

In a language where there are countless ways to say 'welcome' - tafadaloo, ahlan, jebroona- it is ironic that Arabs are perceived in such an othered fashion. My background as a Lebanese American and frequent visits to the Middle East have informed me on the rich culture and generous people of the region. One of the most unique attributes of Arab society is its peoples' unwavering hospitality and my aim is to communicate that through spatial and physical interaction with realistic, ceramic figures and objects from memories that define my culture to me. By sculpting life-size figures and items from their environment and inserting them in the same environment as my viewers, I start to bridge the cultural divide that is brought about by geographical distance. However, I do not want my viewers to simply observe my subjects, I want to initiate a relationship. Historical, Orientalist paintings have an apparent lack of Westerners depicted in the picturesque Orient. Instead, their presence is implied through the gaze. I break the notion of the Western gaze in relation to my work by requiring the viewer to become part of the environment I create around my figures and objects. The environments are meant to temporarily transport viewers to a different location using a variety of 'authenticating details.' Meticulous patterning, tile work, and architectural elements specific to the region set the scene visually. Incorporating Arabic coffee and other offerings common to the daily lives of Middle Easterners transport the senses and fill the hands of the viewers, welcoming them to sit down and get a sense of the hospitality that is Arab culture.