

# MEI Art Gallery opens one of the first exhibitions of contemporary Kurdish art in the U.S.

**WASHINGTON, DC.-** Speaking Across Mountains: Contemporary Kurdish Artists in Dialogue, the second curated exhibition at the [MEI Art Gallery](#) – the Middle East Institute’s new non-commercial art space and the first of its kind in Washington, D.C., is an exploration of contemporary art by ten artists who ethnically identify as Kurdish. On view from December 6, 2019 through February 20, 2020, the show is curated by Heba Elkayal, an independent curator and writer based between New York and Cairo.

The diversity in the featured artists’ backgrounds, narratives and aesthetic approaches reflects the trans-national reality of the global Kurdish community. The artists, many of whom are living in diaspora, practice and produce work on a variety of themes that are not immediately or explicitly related to the topic of Kurdish identity. Instead, their works examine subjects that touch on history, geography and politics, as well as broader cultural themes of language, exile, gender and displacement that have long dominated the Kurdish experience

The exhibition aims to go beyond the tragically topical headlines of recent events that limit understanding of the complexity of Kurdish experiences to present, and instead presents personal reflections in a range of media – including painting, video, photography, textile, sculpture and assembled constructions. A nuanced consideration of a group of people who share as many commonalities as they do differences, Speaking Across Mountains explores tensions in each individual artist’s practice as well as threads of conversation between selected works. An essential aspect of the exhibition is the development of dialogue – both artistic and cultural – that takes place amongst the artists themselves.

Acknowledging the wide-ranging experiences of Kurdish artists and their myriad points of origins, *Speaking Across Mountains* presents works by artists from a variety of Kurdish territories and related countries. Featured artists include Sherko Abbas, Serwan Baraan, Hayv Kahraman, Kani Kamil, and Walid Siti of Iraq; Savas Boyraz, Zehra Dogen and Şener Özmen of Turkey; and Khadija Baker and Bahram Hajou of Syria. Iranian Kurds are being represented in a program of films accompanying the exhibition.

*Speaking Across Mountains*, which will be complemented by panel discussions and film screenings, offers audiences a rare opportunity to engage in conversation about the diversity of Kurdish experiences through the eyes of leading Kurdish artists.