BELONG

No longer invisible.
No longer stateless.

Everyone has the right to a nationality.
Act now to end statelessness



**"IF THERE IS INTERNATIONAL RESOLVE,
IT IS POSSIBLE TO FIND A SOLUTION FOR
THE MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WHO ARE
DENIED A NATIONALITY AND
MAKE SURE THAT EVERYONE CAN SAY:
I BELONG."**



MINORITY ARTISTS WORKING ON STATELESSNESS THEMES

INTERNATIONAL ART CONTEST CELEBRATING MINORITY ARTISTS WORKING ON STATELESSNESS THEMES

To commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and the 8th Anniversary of the UNHCR #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the non-governmental organizations Freemuse and Minority Rights Group International (MRG) jointly organized the International Art Contest for Minority Artists working on Statelessness Themes. The 3 November awards ceremony for the International Art Contest 2022 also benefitted from the generous support of the City of Geneva.

The contest's main aims are to support minority artists' work on statelessness and raise awareness on the human rights of stateless individuals and groups belonging to minorities. Minority artists were invited to submit up to five works of art and asked to explain how these relate to statelessness. Out of a total of 39 submissions from artists from more than 23 countries, an independent Judges Panel comprising of distinguished individuals, selected three winners and awarded four honourable mentions.

The Judges Panel of the contest was comprised of the following distinguished judges:

- Khadim Ali, Pakistani artist based in Australia and belonging to the Hazara ethnic minority
- Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo, artist and former OHCHR Person of African Descent fellow based in Switzerland
- Yuliya Lanina, Russian-born and US-based multidisciplinary artist of Jewish background
- Aline Miklos, Roma artist from Brazil/Argentina and OHCHR Senior Minority Fellow
- Alexandra Xanthaki, United Nations Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights

This catalogue is a collection of work from the seven award recipients of the contest:

- **Zahra Hassan Marwan** (artist and author)
- **Jean Philippe Moiseau** (plastic and recycling artist)
- **Abdullah** (photographer and videographer)
- **Brang Li** (painter and visual artist) - *honourable mention*
- **Amin Taasha** (painter and visual artist) - *honourable mention*
- **Naser Moradi** (painter) - *honourable mention*
- **Mawa Rannahr** (painter) - *honourable mention*



JUDGES PANEL OF THE INTERNATIONAL ART CONTEST

Khadim Ali



“ Minorities are often voiceless. I think art is the only way to decrease the intensity of violence in a community and invite members from different ethnicities to gather under one roof and create harmony.”

Born in 1978 in Quetta, Pakistan, Khadim Ali currently lives and works in Sydney, Australia and Kabul, Afghanistan. Ali was trained in classical miniature painting at the National College of Arts in Lahore and in mural painting and calligraphy in Tehran. Khadim Ali received his Master of Fine Art (MFA) from the University of New South Wales in 2016. He belongs to the Hazara ethnic minority who comes from the central part of Afghanistan. Rich in traditional and modern motifs of Eastern and Western art-historical references, Ali's work tells stories about loss (of his own cultural heritage and of human values) and explores how meaning shifts as words and images are twisted through ideological adoption. His work traces the history of his ethnicity and other minorities who have been subjected to discrimination, persecution and ethnic cleansing. Ali's intricate works depict stories of demons and angels, conquest and war through the lens of the persecuted Hazara community.

Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo



“ The beauty of the Minority Artist Contest is that, as an international platform, it transcends the boundaries of social constructs like nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and religion to empower minorities. This contest gives minorities the opportunity to own their narratives and pushes for a dialogue that centres them as a resource, a solution, and an enrichment to society as opposed to a burden to the state.”

Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo is best known for her femme-artivism which involves using mixed media like Swiss yodel, sculpture, video and visual arts to challenge societal identity politics. Between 2014 and 2019, her short film "Not Swiss Made" about racism in Switzerland won 18 prizes globally. In 2015, she was an artist in residence at the Art Olympics Biennale - Kenyan Pavillion in Venice, Italy. Her "One Family - human blood sculptures" caused a buzz in 2017, as did her Swiss traditional folks' dance intervention, which taught traditional Swiss dance to refugees and Swiss people. Brändle-Amolo has since worked on a series of social-political *Feminist Salon* lounges consisting of films, discussions and performances. A former OHCHR Person of African Descent fellow, she also started a VLOG African Descent after launching the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent in Switzerland. Last year, she co-curated an art projection Fraumunster21, commemorating the 50th anniversary of women's federal right to vote in Switzerland. Currently working on an opera and jodel concert for her Atelier Vivant Art residency in Thusis, Brändle-Amolo is also an elected member of the Swiss parliament for the Social Democratic Party.



“ Minority artists can bring visibility to the issue of statelessness, and this award will support their efforts and increase the visibility of their artwork. ”

Yuliya Lanina

Yuliya Lanina is an interdisciplinary artist whose work exists at the intersection of visual art, performance and technological innovation. She creates alternate realities in her works—ones based on trauma, sexuality, loss and identity. A secular Jew of Ukrainian descent who was born and raised in Moscow, Lanina arrived in New York in 1990 as a political refugee. There, she established herself as a pioneering artist on the cutting edge by combining digital technologies with handmade media. Lanina has exhibited and performed extensively both nationally and internationally, including at SXSW Interactive (TX), Seoul Art Museum (Korea), SIGGRAPH Asia (Japan), 798 Beijing Biennial (China), Cleveland Institute of Art (OH), Patrick Heide Gallery (London, UK), Teatro Santa Ana (Mexico), and Moscow Museum of Modern Art (Russia).



“ Without art, there is no social transformation! Art serves to empower people, to strengthen the sense of community, to unleash creativity, and to give tools so that communities are not afraid to express themselves. ”

Aline Miklos

Aline Miklos is a composer, singer, art historian, cultural producer and activist for minority rights. She currently works as a Senior Fellow at OHCHR (South America). In Argentina, she coordinates the project "Kalo Chiriklo Latin American Romani Music" since 2016 and she is also Director and co-creator of the festival "FESTIVAR - festival of cultural projects with social impact" since 2019. With Kalo Chiriklo, she released the album *Pájaro Negro* in 2021, which had the participation of some Romani musicians from Latin America. Miklos is Romani and belongs to a Hungarian Romani family that arrived in Brazil around 1895. In addition, Miklos is a PhD student in Art History at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP). She received her BA in History (USP) in 2007 and her MA in Art History (EHESS) in 2009. She has organized several congresses, meetings and thematic roundtables, where she has also been able to present her work.



“ This exhibition enables minority artists to convey some of the emotions relating to statelessness. The stories of stateless people must not be lost; the work of minority artists must be visible. ”

Alexandra Xanthaki

Alexandra Xanthaki was appointed UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights in October 2021. A leading expert on cultural rights, Xanthaki (LLB Athens; LLM Queens, Belfast; PhD Keele) is Professor of Law at Brunel University London, UK and the Research Director of the Brunel Law School. A prolific author on minority and indigenous rights, Xanthaki has over 50 publications varying from cultural rights of minorities and indigenous peoples to cultural diversity, cultural heritage, balancing cultural rights with other rights and interests, and multicultural aspects of international human rights law.




Abdullah

A Rohingya photographer and videographer, Abdullah was born stateless in Myanmar to stateless parents. As a predominantly Muslim ethnic minority, the Rohingya are not recognized as an official ethnic group and have been denied citizenship since 1982. "For Rohingya living in Myanmar, having a smartphone is restricted by authorities. I still remember the moment I bought my first Android phone, a Symphony, in 2012. Rice paddies, mountains, streams, animals, bridges, and flowers were my subjects", Abdullah says. Abdullah had to flee Myanmar in 2017 and he now lives in Kutupalong refugee camp, one of the world's largest refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where he works with the Rollywood Rohingya Film Team making videos and taking photos about life in the camp. "In the camp, we neither have livelihood nor education for children. As a refugee myself, I chose this platform to share our suffering with the world. I am also trying to promote youth who have talents and an interest in art such as videography, photography, music, drawing and poetry by collecting their stories", Abdullah explains.

The Judges Panel found Abdullah's photographs both extremely compelling and deeply moving. Using a documentary approach, his photographs chronicle the daily experiences, everyday struggles and embodied stories of Rohingya children, women and men in one of the world's largest refugee camps. Abdullah not only manages to capture the tangible effects of discrimination, statelessness and forced displacement for the Rohingya, but he is also mindful of the bravery and emotions of those he portrays and pays attention to the many different expressions of the human face. The Judges Panel acknowledged Abdullah's courage and dedication to bring attention to the loss, deprivation, and displacement experienced by more than 2 million Rohingya people, through his photographs and videos, as well as on his social media platforms.

“ We were very moved by Abdullah's gripping photos that show the beauty and the horror refugees face in the camp where there is little or no access to basic needs. Abdullah's photos show the world the pain, the adversity, the creativity and the strength of a stateless person.
- Yuliya Lanina ”

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 <https://www.facebook.com/HabibGlarry>



Rohingya girl with traditional "Thanakah"

Kutupalong refugee camp, Bangladesh, May 2021

"I've been forcibly made stateless.
My homeland has been taken away.
But no-one could snatch away my culture and ethnic tradition from me.
Above all, my culture defines my existence."



Trapped in the cage

Kutupalong refugee camp, Bangladesh, July 2022

"I wouldn't have been born stateless,
if I had a choice in determining my birth.
I'm growing within the barbed wire fence,
but my potentialities are not allowing this barbed wire to
grow."



Rohingya boy is looking through net

Kutupalong refugee camp, Bangladesh, August 2022

"I don't remember much about my country.
Can remember the fragrance of the wet soil,
Which I smelled for a while.
I don't know much about my country.
Know the pain and sufferings of us,
To whom motherland is very precious.
I don't recall much about my country.
Can recall the rules and regulations,
Which are thrust upon me but not recognition and
fundamental education."



Rohingya youth being hopeless

Kutupalong refugee camp, Camp-3, Bangladesh, June 2021

"Standing on a hill...

Can see, greens growing on shelters.

A bridge connecting two edges of land,

Can't find the bridge connecting our homeland.

All the joys of childhood and adolescence are sought in this hand. But find only the existential crisis.

Is it our destiny? What is it?"



Rohingya youth seeing their dreams vanishing

Kutupalong refugee camp, Bangladesh, June 2022

"Today's generation is facing the uncertain future.
Tarpaulin shelters are crammed into the narrow spaces where freedom is dying.
We are standing the edge of vast body water without any boat.
Waiting for returning to own country not as a minority but as a citizen."



A Rohingya girl in the fire devastated camp

Kutupalong Refugee Camp, Camp-16 (during fire accident), Bangladesh, January 2022

"Where can I find my basic rights to live?

In the ashes of my burnt shelter?

The dream of my education and the strength to stand tall in the open air are also burnt.

I'm told that a stateless person has no right to get education.

Why is there no right?

Who will answer?"



Rohingya woman on her burnt shelter

Kutupalong Refugee Camp, Camp-5, Bangladesh, July 2022

"My shelter burned down once again.
They set my home on fire in my own country and my future turned into ashes with it.
My tears dried up in the burning fire. Standing on the ashes and thinking...
Where is the end of my sufferings?
Humanity is speechless."



These eyes didn't see freedom

Kutupalong Refugee Camp, Camp-20 extension, Bangladesh, March 2022

"My eyes turned gray,
These eyes have seen a lot of disharmony and oppression due to being a minority.
Being expelled from the ancestral land and given the title of statelessness."



A continuing refugee who has fled three times
Balukhali Camp, Bangladesh, September 2022

"I wasn't born stateless.
I've spent many years of my life in my native land.
These eyes were filled with green paddy fields and open air.
I still dream to die in my own country, free from the slander of the stateless minority."



Zahra Hassan Marwan

Born to a Kuwaiti mother and a stateless father, Zahra Hassan Marwan self-identifies as a member of the Ayam minority of Kuwait, and was herself stateless for a large part of her life. "Since Kuwaiti law says that citizenship is passed down through the father's side, this means my brothers and I were born stateless too", Zahra says. Currently living in the United States where she was eventually granted citizenship, Zahra works as a traditional artist, using watercolor and ink to explore complex themes such as statelessness, feelings of belonging, and homesickness, the pride in one's cultural and linguistic identity and the reclaiming of one's roots. In 2022, she wrote and illustrated a children's book entitled "Where Butterflies Fill the Sky: a Story of Immigration, Family and Finding Home" (Bloomsbury Publishing, NYC). "The story is about the confusion I felt as a child, about not wanting to leave my home and my family. The story is about the luck of coming to New Mexico, United States where people have treated me like I belong, while constantly hoping that I can be with my family again", Zahra explains.

The Judges Panel found that Zahra's artwork connected with her personal experience of statelessness in a remarkably powerful and poetic manner. While only a few children's books touch on complex topics like statelessness, migration and belonging, Zahra's piece offers a moving and deeply personal story of how people learn to live as stateless. Her poignant writing and colorful drawings provide a compelling insight into the emotional, cultural, and linguistic ties that bind families together, despite their nationality status or the country where they live. The Judges Panel also emphasized Zahra's engagement to shed light on statelessness, as her book can be read by children who have gone through similar experiences and may be able to identify themselves, while better understanding their own personal and family stories.

“

It is not often that one finds a book on statelessness and migration that is so artistic. It has really moved me.
- Alexandra Xanthaki

”



zahra_marwan



<https://zahramarwan.com/>

“

Zahra's work is beautiful and necessary. She tells about how her family built a new home in another country. At the same time, her work also conveys a message of love and hope for immigrant children who can feel represented.
- Aline Miklos

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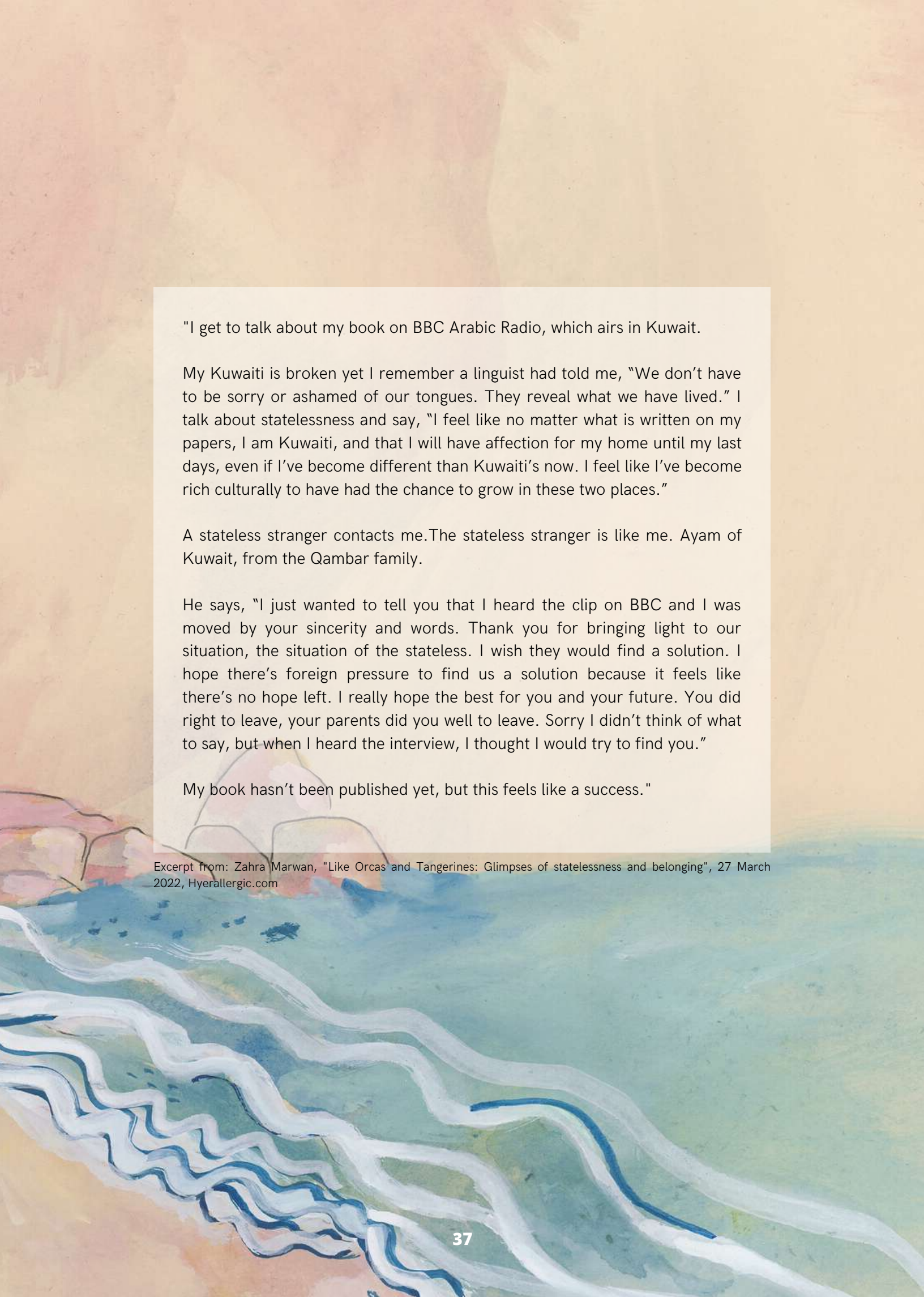


Accessible online content of the book

Where Butterflies Fill the Sky

A Story of Immigration,
Family, and Finding Home





"I get to talk about my book on BBC Arabic Radio, which airs in Kuwait.

My Kuwaiti is broken yet I remember a linguist had told me, "We don't have to be sorry or ashamed of our tongues. They reveal what we have lived." I talk about statelessness and say, "I feel like no matter what is written on my papers, I am Kuwaiti, and that I will have affection for my home until my last days, even if I've become different than Kuwaiti's now. I feel like I've become rich culturally to have had the chance to grow in these two places."

A stateless stranger contacts me. The stateless stranger is like me. Ayam of Kuwait, from the Qambar family.

He says, "I just wanted to tell you that I heard the clip on BBC and I was moved by your sincerity and words. Thank you for bringing light to our situation, the situation of the stateless. I wish they would find a solution. I hope there's foreign pressure to find us a solution because it feels like there's no hope left. I really hope the best for you and your future. You did right to leave, your parents did you well to leave. Sorry I didn't think of what to say, but when I heard the interview, I thought I would try to find you."

My book hasn't been published yet, but this feels like a success."

Excerpt from: Zahra Marwan, "Like Orcas and Tangerines: Glimpses of statelessness and belonging", 27 March 2022, Hyerallergic.com



From the desert to the sea, this is my home where 100 butterflies are always in the sky. Pigeons are kept and loved. Boats sail the calm sea.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021

Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"Me and my brothers in my grandma's little home in Qadsiya."



This is where I sleep, where my ancestors live and are always watching.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021

Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"Two bulls from the ancient Dilmun civilization sit on Greek ruins that are found 10 miles off of the Kuwaiti shore. Many ancient regional sculptures depicted fish, and they are also a nod to Kuwait's sea-faring history."



People say we don't belong here. We have to leave our home. Baba tells me there is magic in the place where we'll go. I don't want to leave. Mama says it will be better for us.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021

Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"Me and baba lay on a Persian rug. We would often eat watermelon after lunch. A picture of my Uncle Abbass from the 1980's that's still hanging in my parents living room in real life is there. He was killed the first day of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. We have useless bureaucrats domineering the scene, one of them angry and hiding in a traditional brass teapot. My grandma is outside her home with her sheep sa'ad. A man is forlorn at the state of things with his prayer beads, a teacup on his knee. Boys play soccer as flamingos fly above. Flamingos that naturally migrate to Kuwait each winter."



I say my goodbye's without knowing why.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021
Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"Me and my father say bye to the local fishermen or friends, as I would often accompany him to the fish market. We say bye to the birds, as there is a long tradition of bird-keeping on the rooftops, from doves to falcons. The angry bureaucrats bid us good riddance, yet my aunt in her abaya protects us with her bukhoor, Arabic myrrh. My mom's three sisters, who are often loud and unafraid, walk me away. I remember my whole family waving us goodbye at the airport when we passed border control, all of us crying."



And travel far, far away, to a new place where each day feels like a year. Where no one speaks like me. Are my ancestors still watching?

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021

Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"My aunts toss us across the world to a new and unfamiliar place. I miss the comfort of language, my family, and home. The comfort that familiarity brings."



I'm so different from everyone here, but these new people show me I belong.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021

Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"I make friends quickly. I make friends without being able to speak much English. As I grow older, New Mexicans tell me I'm one of them. They tell me, 'this is where you're home'."



My family sends reminders that they are thinking of me.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021

Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"My aunts stand in a boat, sending butterflies my way. In real life, I keep a butterfly necklace my Aunt Amina gave me near my bed."

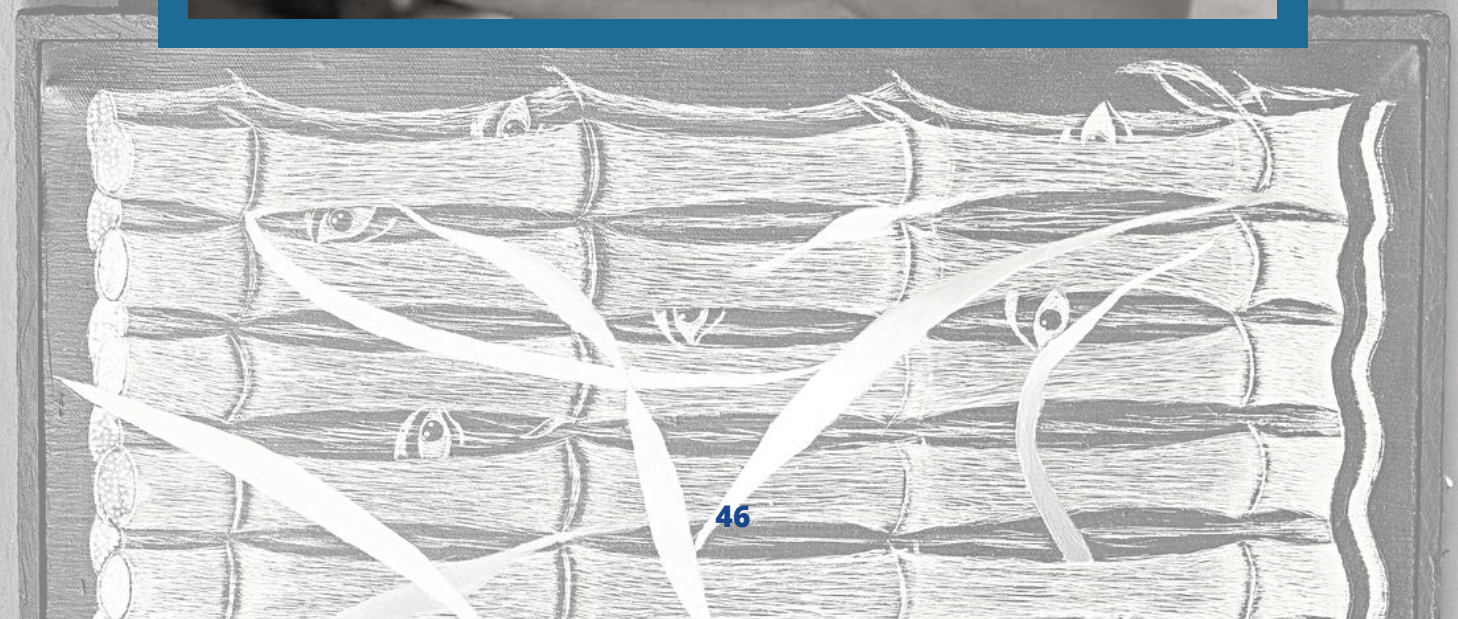


And I tell them that I'm thinking of them, too. That I miss them, and hope we can be together again. That in this new place of high desert, I have found a home.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, 2021

Watercolor and Ink on Board, 10x20"

"On a long-distance call with my mom's three sisters who are at a table on terrazzo tiles that surrounded my grandpa's house."



Jean Philippe Moiseau

Belonging to the Haitian minority in the Dominican Republic, Jean Philippe Moiseau is a plastic and recycling artist who explores the complex forms of discrimination facing Haitian communities and their descendants born in the Dominican Republic through his paintings, sculptures, engraved metal objects and masks. Some of Jean Philippe's artwork depicts the impacts of discriminatory laws, policies, and practices facing Haitian minorities in the Dominican Republic, including as the result of the 2013 ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic that effectively led to the revocation of nationality for thousands of people who were born in the country, most of them of Haitian descent. "I transformed this event into a metal mask entitled "*La Sentencia*" [*The Sentence*], which uses newspaper clippings that give an account of the different aspects of such human rights violation", says Jean Philippe.

The Judges Panel found Jean Philippe's masks particularly compelling as they unveil the challenges of statelessness for Haitian minorities in the Dominican Republic, including the negative stereotypes that can affect them. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jean Philippe created a mask called "*Los Olvidados del COVID*" [*The Forgotten by Covid*] that captures the new exclusion through a "masked mask", and refers to the lack of health and socio-economic support for stateless people. Jean Philippe's bravery is reflected by the political meaning of his artwork and the way he seeks to examine and make visible difficult issues, such as the forced labor of Haitians in the Dominican Republic through his painting "*Detrás de la Caña*" [*Behind Sugar Cane*]. The Judges Panel liked that the artist uses traditional techniques to discuss contemporary themes and combines recycled materials such as pieces of metal called "fer découpé" in Haïti or printed journals, with natural elements, such as jagua palm, gourds, driftwood or seeds, that are of particular importance to Haitian culture and identity.

“

Jean Philippe uses elements of traditional arts - reflected in the forms, colours and materials - to make a strong critique of exclusionary politics. In his artworks, art and politics are intertwined to denounce the grave human rights violations facing Haitian minorities who reside in the Dominican Republic.

- Aline Miklos

”





L'Immigrant [*The Immigrant*]
Dominican Republic, 2020
Acrylic on wood and gourds, 25x30x70"



Les Rêves du Cireur de Bottes [The Dreams of the Shoeshiner Man]

Dominican Republic, 2021

Acrylic on canvas, 40x50"



La Sentencia [The Sentence]
Dominican Republic, 2015
Acrylic on metal, 1x25x35"



Los Olvidados del COVID [*The Forgotten by COVID*]

Dominican Republic, 2020

Acrylic on gourd/calabash, 4x14x24"



Detrás de la Caña [Behind Sugar Cane]

Dominican Republic, 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 30x55"



Porteuse d'Espoir [Bearer of Hope]

Dominican Republic, 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 40x50"



Fille, Enfant de la Canne à Sucre [Daughter, Sugar Cane Child]

Dominican Republic, 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 40x50"



Danse Folle [*Crazy Dance*]

Dominican Republic, 1997

Acrylic on canvas, 40x50"



Madan Sara

Dominican Republic, 2022

Acrylic on canvas, 40x50"



Mawa Rannahr

Born in Soviet Central Asia, painter Mawa Rannahr became stateless after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Since 1994, she has lived in the United States as a stateless person and, consequently, she has not been able to continue a “normal life”, nor to travel back to her country of origin and to visit her family, including when her father was terminally ill. “I have struggled deeply with being able to explore my statelessness through art, despite having been an artist my entire life. I find it incredibly painful to delve deep because it triggers memories, and emotions that I try to keep buried to simply function”, Mawa says.

In addition to the fine quality of Mawa’s paintings and her mastery of artistic techniques, the Judges Panel was struck and moved by her powerful depiction of the concrete experiences of statelessness for many individuals and families throughout the world, including in her painting entitled “The Weight of Paper” that seems to depict the burdensome administrative processes that most stateless minorities must go through in their daily lives. As a stateless artist herself, Mawa seems to use painting to connect her deep emotions and pains with her conviction that no human being should ever be reduced to his or her nationality status.

“

Mawa's artwork portrays the power of her emotions at being held hostage by the bureaucracy of statelessness. Her work reflects a lot on her personal life journey, her perception of female members of her family and the societal burden of not belonging. The art brings forth her creative talent, capturing an ever-elusive glint of subtle beauty in the emotionally evocative work.

- Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo

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 @mawarannahr

 <https://iamstateless.wixsite.com/mawarannahr>



The Weight of Paper

United States, 2021

Pencil, ink on paper

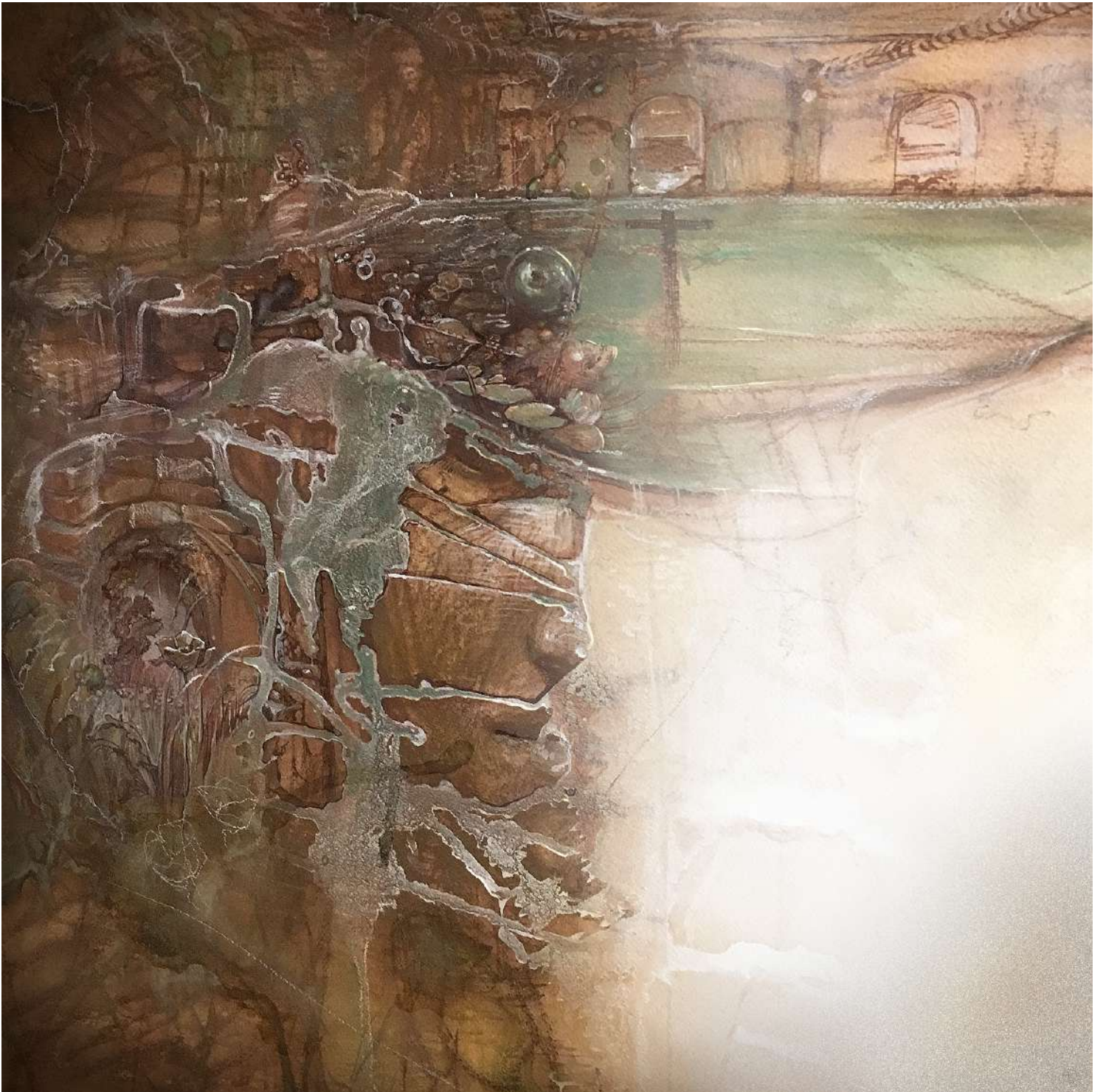


The Sentinel

United States, 2019

Pencil, white chalk, digital

"To stand a sentinel at the edge of meaning.
To stare into the abyss, to feel its gaze returned.
Silent for so long your lips turn to stone."



Fragmentation

United States, 2020

Pencil, gouache, pastel on paper

"I am adrift. I am a nomad. I am fragmented into so many pieces. Perhaps the very question - the question of where do I belong - that statelessness fleshes out, gives most gravity to. I am adrift. I am a nomad. I am fragmented into so many pieces. Not quite human, not quite a daughter, not quite a sister, not quite this or that, half-realized, truncated dreams... Where do I belong? If there is a way to prevent ignorance from settling this question, I want to find it. It should lead me home."



Kintsugi: My Mother's Hopeful Heart

United States, 2022

Oil on canvas, gold leaf, digital

"Japanese tradition Kintsugi (golden joinery) mends broken pottery with gold. Kintsugi celebrates and highlights the breakage and repair of a vessel as a part of its history... not as something to hide. I have lived in the shadows of my statelessness, my identity erased and fractured, just as millions of others live in the cracks of the collective human heart torn by discrimination, wars and genocide. I used gold leaf fractures in place of a child in my young mother's arms. The fractures run through the heart of the women in my family, my grandmother, my great-grandmothers - of these only my mother still survives, holding on to our dream, our hope."



Brang Li

Brang Li is a Kachin (Jingphaw) artist from Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin State in Northern Myanmar. Brang Li's artwork explores the dire consequences of the civil wars in Myanmar and the plight of those affected by the violence, including the Kachin people. "From a very young age, I grew up amidst political conflict and war between the Burmese military and the ethnic revolutionary forces", says Brang Li. The artist describes his artwork as a "tribute to those impacted by war", which can increase the risks of people becoming statelessness. "Statelessness is a recurring theme for me because of the many Internally Displaced Persons there are in, and coming from my state, Kachin state", explains Brang Li.

The Judges Panel was particularly touched by Brang Li's "No More Life" series that features shadowed -almost transparent and invisible- human figures placed over photographs of crowded streets, empty buildings, and scenes of ordinary life. Both poetic and somber, these shadows can be interpreted as a representation of those individuals and communities that are considered "second category" and deprived of rights, including stateless persons who are often among the most marginalized. The Judges Panel also noted that Brang Li's artwork raises deep feelings and thoughts that can be shared by many - *what does it mean to be invisible?*

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The "shadow people" imposed on pictures of everyday life depicts so well how invisible statelessness makes individuals.

- Alexandra Xanthaki

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<https://www.facebook.com/brang.li.3>





"No More Life" Series

Yangon, Myanmar, 2016

Print and soot on canvas, 121x182cm



"No More Life" Series

Yangon, Myanmar, 2016

Print and soot on canvas, 121x182cm



"No More Life" Series

Yangon, Myanmar, 2016

Acrylic and soot on canvas, 121x182cm



"No More Life" Series

Yangon, Myanmar, 2016
Print and soot on canvas,
121x121cm



"No More Life" Series
Yangon, Myanmar, 2016
Acrylic and soot on canvas,
121x121cm



Naser Moradi

Naser Moradi is an Afghan artist belonging to the Hazara ethnic minority, who left Afghanistan in 2011 to escape conflict. Without access to art supplies, he first experimented painting with instant coffee powder and water on a paper plate in 2016 while detained in an immigration center in Australia. "My life has been shaped by instability, uncertainty, and displacement. Because of my ethnicity and for seeking asylum in Australia by boat, I have been subjected to indefinite detention under Australia's immigration policies. There is no part of my story where I have not had to confront what it means to live as a person without protection in the world. Disconnected from my homeland, my people, and my culture", Naser says. Still detained in an immigration facility and seeking asylum, Naser explains: "Since fleeing Afghanistan, I have lived in limbo, cut off from my family of origin and everyone I have known and loved. No place nor people have claimed me. I can never return home and yet I have never arrived anywhere. My art represents discrimination, incarceration, loss, sacrifice, grief, uncertainty; but also, the will to survive, the hope on the horizon, the dream of safety and refuge, the promise of belonging and peace."

The Judges Panel highlighted the bravery conveyed by Naser's paintings, and considered it inspiring that Naser uses colorful paint to express the hardships and aspirations of his personal story as someone who had to escape his own country and has felt separated from his homeland and cultural roots. The Judges Panel saw in Naser's paintings the reflection of deep and painful feelings that may be experienced by those who are disconnected from a part of their self - including stateless persons.

“

Naser's work reminded me of the gradual stripping of one's identity in statelessness; parts of oneself being dispersed and lost.

- Alexandra Xanthaki

”



@nasir_moradi_12



nasir.moradi.1





Forced Displacement

Australia, 2019

Mixed media on canvas

"Love and choice have been denied to those who need it most. Love is the climate in which all things flourish - a human right, yet here abrogated. Freedom, love and opportunities of choice are fenced off. The people lost in a barren, lifeless landscape; dispossessed, dislocated, disempowered and deprived of vision. They walk in circles and have no pathway to the future."



Hazara Black Day

Australia, 25 September 2021

Acrylic on canvas

"September 25th is a black day for the Hazaras. On this day we remember the anniversary of the Hazara genocide by Abdur Rahman Khan. All over the world people are commemorating and remembering the genocide of their ancestors by marking this day as a black day in the history of the Hazaras. Tragically, now with the Taliban back in power, it is all starting again, and they have lost everything they had gained in the blink of an eye. Sadly, because of the Taliban, the minority groups, especially the women, have no rights to live in their own homeland - they are living in a dark hell. I am feeling this torture and pain from inside the cage. I am feeling helpless and so sorry for all who are suffering at the hands of the Taliban."



Twelve days at sea

Australia, 2016

Acrylic on canvas

"We were twelve days at sea. We had run out of food and water and then we saw the Australian Flag on the big ship and everyone cried tears of happiness and joy for a new hope."



Wounded Home's

Heartland Afghanistan

Australia, 2021

Acrylic on canvas

"Darkness has devastated my homeland again! Terrified by my own pain, I cried all night. I do not know what I can do. The dark and cruel history of the Taliban, the murderers of the oppressed people of Afghanistan, has always been on my mind. Now I feel again all the suffering I suffered then. I know that this pain is very familiar to my compatriots, especially women and ethnic minorities who will now have their rights violated and live in fear. I do not know when this tragedy will end. May God watch over you all."



Fragmented life

Australia, 2016
Acrylic on paper

"Every day life is like fragile pieces of paper, slowly fragmenting. Every day I am thinking about how to be really alive; how to find meaning in a life where I have no homeland and no safety."



Bridge to Harmony

Australia, 2018

Acrylic on canvas

"God made this beautiful earth, ocean and sky for all of us to share. We are lucky to have these gifts. But how can we all enjoy life if society cannot accept our differences? Minorities are often targeted by society and forced to flee from persecution and violence due to their differences. Who will accept asylum seekers and stateless persons?"

Conflicts that arise from opposing beliefs and faiths require bridging. A bridge for us all to cross with a shared vision of harmony, love and acceptance. We are all human beings, and only when we connect with one another can we create lives of beauty, peace and happiness, enjoying all that we have been given together."



Open your caged heart

Australia, 2019

Acrylic on canvas

"Some people enjoy imprisoning other people in a cage. There are other people who would like to open these cages. I wish that all my lovely friends could pull the rope and open the doors of these cages and for everyone to be free."



At what cost?

Australia, 2018

Acrylic on canvas

"The concept of freedom is rarely understood, unless it has been taken from you. There are many ways that freedom can be eroded. [...]"

Freedom is at threat when our languages deny us the grace to understand, to tolerate and to forgive. Freedom is at the core and very essence of our journey. Without freedom, everything is unknown and we live our lives in a dark world. I wish justice and freedom for everyone trapped in these cages."



A Glass Cage
Australia, 2018
Acrylic on canvas

"Our life is in transit, whether we want it or not, whether we are rich or poor, whether we are free or prisoners in a glass cage. It would be better to be like butterflies able to fly away together."



Outdoor murals

Naser was given permission and encouraged to paint outdoor murals around the grounds of the detention centre, Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation. This has included plant boxes, seating and fences.

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ای پسر جام میم ده که بر پیری کای بری
شاهپادان طریقت به شکار مگسی
حیف باشد پوتو بر غمیکه ایسر قفسی

علی و پور الهوسی
هر که قانع شد اند



Amin Taasha

Born in the Bamiyan province of Afghanistan and belonging to the Hazara ethnic minority, Amin Taasha learned at age five about the craft of carpet-making after moving to Kabul with his family due to the fear of the Taliban. Recognized at both national and international exhibitions, Amin's artwork incorporates aspects of abstraction and miniature painting. "In my works, there are marigold flowers that I use as a symbol, a kind of positive emotions and energy. The fiery yellow, orange, and red hues connect with happiness, optimism, and luck. Yet, some symbols evoke darker emotions such as grief, despair, and mourning, and they act as a sign for the desperate souls to find a way back to where they belong", Amin says.

The Judges Panel highlighted Amin's remarkable bravery. After facing intimidation and threats when exhibiting his artworks in Afghanistan, Amin had to flee to Indonesia where he graduated from the renowned Indonesia Institute of the Arts (ISI) and was able to continue his artistic career. Amin's artwork depicts personal and embodied memories of his homeland, Afghanistan, where he has not returned due to his Hazara identity and artistic engagement. From an aesthetic point of view, the Judges Panel was also struck by the beauty and technical complexity of Amin's pieces of art as they build a poetic bridge between the past and the present through the use of "miniatures".

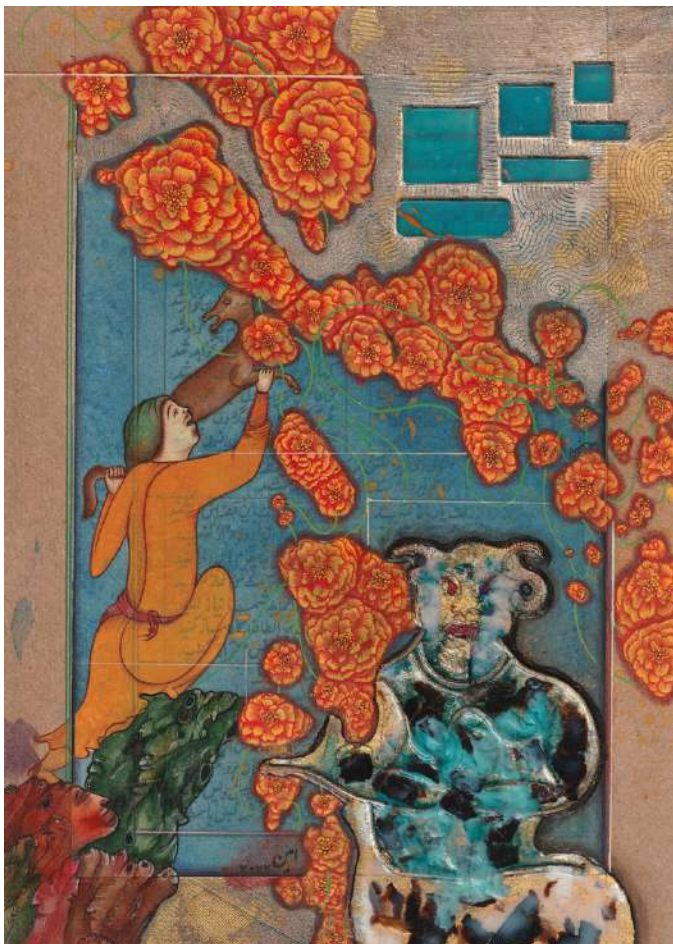


The synergies expressed through the integration of indigenous art techniques and the symbolic marigold flower depict the artist's nostalgic attempt to preserve the memories of his birth country in his stateless situation.

- Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo



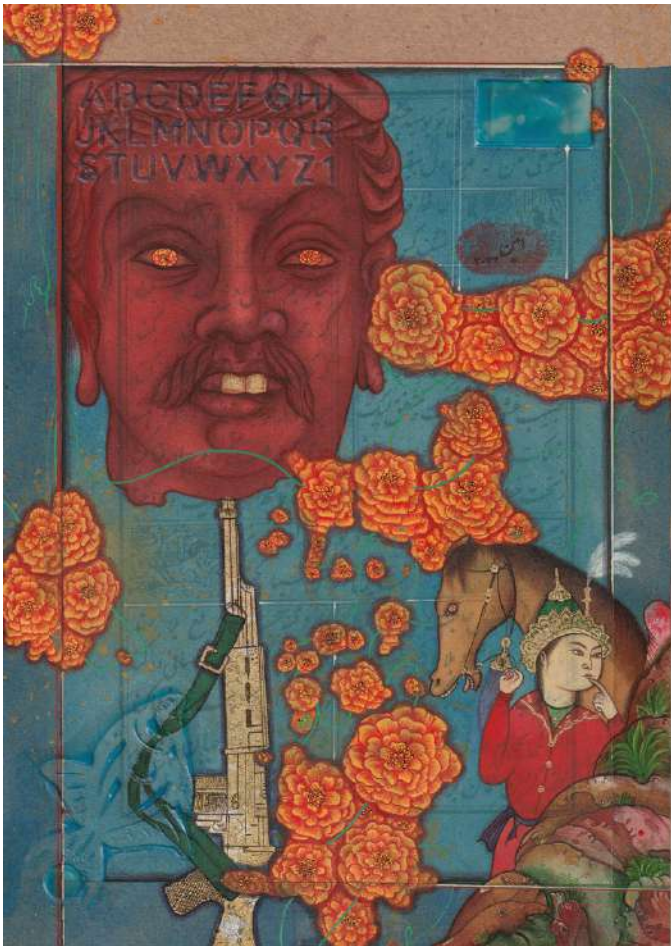
@amintaasha



To Wherever They Go (Series)

Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2022

Watercolor, gouache, gold, silver, acrylic on paper, 21x30 cm





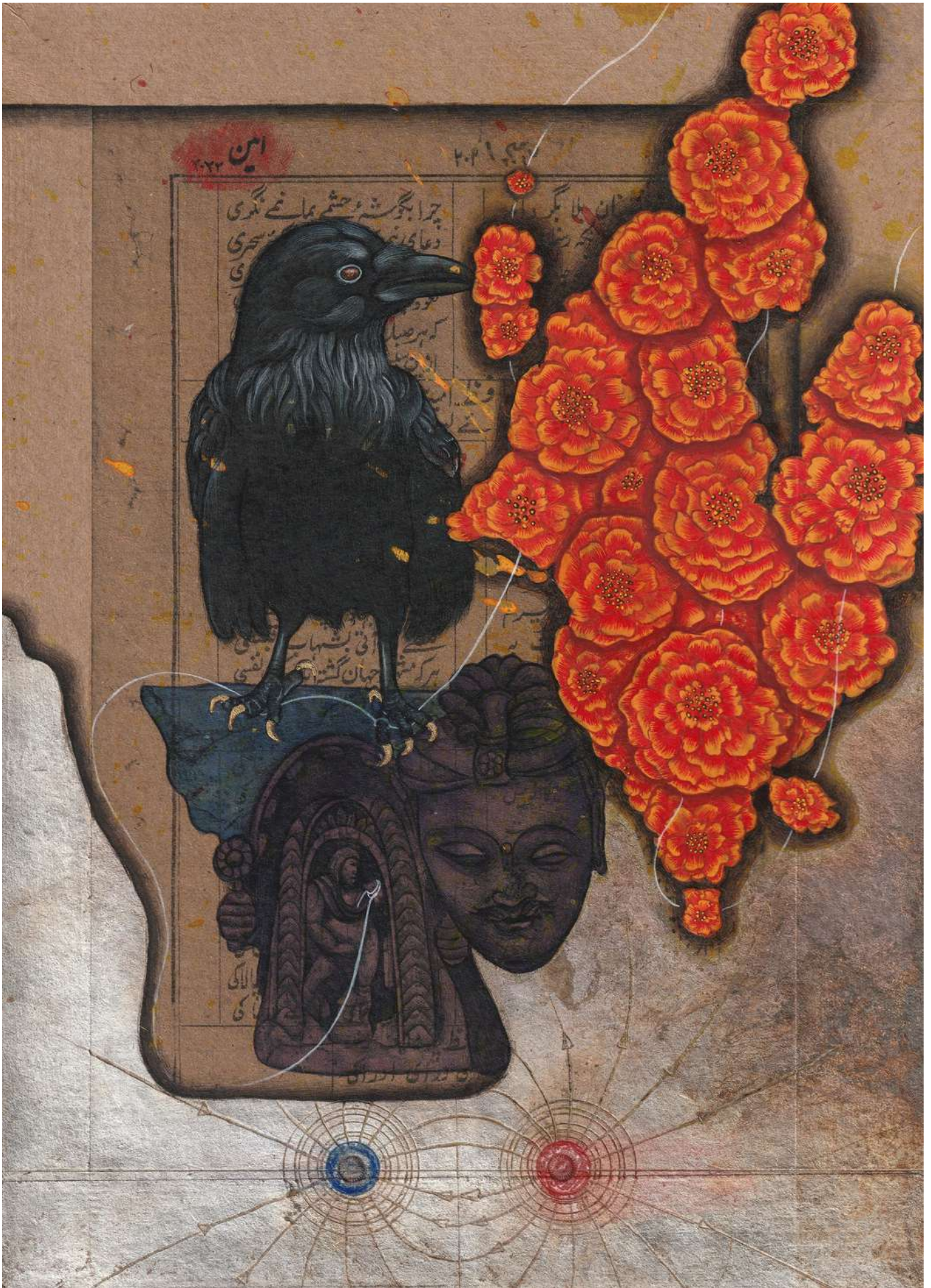
This too shall pass

Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2022

Watercolor, gouache, gold, silver on paper, 20x28 cm



Growth
Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2022
Watercolor, gouache, gold, silver on paper, 20x28 cm



Why

Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2022

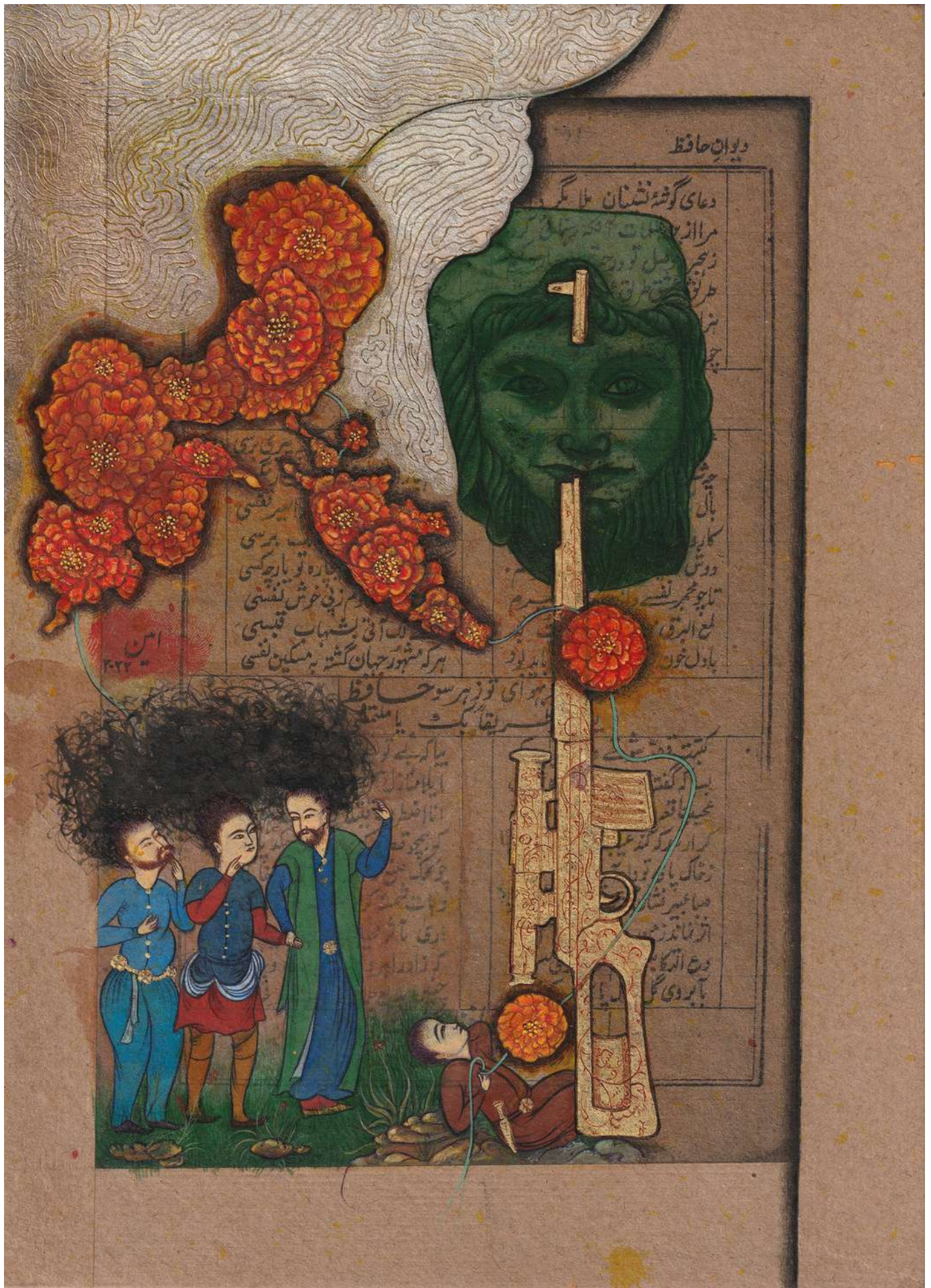
Watercolor, gouache, silver on paper, 20x28 cm



Let's go

Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2022

Watercolor, gouache, gold, silver on paper, 20x28 cm



Dua

Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2022

Watercolor, gouache, gold, silver on paper, 20x28 cm

Exhibition Catalogue

International Art Contest for Minority Artists Working on Statelessness Themes

To commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and the 8th Anniversary of the UNHCR #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the non-governmental organizations Freemuse and Minority Rights Group International (MRG) jointly organized the International Art Contest for Minority Artists Working on Statelessness Themes. The contest's main aims are to support minority artists' work on statelessness and raise awareness on the human rights of stateless individuals and groups belonging to minorities. This catalogue is a collection of work from the seven award recipients of the International Art Contest.



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