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MoMu | Fashion Museum Antwerp and Texture Kortrijk present  
@ Texture - Noordstraat 28 - Kortrijk  
[www.texturekortrijk.be](http://www.texturekortrijk.be) - [www.momu.be](http://www.momu.be)



Textile

as

Resistance

ance



# INTRO

## THE POWER OF NO-SLOGAN FABRICS

MoMu Antwerp and Texture present the exhibition and publication 'Textile as Resistance' in collaboration with photographer Mashid Mohadjerin and journalist Samira Bendadi. Taking textiles as a starting point, the curators searched for new stories that closely connect to important themes in their own work: activism, the role of women in resistance, migration and displacement, cultural and social alienation and the search for a cultural identity.

'Textile as Resistance: The power of no-slogan fabrics' gives a voice and face to the – often silent – resistance of people around the world who fight for the survival of their

families, communities and the social cohesion of their familiar everyday reality. In both words and images Bendadi and Mohadjerin show the pain and sadness of this fight, as well as the incredible resilience, creativity and initiative demonstrated by people in displaced and traumatising situations. They approach great contemporary issues concerning migration and cultural identity through individual and personal testimonies that cross religious, cultural and national borders. Their search started in Antwerp, but the stories they tell take us along to other parts of the world, to Paris and Beirut, Aleppo and Kabul. Textiles are literally and figuratively the connective element between individuals, communities and cultures.





# THE THREAD OF LIFE

## ZENA SABBAGH

When she talks about “here”, Zena Sabbagh is literal-ly talking about her living room. One year into her stay in the Lebanese capital, she transformed this living room into a studio and meeting place where women try to pick up the thread of their lives again through sewing, embroidery and textile printing. The warmth and friendliness of the place embrace you as soon as you enter her apartment.

‘The most important thing for me was for these people who have lost everything to know that they have a place in society, that they are citizens. I wanted them to know that they are not just shadows.’

## MAHA HOESSEIN

Three years ago Maha heard about Zena’s studio through a friend. ‘There’s no Palestinian woman who doesn’t know how to embroider. When I saw Zena, with her smile and her warm welcome, I immediately got a good feeling. I was in her studio for barely two months, she didn’t really know me well, and she lent me 100 dollars. I said: “I’m going to Syria. I don’t know if I’ll be back. I don’t know if I’ll still be alive.” Zena said: “Take the money and give it back when you return”.’

## OM IMAD (ZEYNEB)

‘I want to flee from my reality, from my sorrow. I want to be strong for my oldest son Imad, who is in Turkey and whom I’ve not seen for eight years. I’ve not seen my daughter who lives in Egypt for five years. I’m here with my daughter. She’s 15. My husband’s sick, physically and mentally. If Imad were here, that would be better. I feel that I need my children.’



# EMBROIDERING NOT TO FORGET

## SAMIRA SALAH

'What does it mean to be a Palestinian today?', Samira Salah asks herself. 'My daughter has French nationality and my other daughter has German nationality because their husbands have these nationalities. This question has been the subject of discussion for a long time among the young generation of Palestinians. They've come to the conclusion that it's not a piece of paper that determines who you are. Nationality is not identity. Ultimately, the Palestinian issue is not a matter for Palestinians alone. It is a universal and human issue. You don't have to be a Palestinian to embrace the Palestinian cause and stand up for Palestinians' rights. That's why I believe in returning.'

## MALAK BAKOOR

'I never fled when there was fighting. Everyone went away and returned when it became quiet. I saw how exhausting that was. I refused to leave my house. At a certain point when the fighting became fierce and the people fled from the village, I kept calm and prepared the children.' 'For death?', I ask her. 'Yes', she says. 'I washed them and had them say the shahada [testimony of faith]. They were scared in the beginning and that made me nervous. I told them that Allah loves us and that we go to heaven. When they saw that I was strong, they also became strong.'





# AFRICA IS COMING

## IDRISS AND ALPHA DIALO

'When I started in this profession, I thought I would be one of the last dressmakers. African fabric was for the mamas. But now young people who've never set foot in Africa want to show up in an African outfit on all their festive occasions, from baptisms to en-gagements and marriages.'

The story that wax print fabric originated in Asia, because it was inspired by the Indonesian technique of batik, and that it was introduced to the African continent by the Dutch company Vlisco at the end of the 19th century, is something of which Idriss and Alpha Dialo are unaware. Nor are they particularly interested in it. What they do know is that each country has its own prints and that those from Ghana are the most popular, that the best wax fabrics come from the Netherlands and the Chinese ones are of inferior quality. Most importantly, African textiles ought to be produced in Africa by African companies. It's ultimately about economics.

'I know that many Africans don't understand this, but I'm not one of those who blame the African heads of state', Idriss replies, when I ask him about the responsibility of African leaders. 'I know they have no choice, because every time there's a statesman who is a nationalist and loves his people, it doesn't work. He's killed or he's accused of something. It's still the colonial powers that decide.'



# AFGHAN PRIDE

## ZOLAYKHA SHERZAD

The young girl who fled the war with her parents at the age of ten and found a safe haven in Switzerland has never forgotten the country of her birth, even though she managed to suppress that feeling for a long time. 'I left my country brutally. In your teens, you try to deny your origins. I wanted to blend into the Swiss context. It was only after completing my studies and starting work that I began looking for my roots. Apart from a few nostalgic memories, I had no connections with Afghanistan.'

'It is partly a return to sources, but with a modern vision. Modern is not synonymous with Western', the designer emphasises. 'Modern means: reinterpreting what we already have, and making it suitable for con-temporary life. I work on elements and concepts from old pieces of clothing. For the linings, I work with fabrics with typical Afghan motifs and flowers. I add elements on the outside, including through the use of embroidery, that refer to Afghan culture.'

'As in all cultures, Afghan pride is what people make locally. We have known war for 40 years and much has been lost. It is important to point out that our history is not one of war and internal conflicts. Our history is the result of an external invasion that was destructive, both physically and socially.'



# THE MIRACLE

## ARPI MANGASSARIAN

'It happened in 1915. The refugee caravan continued on its way, but my great-grandmother could not. She no longer had the strength to continue walking. She had lost the donkey that carried her. Her knees hurt terribly. Then she said to her daughter – that is, my grandmother: "Nazili, leave me here, leave me alone, I want to be relieved of the pain." My grandmother answered: "I'm not leaving you behind, I'll carry you on my shoulders, on my back." And my great-grandmother said: "Listen, you leave, you move on and you don't look back." My grandmother obeyed. She left her mother behind and went on with the group.'

'My aunt was a seamstress. I spent part of my holidays with her. We had neighbours who were Shiites. I don't like talking about communities. My aunt taught neighbourhood girls to sew, but not only that. She also taught them how to handle their menfolk and their environment. I listened and admired her. She said to me and to the other girls: "There's a skill in a girl's every finger." My aunt influenced me. I got to know fabric from her, and embroidery too.'



# SPIRITUALITY IN WHITE

## DADA CHAWCHA

Dada Chawcha always dressed in white, as women after a certain age often do in North Africa – especially after going on a pilgrimage to Mecca. White is the symbol of purity and abstinence from every sin. Dada Chawcha, however, has never been on a pilgrimage. She never had the money for that. But she could afford her own funeral, and so she did. As is customary, she purchased her shroud herself, which she then gave away. She ate nothing of the food she had had prepared. This is how it should be: the shroud you are buying is used by someone else and you are not eating because you are supposed to be dead.

## SUFISM

The dichotomy between Sufism and Islam has been, and continues to be, built upon. Islam is dismissed today as religious terror and Sufism is presented as the solution. Muslims too use this rhetoric. 'When a taxi driver in Pakistan tells you he is a Sufi, he's not trying to indicate that he is following a certain direction such as Sunni or Shia Islam. It's his way of saying he's not one of those terrorists. It's a way to win points with Westerners', says Jonas Slaats.

Clothing has a strong symbolic significance for Sufi orders. One of the most important items of clothing of the Mevlevi is the hirka, a woollen, shirt-like garment or a long-sleeved coat. By wearing a hirka, a person shows that he knows the principles of the sect to which he belongs and of religious law. The hirka refers to worldly life, while the white tunic represents a person's shroud. When the Mevlevi dervish, as part of the whirling ceremony, throws off the hirka, it means he is turning his back on the world to come closer to God.



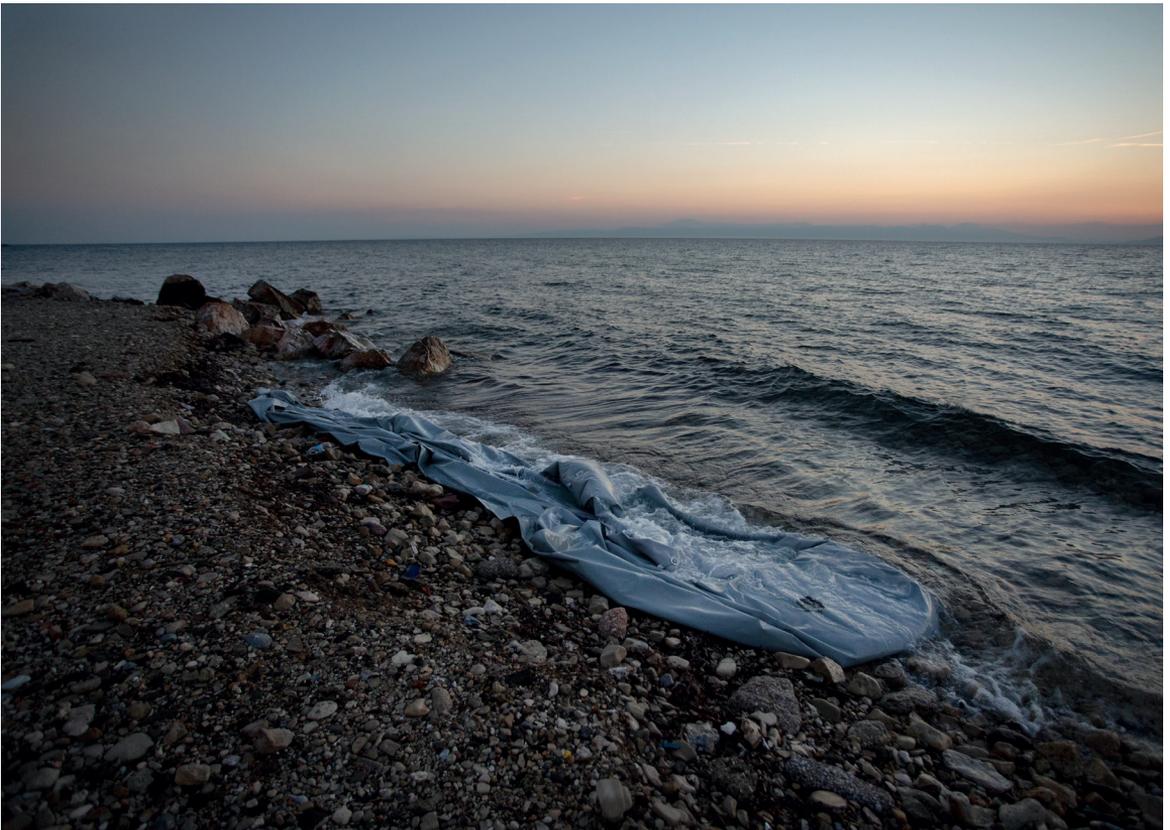
# FAREWELL

The muezzin recites the call to evening prayer. The father gestures with a hand to place him on the floor, towards Mecca. It's the second time he has asked. The last time. He is conscious until the last second and does what needs to be done. He does not forget to pronounce his shahada again. She sits next to him and sees his soul struggling to leave his body. Death is like removing wool from a thorn plant, as painful and difficult.

## HALIMA

'I chaired a women's association and asked the women if they were interested in the theme of 'ritual washing of the dead'. They were.

I served as the model. I was the body that had to be washed and wrapped in the shroud. It did something to me. I crawled into my role and thought: it's done, life is over and now what? A mass of questions occurred to me at that time. "What have I done with my life?", I asked myself.'



**PRACTICAL**

# Textile as Resist- ance

15/11/2019 - 16/02/2020

Texture, Noordstraat 28, 8500 Kortrijk

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday,  
10AM-5PM (closed on Monday)

Prices: €6 / €4 reduction tarif

Guided tours: €66, more info & reservations:

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*After Kortrijk the exhibition travels to Kunsthal  
Extra City in Antwerp and will be on view from  
21 March until 19 April 2020.*

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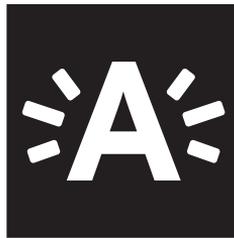
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MoMu is closed to the public until Spring 2021 for intensive renovation and expansion work. While the building is under construction, you can enjoy an extra muros programme with exhibitions and activities on location.



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