BIRDS OF NO NATION

Afghan Women on Art, Gender, Freedom, and Exile

Wednesday, March 8, 2023
Alumni Park & Doheny Memorial Library

"Art changes people’s minds and people change the world."
—Shamsia Hassani

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

LIVE ART SESSION
12 PM | ALUMNI PARK
Afghan graffiti artist and muralist Shamsia Hassani

CREATIVE WORKSHOP
5 PM | DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY, ROOM 240
Afghan American multimedia artist Gazelle Samizay

CONVERSATION
7 PM | DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY, ROOM 240
Panel Discussion on art, gender, freedom, and exile with Hassani, Samizay, and journalist and activist Najiba Ayubi, moderated by USC Dornsife professor Eliz Sanasarian
KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

“Birds of No Nation” is a three-part series of events celebrating International Women's Day that explores the role of arts and creativity in global struggles for women’s rights.

SHAMSIA HASSANI

Shamsia Hassani was one of the first female graffiti artists in Afghanistan, depicting a “new” Afghan woman in public spaces in Kabul. “The woman character used in her artworks portrays a human being who is proud, loud, and can bring positive changes to people’s lives,” Hassani’s website reads. Another part of her mission in making graffiti in Kabul was “to beautify the city with color amid the darkness of war,” Hassani told the L.A. Times.

Hassani was formerly a lecturer in fine arts at Kabul University, but left and sought refuge abroad after the Taliban takeover. She is now organizing graffiti festivals, art classes, and exhibitions around the world. She painted a mural in L.A.’s West Adams district during a 2016 residency at the Hammer Museum, and has also painted murals in Italy, Germany, India, Vietnam, Switzerland, Denmark, and Norway.

“People in my country are all the time traveling somewhere to stay safe and find a peaceful life. And we are missing a lot of our friends and family who have left the country. Usually, birds are traveling all the time; they have no nation. And I thought maybe we also have no nation because everybody has moved to different countries. It doesn’t matter what country that is; the thing that’s important is just feeling safe, staying alive. Art—I can tell that story.”—Shamsia Hassani in the Los Angeles Times, 2016

GAZELLE SAMIZAY

Gazelle Samizay is an Afghan American multimedia artist who was born in Kabul and raised in Washington state. Her work in photography, video, and mixed media has been exhibited across the United States and internationally. Samizay’s art explores and reflects the complexities and contradictions of culture, nationality, and gender through the lens of her bicultural identity. Her pieces are part of the permanent collections of LACMA, the Center for Photography at Woodstock, NY; and En Foco, New York. She is a founding member of the Afghan American Artists and Writers Association. Samizay holds an MFA in photography from the University of Arizona.
NAJIBA AYUBI

Najiba Ayubi is an Afghan journalist and activist for human rights and freedom of the press. She is the managing director of the Killid Group, an independent, non-profit Afghan media network. She received the International Women’s Media Foundation’s Courage in Journalism Award in 2013.

ELIZ SANASARIAN

Eliz Sanasarian is a professor in the departments of Political Science and International Relations, and Gender and Sexuality Studies at USC. She is the author of Religious Minorities in Iran and The Women’s Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

International Women’s Day is a global holiday celebrated on March 8. It has been observed annually since the early 1900s. The holiday has roots in movements for women’s suffrage and labor movements. On March 8, 1857, women garment workers marched in New York City to protest inhumane working conditions and low pay. On March 8, 1908, women workers on New York’s Lower East Side protested against child labor and demanded shorter work days, better pay, and women’s suffrage. Early National and then International Women’s Days in the United States and Europe were organized by socialist organizations, and the day was associated with Left-wing movements until it became mainstreamed, partly via incorporation into the multi-issue women’s movement, in the 1960s and ’70s. International Women’s Day was adopted by the UN in 1977.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- How do gender, culture, and identity inform the artists’ work? What else informs their work?
- How is their art related to political events or circumstances? To place?
- Shamsia Hassani has said, “Art is a kind of friendly way to fight with every kind of problem.” What do you think she means by “friendly”? How can this friendliness advance or enhance a fight for solutions to social or political problems?
- Does it matter where art is displayed? What is the impact of art on the streets versus art in galleries? Is art interpreted or received differently in these different spaces?
IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- The artists online
  shamsiahassani.net
gazellesamizay.com
- The Killid Groupe
tkg.af
- Arts in Action
  artsinaction.usc.edu
- Upcoming Visions and Voices events, including
  3/23 Rewriting War: A Conversation with Refugee Writers
  3/31 Dismantling Orientalism: This is Not a True Story
  4/6 Cynossema: Movement and Vocal Workshop
  4/12 Cynossema: A Dirge from the Dog’s Tomb
  4/30 Tales of Clamor

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

RUTH WALLACH of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

ARTICLES


BOOKS

- Zohra Saed and Sahar Muradi, One Story, Thirty Stories: An Anthology of Contemporary Afghan American Literature (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2010).

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Berang Arts | Kabul (Facebook page)

STREAMING MEDIA

- Enemies of Happiness (Women Make Movies, 2006).
- Afghanistan through Women’s Eyes (The Video Project, 2001).