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SCRATCHED

مشطوبة

IDENTITIES

هويات

Republic of Yemen
Ministry of Education

2006

School Year

An exhibition by
Shatha Altowai
معرض لشذى التوي




11 Oct - 11 Nov
11 أكتوبر - 11 نوفمبر

Times vary - booking required
تختلف الأوقات بحسب اليوم - الحجز مطلوب

المكان: Southside Community Centre, Edinburgh

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An exhibition that talks about strong, successful women who are forced to hide their own identities due to enforced community constraints.

'Scratched Identities' is an exhibition by Yemeni artist in exile Shatha Altowai that talks about strong, successful women who are forced to hide their own identities due to the community constraints that are imposed on them.



In Shatha's words:

'I have asked Yemeni women to send me their own pictures and I have explained the purpose of it. They were excited and encouraged to send me their own photos. Some of them can't reveal their identity, while others can. Not to forget to mention that someone told me that she couldn't do it before but she finally retrieved her own identity.'

There are a lot of issues that I could highlight through my paintings while I was in Yemen. However, there are certain topics I wished to discuss but whenever I wanted to paint it, I hesitated, because it is considered as a sensitive matter and the people's reaction is un guaranteed.

So I am here in Edinburgh, with a freedom of expression, I had more courage and confidence to release what's in my head.

Before I explain about the exhibition, I want to tell you a small story that happened to me, and it was the beginning of everything...

When I was 10 years old, in the sixth grade as I remember and while I was carrying my certificate with my little tiny picture stapled to it, I went with a pride to my classmate to show off my results. I was so happy because I got the second place in the class.



My classmate was older than me with one year or a bit more than that.

When I went to have a look at her grades I was surprised to see a flowerish sticker on her personal photo that was stapled on her certificate and when I asked her why did you put that sticker!? I remember she told me that she is a grown up woman now and no one can see her face!

And that was the shock for me, I was extremely surprised and due to my young age that was the first time for me to realise that there is a difference between women and men in certificates in our society.

Of course, a man can show this identity until his last days, but for a women in some families, she must hide or cover her own identity when she reaches a certain age. Lucky ones are those who came from open minded families that are proud of their daughter's identity. And for the rest, women are considered as a shaming bomb, if their identity was leaked in the wrong hands.



For a moment, I did not want to grow up! So I don't have to cover or scratch my own identity.

Unfortunately, the cycle of fear was not restricted on documents or in paperwork. It expanded until it reaches the digital world like social media, smart phones, applications etc.

And because I am a woman, I had to hide my own identity for a very long time, and I fought with all my strength to get it back and be proud of it!!

Yes, I wanted to give that small light and strength to those who are still afraid to appear, for those who are still wanting to say I am here.

The idea of the scratched identities exhibition is to give support, solidarity and to wave that there is a problem here...

Because, unfortunately the faces of those women that covered with the emojis which I have seen recently over the Internet is only the updated version of the flowerish sticker that I have seen 20 years ago!

It is sad to see those beautiful women are hiding and afraid to shine...

It is very painful to see those beautiful women are covering their own identity as an act of normality without wondering why.

If we identify the problem, then the solution will be found.

For where I am, I wanted to add to the exhibition a sort of societal experience.

"Talking about a problem, it is not like when you experience it"

So, besides of my paintings, I wanted to give the exhibition a touch of reality and be closer to the community.

To women in particular.

In term of the societal experience here in Edinburgh, I have asked some women with different culture and backgrounds to give their support and solidarity to any woman who has gone through all of this; "We are here to support you, get up and restore your own face".





Scratched Identities portraits in Edinburgh were taken by the Iranian acclaimed photo-journalist Laleh Sherkat. While some portraits in Yemen were taken by photographer Sara Othman

Women in leadership - cancelling women's voices in Scotland and the UK

For women and girls on the internet, online abuse and harassment is not a new phenomenon. Writing in 1995, feminist journalist and academic Sue Innes wrote that for women, the internet "was a new medium with an old message: keep out." Since then, online abuse and harassment have only spread and adapted, welcoming the rise of the new mediums of social media and becoming endemic across

these platforms. Women are 27 times more likely to be harassed online, and 1 in 14 tweets sent to women journalists in the UK and US is abusive or 'problematic'. In Scotland, a recent Girlguiding survey showed that 27% of girls had experienced sexual harassment on social media, and that 68% of girls said they felt they had to change how they behave to fit in when they are online.

When racism intersects with misogyny, the figures become even more chilling: black women are 84% more likely to be mentioned in abusive tweets, and in a study of online abuse of politicians, MP Diane Abbott infamously received almost half of all abuse directed at female MPs. Engender Scotland.

Online trolling, sexist comments, insults and threats of violence have become too common for women trying to serve their community. "It's becoming a massive issue - it's sexism, bullying, people being judged on their appearance... and people shouldn't have to put up with it just because they

are in a prominent position," said Jenny Griffin, who runs Unison's cyber bullying course. It's definitely putting women off standing for these roles, particularly women with kids, as they don't want to put their family through it as the people around you often get targeted too."

Scottish Women's Rights Activist Talat Yaqoob explains how the sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse she receives on Twitter is far worse than anything she has experienced offline. "I, 100%, don't experience the level of abuse offline that I do online. I experience it - but the frequency of it and the toxic nature of it is

more online than what I experience in real life because people know they get away with it more. If people do it, it's behind an anonymous Twitter profile. Offline, you have to be physically in front of me. I don't think that people understand the consequences of what they say online." *Amnesty International*.

"ONLINE ABUSE IS UNACCEPTABLE FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS, JUST AS IT'S UNACCEPTABLE FOR A WOMAN ANYWHERE TO SUFFER THAT KIND OF ABUSE."

Nicola Sturgeon (SNP), First Minister of Scotland

'Toxic Twitter' report by
Amnesty International:



Paintings pf Scratched Identities Exhibition:



