

**Under the Patronage of
Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan**

I AM

JORDAN - U.K. - USA (2017-2018)

A strategic East-West exhibition celebrating the rich, diverse and pivotal contribution that Middle Eastern women make to the enduring global quest for harmony and peace

Introduction

I AM is a strategic peacebuilding exhibition organized by CARAVAN that showcases the insights and experiences of Middle Eastern women as they confront issues of culture, religion and social reality in a rapidly changing world both in the Middle East and West. It addresses today's critical and increasing need of creating respect, developing understanding and encouraging friendship between the Middle East and West.

The exhibition will premiere at Jordan's National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, for a period of two months, in spring 2017 (May 3-June 14, 2017) and will then be showcased in London at St. Martin in the Field's on Trafalgar Square (opening on July 3-August 20, 2017) and then premiere in North America on September 5, 2017 in Washington, D.C. at the Katzen Arts Center of the American University, before touring to five other North American venues through 2018.

At the heart of many communities, women work to support the needy, offer friendship and foster peace in all its forms. This unique exhibition sets out to recognize and celebrate the crucial role that women, especially in the Middle East, make to keeping hope alive and striving towards a more peaceful future.

I AM aims to challenge existing stereotypes about Middle Eastern women by showing that they are current, contemporary, engaged, active, dynamic and contribute very significantly to the fabric of local and global culture. This exhibition is an acknowledgement of how they continue to creatively evolve new narratives that uphold their heritage while embracing a future full of challenges.

Many exhibitions featuring women artists focus on the negative aspects of oppression, exploitation, suffering and inequality. **However, the I AM exhibition does the opposite, and instead visually celebrates the rich, diverse and crucial contributions that women make to the enduring global quest for harmony and peace.**

In this regard, the **I AM** exhibition focuses not of what women are missing and often do not have (for example, equal rights), but rather on what they inherently do have, and how fundamentally essential their contribution is freeing our world from sectarian strife of any kind.

Strategic Need for I AM

Given the increasing chasm of discord and misunderstanding that exists between the cultures and creeds of Middle East and the West, a new kind of movement is needed: one that builds on what we hold in common, and that wages peace on the “other”. In a world of stereotypes and assumptions, it is essential to redress the balance, listening to each other, and gaining true insights into each other. This is often most effectively achieved through art. We live in a time when the establishment of “creative demonstrations of dialogue” is required.

The I AM exhibition expresses the importance of not just tolerance between the peoples of the Middle East and West, but of living in “peace and with compassion” towards the “other”.

More specifically, the exhibition celebrates the unique voice of women in shaping a harmonious world. While hundreds of governmental and non-governmental entities are strategically addressing the challenges women face around the world, this initiative highlights what women contribute toward healing our world, because of their inherent connection to the sanctity of life, and their ability to nurture and protect it, thereby inspiring a legacy of harmony. This exhibition demonstrates that women are more often than not the guardians of harmony in our world.

Thus, the I AM exhibition uses the arts for an intercultural and interreligious interchange, enhancing understanding and respect, and deepening relationships between individuals of different cultural and religious backgrounds from the Middle East and West.

Background on the ‘I AM’ title

“I AM” as the title of an artwork implies a representation of an individual's culture and heritage — showing the uniqueness of the individual, as well as one's identity within the community and the world. The “I AM” theme serves to bring about creative “self-portraits,” with the objective of seeing the “other” with fresh eyes. As the early 20th century Lebanese artist and writer, Kahlil Gibran (who profoundly bridged East and West), beautifully said: “Your neighbor is your other self, dwelling behind a wall. In understanding, all walls shall fall down.” More recently, Amin Maalouf, the best-selling Lebanese-French writer, in his acclaimed book, *In the Name of Identity*, writes: “For it is often the way we look at other people that imprisons them within their own narrowest allegiances. And it is also the way we look at them that may set them free.” This “I AM” phrase thus expresses the tension between the unique and the shared – unique beliefs, values and methods of worship paired with shared goals and desires for oneself, one's community, and the world.

Additionally, the “I AM” is significant to the Abrahamic faiths on a variety of levels. The words of self-identification, “I AM”, are familiar to Christians and Muslims to represent God/Allah, and therefore serve as an interreligious bridge. In the familiar “burning bush/voice in the tree” story, God/Allah is identified to Moses/Moussa as “I AM”. Therefore, the phrase “I AM” remind us, regardless of creed, of all being all equal and one. Above all, this exhibition celebrates the diversity of human expression, while also asserting the common priorities that all persons seek and treasure.

Artists

The 31 women artists selected for I AM are premier artists of Middle Eastern origin and cover a broad geographic area from 12 countries. Some noted emerging artists were also selected for participation.

Each artist is submitting **one** original two or three-dimensional work in any still art medium done for this exhibition: painting, drawing, collage, photography, digital art, mixed media and sculpture. They will measure no larger than 1m on the longest length for a painting/photograph or 1.5m high for a sculptural piece. For those venues where sales are permitted, the artworks will be for sale with 70% of the proceeds going to the artist and 30% to charity.

Associated Program

I AM will be a catalyst for a variety of events and programs around the exhibition to stimulate discussion, dialogue and education around the exhibition's them promoting further understanding (such as talks, forms, lectures, music, literary readings, film screenings, panels, etc.).

Key Themes of the I AM Exhibition

WOMEN:

The choice to select solely women artists for this project is due in part to their underrepresentation in the global art scene, and more pertinently, because of the large number of very talented women artists of Middle Eastern origin who produce outstanding work that is of global importance.

ART:

CARAVAN's experience has shown that the arts often serve as the most effective medium for building bridges of respect, understanding, sharing and friendship between the Middle East and the West. The arts are a compelling vehicle to communicate and to connect peoples of all cultural and faith backgrounds, while also educating the next generation.

HOPE and PEACE:

We are constantly challenged on the personal, family, community, country and global levels. Hope inspires us and gives us the motivation to implement change and progress towards a world lived in harmony and at peace.

FAITH:

It has long been noted that common to all human societies is the need to develop a belief system, to explore our place in the universe and to seek meaning through our experience of life. This spiritual journey ties us all together in our quest for a better life; it is essentially an expression of faith.

Guest Curator

Based between London and the United Arab Emirates, Gallery Director and Curator, **Janet Rady** is a Specialist in Contemporary Art from the Middle East, with over twenty-five years' experience of the International Art Market including Leading Auction Houses and Major Commercial Galleries.

Janet Rady holds a Masters Degree in Islamic Art History from the University of Melbourne and a BA from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. She is a member of the Arab British Chamber of Commerce and sits on the Advisory Council of CARAVAN. Janet is also the Hon Lectures Secretary for the Iran Society, on the Editorial Board of the Middle East in London magazine, and a Judge for the Edinburgh Iranian Festival Art Prize. She is an Expert for Auctionata and Head of Development at ArtBahrain. Janet has recently edited the book "33 Artists... 33 Islands... A Kingdom of Art" - a comprehensive survey of the artists of Bahrain.

Background on CARAVAN, the global coordinating body

The I AM exhibition builds upon nine successful years of strategic East-West arts initiatives implemented by CARAVAN. CARAVAN is an international and interreligious peacebuilding arts NGO that originated in Cairo, Egypt in 2009, with the objective of building bridges through the arts between the creeds and cultures of the Middle East and West.

CARAVAN's experience demonstrates that the arts can serve as one of the most effective mediums to enhance understanding, bring about respect, enable sharing, and deepen friendships between those of different cultures and faiths in the Middle East and the West. A flagship initiative of CARAVAN is the globally recognized annual CARAVAN Exhibition of Art, a unique arts initiative that brings together many of the premier and emerging artists from the Middle East and the West. These CARAVAN exhibitions have resulted in unprecedented gatherings of renowned Middle Eastern and Western artists who use art for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. These exhibitions have garnered attention from the international press, media and art world, and attract thousands of visitors.

Following on from the strategic successes of the CARAVAN peacebuilding art initiatives, the I AM exhibition takes the same message of intercultural and interreligious understanding and harmony around the world.

Funding/Sponsorship

As in all CARAVAN artistic initiatives, individual, corporate, philanthropic or governmental sponsorship is sought for the I AM exhibition.