

ABOUT AANM

Since opening its doors in 2005, the Arab American National Museum (AANM) remains the nation's only cultural institution that documents, preserves and presents the history, culture and contributions of Arab Americans. Today, AANM sees itself as a touchstone that connects communities to Arab American culture and experiences. Located in Dearborn, Michigan, amid one of the largest concentrations of Arab Americans in the United States, AANM presents original exhibitions, cutting-edge art, film screenings and performances in Michigan and in major cities across the U.S., and continually documents the history and experiences of Arab Americans.

AANM is one of just seven Michigan Affiliates of the Smithsonian Institution and is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. AANM is a founding member of the Southeast Michigan nonprofit arts and culture association, CultureSource, as well as the Immigration and Civil Rights Network of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and the Michigan Alliance for Cultural Accessibility, and is a member of the National Performance Network.

In 2020, AANM was recognized as one of America's Cultural Treasures by the Ford Foundation for being a "significant national anchor for artistic and cultural diversity in America." This \$156 million grant initiative was intended to help fund Black, Latinx, Asian and Indigenous arts organizations that have overcome hardships presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This major recognition is an acknowledgement of the important and enriching contributions that communities, like the Arab American community, make to the cultural life of the United States.

AANM is an institution of ACCESS, the most comprehensive Arab American community nonprofit in the nation, founded in 1971.















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FROM THE AANM DIRECTOR



Dear friends,

In my letter last year, I wrote about how the Arab American National Museum (AANM) navigates its responsibility to serve our community when it is in crisis. The pages of this annual report illustrate how we strove to respond to the unthinkable horrors of genocide against the Palestinian people—our people—by centering Palestine in much of our work.

The past eighteen months have been some of the most challenging of my life, but it's been the work my team and I do at AANM, day in and day out, that has brought me much solace. It is knowing that our work is important and necessary, now more than ever. And our work is, simply put, telling stories—telling our stories. Stories are how we make sense of the world. It gives order to an otherwise random series of events. Stories are our legacy, our heritage, our existence. Telling stories is one of the ways we make our mark in and on the world. The Arab American National Museum is needed now more than ever to make sure that our stories—whether told through oral histories, novels, poems, paintings or performances—endure.

We need to continue telling and documenting our stories that are told in our words and our voices because there are many who want us to be silent. AANM is a space that not only captures and preserves stories, but is a place where stories are made. We are a place where families can come together and learn about their community and its history, and bond over a shared experience. We are a place where a young Arab American school girl can visit

with her class and learn about people who are Arab like her, who look like her, who have a name like hers and show her that she too can be a world class surgeon, a prize-winning author, a Congresswoman, or an Oscarwinning actor. We are a place where researchers can come and use our archive to further their knowledge and understanding of the role Arab Americans have made as agents of history and change. We are a place where artists can come and meet each other, share and incubate ideas, and produce marvelous and innovative works of art. There is no other place like it for our Arab American community and it is my privilege as it should be yours to champion its ongoing success and national impact.

Twenty years ago, AANM emerged out of the horrors of 9/11 and its aftermath with a mission to counter misconceptions, lies and negative stereotypes about Arabs that permeated American culture and society. As we approach our 20th anniversary, we reflect on the path we've forged together: a path that has had us shifting from challenging apocryphal narratives about who Arab Americans are to nurturing a beloved space where the stories that shape us are amplified, and where those who continue to move our community forward can find therein strength and inspiration.

In solidarity,

Diana Abouali

FROM THE NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR



Dear friends,

It has been my sincere honor and pleasure to serve again as Chair of the National Advisory Board (NAB) for the Arab American National Museum (AANM), the only museum dedicated to telling the Arab American story. This past year has been one of progress, reflection and renewed purpose as we continue our mission to document, present and preserve the stories that inform our future. This past year has also been profoundly difficult for our Arab American community and my heart goes out to every person and family who has suffered from the genocide against the Palestinian people.

In spite of the challenges we faced, I am grateful to have been on this journey alongside my esteemed board members and AANM Director Dr. Diana Abouali because, together, we have creatively responded to the needs of our community. At a time when many museums and arts organizations shut their doors in the face of Palestinians and their allies, AANM forged paths for artists, activists and more to speak their minds freely and safely. From grief circles to a monthly virtual series called Words for Palestine, this institution has showed up for its local and national community with fervor and determination. In these times of adversity, AANM's role as a storyteller becomes ever more critical, as we endeavor to bring to light our narratives with authenticity.

Our efforts have not gone unnoticed. Thanks to the dedication of our extraordinary staff, volunteers, supporters and partners across the country, AANM has reached new milestones. From innovative educational programs

and exhibitions to expanded digital content and outreach, AANM is deepening its impact and broadening its reach every day. As AANM enters its 20th year, it has earned its right to being a pillar of education and pride in the Arab American community.

As we look ahead, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my fellow National Advisory Board members, our generous donors and benefactors, and the steadfast Museum staff, whose unwavering dedication to AANM's mission is the glue that keeps this house standing. Together, we are capable of elevating the Museum that champions our cultural legacy and empowers future generations.

In solidarity and hope,

Faiza Zalila

ALL EYES ON GAZA & BEYOND

For much of 2024, we were all struggling as we continued to bear witness to the genocide in Gaza, as well as the devastation of Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, the Congo and-tragically-beyond. We knew there was not much we could do to change the harsh reality we lived in. We asked ourselves, what is the role of a museum like ours when our community is in crisis? We saw that our duty as a community space was to bring people together and our responsibility as a museum was to lead in sharing knowledge and accurate information about the Arab American experience, from our heritage and looking ahead to our future. As such, AANM pivoted its daily routine to uplift Palestinian voices and stories from numerous approaches. Beginning with the archive, AANM collected stories and activist ephemera to preserve in its permanent collection instances of Arab Americans coming together at community civil actions in times of crisis. Then, AANM opened its doors to organizers who needed a space to convene and discuss solidarity actions. Most notably, the Museum curated programming that served to educate about Palestine, respond to our people's needs and motivate the community to act in solidarity.



VOICES FROM GAZA

On November 29, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, AANM partnered with Detroit-based theater company, A Host of People, to participate in a global artistic solidarity call to present *The Gaza Mono-Logues*, testimonies written by ASHTAR youth (a theatre based in Palestine) in 2010, after the first war on the Gaza Strip. These testimonies held truth more than a decade later, highlighting the horrors, hopes and resilience of the courageous Palestinians to a wider audience, bringing out the voices of men, women and children living in Gaza.





OUR PEOPLE ON SCREEN

AANM partnered with Palestine Cinema Days, Project 1948 and the Arab Film and Media Institute to screen a variety of titles such as *Gaza Surf Club*, *From Under the Rubble* and *Gaza Fights for Freedom*. AANM also presented a series of short films from Yemen and *Soleil O*, a Mauritanian film described as "a furious howl of resistance against racist oppression and colonialism." The latter two film programs brought in new audiences to the Museum; some of the attendees were even new to Dearborn!

WORDS FOR PALESTINE

A monthly online poetry series, this program aims to center and highlight Palestinian voices amidst the genocide while also featuring readers of diverse backgrounds who align in the struggle for liberation of the global majority.

LOUDER THAN BOMBS

If we didn't already know, this concert proved to us how hungry our community is for opportunities to express themselves musically. AANM artist-in-residence and Syrian opera singer Lubana Al-Quntar built and directed an Arab American community choir as well as presented a concert with the choir in just four short weeks. She transformed a diverse group of people of various ages—who may or may not speak Arabic, may or may not have ever been part of a choir or even sung in public before—into a cohesive and moving performance of beloved songs from our homelands.

ENGAGEMENT & EXPERIENCES

Over the years, AANM has presented a wide range of dynamic and influential programs that have become a core cultural experience in our Arab American community. With established events such as the Arab American Book Awards and the Arab Film Festival, we've welcomed artists to Dearborn and uplifted their works. Through new youth programs, we learned from the next generation of leaders while providing them with professional opportunities and resources. Thus, we deepen our role as a museum while expanding our ecosystem.









WHEN WORDS MATTER MOST

Every November, AANM proudly presents the nation's only Arab American Book Awards. This year, however, the Book Awards held a different energy. In 2023, after a month of relentless bombing on the Gaza Strip by Israeli Occupation Forces and a series of canceled Palestinian events and censored Palestinian voices in the U.S., the Book Awards—and the subsequent open mic-were a defiant expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people. In her acceptance speech for the Anan Ameri Lifetime Achievement Award, poet Naomi Shihab Nye said, "We need every one of your voices to hold us together and hold us up." A powerful and moving night, this event cemented the Museum's responsibility to maintain a space where condemnation of genocide and ethnic cleansing can be made and where our community can come together.

GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

Each year that we host the Arab Film Festival (AFF), we foster new platforms, connections and expressions of this dynamic form of art and storytelling. This year, we piloted the AFF Industry Mixer, which brought together local and regional filmmakers to network and connect, expanding and deepening the film ecosystem in Southeast Michigan and beyond. The festival's highlight was the immensely popular, *Goodbye Julia* by Mohamed Kordofani, which brought in overflow crowds from as far as Flint, followed by a concert by Omar Ihsas, a Sudanese singer and composer known for his social activism and calls for reconciliation and peace in Darfur.

BUDDING TO BLOSSOMING ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES

Last summer, AANM launched the Al-Hadiga Apprenticeship in Environmental Stewardship, a new youth program that provided high school students with opportunities for hands-on scientific learning, communitybased environmental activism and purpose-driven story-telling over the course of three months. The "Eco Crew," as they were called, grew a green thumb planting seeds and nurturing vegetables in AANM's rooftop garden. In addition to developing practical gardening and sustainability skills, the students deepened their knowledge of environmental activism and applied it by conducting a research project on a topic of their choosing. Their apprenticeship culminated in a symposium where each student presented their findings and expressed where they want to go next with their newly fostered sense of responsibility towards the planet we call home.

TOURING THE MUSEUM

One of the unspoken themes of the year at the Museum was creating space: for exploration, for play, for change. Our two exhibitions of the year, *Colonial Colonnade* and *Waiting for Peace*, did that by taking what has been accepted as fact—language, history, borders—and subverting it to reveal the nuanced truth of first-hand experiences. As we continue to update the Museum's permanent galleries, we are also interrogating our perception of "permanence" in our space when it relates to sharing the history of an identity that remains in constant flux.











COLONIAL COLONNADE

What happens when improvisation is introduced into existing patterns? Pattern repetition and text are the foundation for Doris Bittar's site-specific installation and other works in her first solo exhibition at AANM. However, these patterns became non-linear, interactive and immersive realms, often larger than human scale. Colonial Colonnade thus included a space for reflection, play and free movement. Visitors were encouraged to push into words, patterns and symbols that may have pushed back, disrupting sequences. During the opening reception of the exhibition, dancer Nadia Khayrallah and oud player Clarissa Bittar put on a performance titled, "Textual Dances," interpreting the installation through improvisational movement and music. This improvisation is partly a reclamation, undoing or challenging how colonization has affected language, among other aspects of culture.

WAITING FOR PEACE

Despite being most known for creating the way-finding symbols seen in public buildings and airports, Palestinian American designer Rajie Cook created art in a variety of mediums. The artworks included in *Waiting for Peace* are from the last two decades of Cook's life and they focused primarily on the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. Cook said, "I remember my dad—he died at the age of 94—old and blind and sitting by the radio saying he was waiting to hear something good... about peace in the Middle East. I'm 74, and I don't know if I'll ever hear it either." Rajie Cook died a few months shy of 91, still waiting for peace. The opening reception of the exhibition was paired with Visualizing Palestine's book launch, a collaboration that emphasized the persuasive and powerful tool of visual design in storytelling.

A MAP TELLS A STORY

Since the Museum opened, one of the favorite exhibits was that of the Arab World Map. A mostly static image with light-up features, the map showed Museum visitors how vast the Arab world is and from where Arab Americans traced their heritage. But we know a map is more than just a depiction of location or geography. AANM's newly remodeled Arab world map is an iteractive digital exhibit that, among many things, tells stories of Arab migration, illustrates the changing borders of the Arab World over time and highlights the nuances of Arab, MENA (Middle Eastern or North African) and SWANA (Southwest Asian or North African) identities.

RESEARCH & COLLECTIONS



Throughout the year, Museum staff have traveled around the country to present research and reflections about our place at the intersection of art, culture and activism. These presentations birth exciting collaborations, innovative programs and turn curious onlookers into Museum supporters. Museum staff thus double as ambassadors of the community as well as thought leaders on placemaking. Notable features include an article in the Fall 2023 issue of Exhibition by Public Programming Coordinator Fatima Al-Rasool, a paper by Content and Research Manager Kyle Wynter-Stoner presented at the "Locating Palestine in the Arab Americas Conference," and an opinion piece by AANM Director Diana Abouali published in Museums Association about how AANM is countering rising censorship and anti-Arab hatred in a repressive climate.







EMPOWERING A COMMUNITY-POWERED ARCHIVE

What is oral history? What is worth preserving? How does one maintain an archive? These are the leading questions that AANM and Elmahaba Center set out to answer in their Oral History Workshop series, a free and virtual resource for SWANA community members. Elmahaba Center, an essential community resource at the forefront of information, connection, translation and support, primarily serves Arabic-speaking immigrants in Nashville, Tennessee. In partnering with the Museum, both Elmahaba and AANM gained access to new audiences across the country, spreading the gospel of community archive practices. Thus, contributing to the larger goal of documenting and preserving SWANA stories, work that has become ever more crucial as these stories are threatened to be erased in an increasingly hostile political sphere.

IN ORDER TO FORM A MORE PERFECT HISTORY

For a lot of 2024, two of our staff members, Kyle Wynter-Stoner and Dean Nasreddine, were traveling to Massachusetts to meet with Arab American community centers and individuals who are partnering with us on a groundbreaking initiative, the *Arab Americans in Massachusetts* traveling exhibition. Set to launch in November 2025, this exhibition will shed light on the vibrant stories of Arab American communities in the state from the late 19th century until present day. Kyle and Dean have been conducting meticulous archival research and interviewing Arab Americans residing in Massachusetts to bring these stories out of individual family histories or the confines of institutional records and into public domain.

CRITICAL FUTURES IN ARAB AMERICAN STUDIES

In April 2014, the Arab American Studies Association (AASA) held its inaugural conference at AANM. Ten years later, AASA conference returned to the Museum during what is now nationally recognized as Arab American Heritage Month with these questions: "What does it mean to celebrate [Arab heritage] at this moment and in this place when activism for Palestine, which is finding increasing support among students, faculty, and the general public, is met with virulent suppression by campus administrators, media conglomerates, and public officials? How do we enact meaningful critique and true solidarity, and how do we continue with our work?" With a theme that looked forward, many of the presentations were hopeful and inspired new ways to imagine humane, just and equitable futures for all.

ARTISTS + RESIDENTS

Each year, the Museum welcomes a range of emerging and established artists through the Artists + Residents program. Based in Dearborn, this residency gives artists access to the most concentrated Arab American community in North America, allowing them to present their work—in-progress and final—to a uniquely familiar and specific audience. With the exception of Doris Bittar and Lubana Al-Quntar, this year's residencies were mainly developmental and revisionary, meaning artists used their time to write, revise, research and expand their ongoing projects. Some of those, such as *The Magic Bullet* and *EVE*, will return to AANM for their premieres in the near future.



DORIS BITTAR COLONIAL COLONNADE (INTERDISCIPLINARY)

Interdisciplinary artist and writer Doris Bittar's art employs pattern as structure and codes of decorum that layer colonial heritages and diasporic identities within historical contexts. She views patterns as cultural DNA that mutate in tandem with human migration. During her residency, Bittar debuted her installation, *Colonial Colonnade*, a visual, aural and architecturally rich space for interdisciplinary explorations of the Arabic language intertwined and parallel to languages such as English and Spanish. In conjunction, she led community workshops where the general public, along with dancers, musicians and poets, "tested" the space for its improvisational possibilities.



YAHYA ASHOUR UNTITLED (POETRY)

A touring poet, award-winning author and 2022 Fellow in Writing at the University of Iowa, Yahya Ashour was born in Gaza City. Yahya has published several books and has contributed to various publications worldwide. His writing has been translated into English, French, Spanish, Italian and Finnish. Since the tragic events of October 2023 in Palestine, Yahya has been exiled in the U.S. AANM's residency was one of his stops as he tried to find a place to exist. He spent his time at AANM writing, editing and translating his poems about Gaza, which would become part of a larger poetry collection. He also traveled around the country, sharing readings and a message to keep struggling for Gaza's liberation.



LUBDUB THEATRE CO. THE MAGIC BULLET (THEATRE)

LubDub Theatre Co. is a NYC-based company of artists that creates work at the intersections of writing, music, movement and immersive performance. Their latest work, *The Magic Bullet*, is a transdisciplinary performance about an ensemble of artists telling the story of a French colonial magic show that took place at Algiers' Bab-Azoun Theatre in 1856. Drawing on archival sources, ritual, original writing, stage magic and documentary filmmaking, this work offers an uncanny confrontation between the power of illusion and the illusion of power. While in residency, LubDub shared *The Magic Bullet* as a work-in-progress, leaving audiences excited for the upcoming final production.



LUBANA AL-QUNTAR LESSONS FOR LIFE: SINGING WITH LUBANA AL-QUNTAR (MUSIC/THEATRE)

Born in Syria, Lubana Al-Quntar began singing at an early age and had a unique gift for singing challenging sung poetry. Today, Lubana performs a wide range of repertoires in the Arabic music canon, including classical, contemporary, folk and pop genres, and is the first Syrian opera singer to attain international recognition. She was the head of the Department of Opera Singing and launched the Department of Classical Arabic Singing at the Syrian National Conservatory. During her residency, Lubana founded and directed an Arab American choir; together, they presented a concert titled, *Louder than Bombs: Songs for Our People*.



GEORGE ABRAHAM & FARGO TBAKHI EVE: A PALESTINIAN NECROPASTORAL (POETRY/THEATRE/PERFORMANCE ART)

George Abraham is a Palestinian American poet and Fargo Nissim Tbakhi is a queer Palestinian American performance artist and writer. George and Fargo spent their second residency at AANM rewriting their collaborative performance project, *EVE*, a shattering of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in order to build a liberatory, decolonial space of queer Palestinian subjectivity. Their culminating presentation was a reading of their work-in-progress where they asked for feedback from the audience which they plan to incorporate into their final draft. The final production will premiere at AANM in the summer of 2026.



ANEESA SHAMI ZIZZO BEDTIME STORIES FOR YURI (FIBER ART)

Aneesa Shami Zizzo is an artist and researcher in Los Angeles upcycling materials to create fiber art. Her work references the sublime and world mythologies to evoke a sense of the collective unconscious. *Bedtime Stories for Yuri* is a series of appliqued tapestries dedicated to her son and are visually inspired by vertical scrolls, Mughal paintings and Arabic calligraphy. While at AANM, Aneesa created new tapestries for the series as well as hosted workshops centered around themes of parenthood/caregiving and healing generational trauma through crafting.



ZEIN EL-AMINE REMITTANCE: THE INTERNAL IMMIGRANT (WRITING)

Zein El-Amine is a Lebanese-born poet and writer who lives in Washington, DC. He spent his time at AANM writing and researching for his new novel, *Remittance: The Internal Immigrant*, which centers around the lives of expats and immigrants in Saudi Arabia. It focuses on life in the compounds where the expats live and follow a triangular relationship between an American couple and a Lebanese youth. Zein also gave two lectures on revision and travel writing to fellow writers in the community.



NOAH SHANKOOL ARABIZING THE DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATION (SOUND/MUSIC)

Noah M. Shankool is a Chaldean musician, producer and audio engineer. His work explores societal changes and inner struggle through playful grooves, juxtaposition of sonic palettes, and commentary focused lyricism. The goal of his residency was to develop a five song EP, *Arabizing the Digital Audio Workstation*. Whereas most audio mixing software privileges the production of Western styles of music, this project challenges that by exploring Arab American identity and creating compositions that honor tradition while simultaneously embracing the future



(PHOTOGRAPHY) حاجات ومحتاجات / PHOTOGRAPHY)

Ebti is a multidisciplinary artist, a self-taught photographer and a translator living between Cairo and San Francisco. Ebti utilized the archives at AANM and collaborated with community members to create a literary archive that tells our (Arabs and Arab Americans) stories through "the object we may have been carrying around with us to feel like we belong." Through this project, Ebti engaged in a conversation via objects around what unites people with different histories, coming from different countries but "united" by a common denominator.



ELI TAREQ EL BECHELANY-LYNCH LEILA AND THE OUD (NOVEL)

Primarily a poet and based in Montreal, Eli Tareq El Bechelany-Lynch spent their residency working on a first novel. Leila and the Oud is a novel-in-progress that deals with diasporic identity, queer identity, mixed-race identity, the narratives we build about ourselves, and what we inherit from our families and ancestors. Filled with queer friends and six stepmothers, the novel also plays with humor and levity while contending with large questions. Also, during their residency, Eli led a workshop series about writing non-didactic political poetry.

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Yemen Art Base

AANM BY THE NUMBERS

SCHEDULE OF REVENUE & EXPENSES (UNAUDITED) Oct. 1, 2023 - Sept. 30, 2024

CONTRIBUTIONS & GRANTS

Individuals, Memberships & Special Events Net	254,413
Corporations	250,500
Foundations	1,682,258
Government	542,000
Subtotal: Contributed Revenue	2,729,171

EARNED REVENUE

Program Fees, Rentals & Admissions	134,053
Subtotal: Earned Revenue	134,053
Total Revenue	2,863,224

OPERATIONAL EXPENSES

Administration, Salaries & Benefits	410,439
Facility Operations/Overhead	400,694
Public Programming, Salaries & Benefits	630,535
Exhibits Programming, Salaries & Benefits	322,206
Marketing, Communications & Development, Salaries & Benefits	332,038
Library & Research Programming, Salaries & Benefits	296,630
Education Programming, Salaries & Benefits	266,995
Total Operational Expenses	2,659,537

PROFIT (LOSS)* 203,687

AANM ENDOWMENT FUND

The AANM Endowment Fund consists of eight funds, five are invested with Charles Schwab and three are maintained by the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM). As of Sept. 30, 2024, the market value of the fund reported as an asset on the ACCESS balance sheet consists of the following:

Funds maintained at CFSEM	\$1,556,104
Funds invested at Charles Schwab	\$4,813,466
Total	\$6,369,570

The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM) has also accepted gifts from unrelated donors for the benefit of ACCESS. These assets are not reported on the balance sheet since CFSEM maintains variance power with respect to the assets contributed to them for our benefit. The total value of these assets as of Sept. 30, 2024 is \$3,419,136.

ATTENDANCE & USAGE

Objects and oral histories added to the Collection	125
Online Collections pageviews	60,649
Website visits	74,000
Social media followers	66,588
People served	27,688

^{*\$200,000} added to AANM Endowment







Save the date for AANM's Benefit Dinner October 11, 2025 The Henry Hotel, Dearborn

