

# Exploring the Shadows



Zainab Hakim & Serena Safawi  
Mentors: Evyn Kropf & Jamie Vander Broek



# An Inherited Project

---

Shadow and Light is a 2018 offshoot of the Al-Mutanabbi Street Project, which has been active since 2007. Shadow & Light is a witness and solidarity project commemorating the hundreds of assassinated Iraqi academics during the 2003-2011 American occupation. It has circulated around the US and into the UK since its inception- the MLibrary is the most recent host of its material.

# A Focus on Artists' Responses

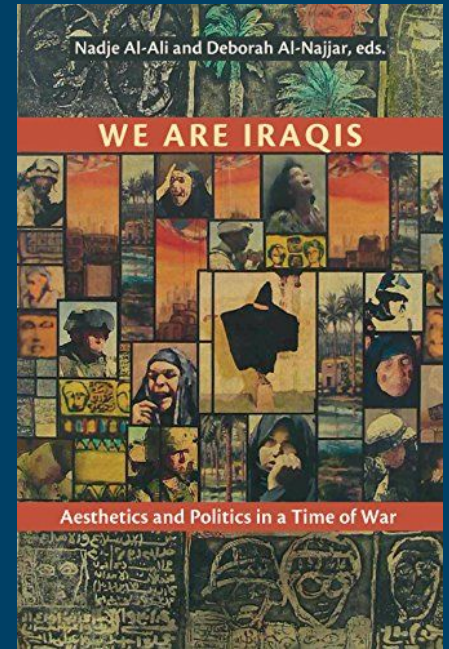
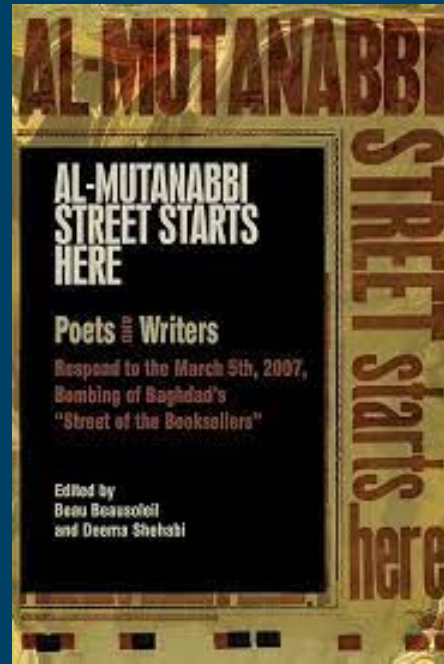
---

The Shadow & Light Project constitutes of the commissioned art and reflections from everyday people living in the West on their selected academic. Each participant is asked to memorialize their selected academic with a photograph. These photographs are exhibited alongside their reflective writings.

# Lots of Self-Studying

---

- News articles
- Scholarly articles
  - Iraqi scholar Saad Jawad
- Memoirs
- Creative writing
  - Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here
  - We Are Iraqis Anthology
- Interviews
  - Students, family, community members, previous hosts



# Our Initial Thoughts

---

- Reading the Artist's Statements for Shadow&Light
  - Potentially "Othering"
  - Concerns regarding community engagement - we wanted to ensure we were speaking to Iraqi people rather than just about them
  - What invitation do we want to extend to audiences?
  - Where does it exist outside of Google Drive?
- Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here Anthology
  - The book format is nice - makes the loss more concrete
  - How is the book being distributed?

# Challenges:

our values versus project integrity

# What We Knew We Wanted

---

- To honor our positions as Muslim students impacted by the War on Terror, as well as our access to living Iraqis in our community
- To expand on the project by resubjectifying Iraqis and their relationship to art and witness
- To ensure that Iraq as a political body was recognized in its full complexity and agency
- To apply our studies in postcolonialism and orientalism

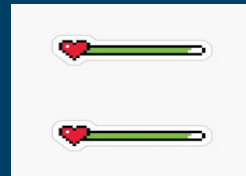
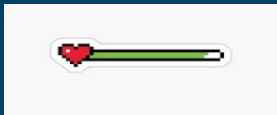
# Solutions: Taking it to the “Boss”



VS



Just kidding!  
He was really nice and it was a great conversation. We were all pleased with how receptive he was :)





# Talking with Beau Beausoleil

---

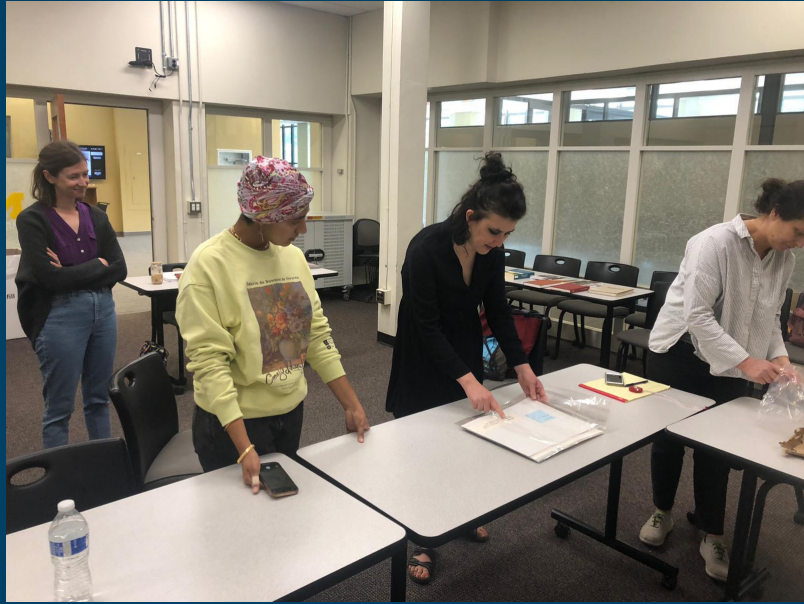
We drafted our concerns and interests and presented them to the project founder, Beau Beausoleil. We made sure he recognized our passion for our own ideas while prioritizing respect for the work he initiated. We sought his permission to expand the project at its turn in the MLibrary.

He approved! We moved forward with our ideas and began refining them.

# Selecting The Artist's Statements

---

- Statements were definitely a mixed bag
  - Some were poignant and touching, others felt like they were making a spectacle of the person's death
  - A few felt like they were forcing a connection between the writer and the academic and others made unwarranted assumptions about the lives of the assassinated Iraqis
  - We eventually selected about 25 to have shipped to Ann Arbor
- The Photographs
  - The next challenge was to make sure that we liked the photographs that accompanied the statements
  - They were also a mixed bag
- This work is ongoing...



# Pivoting to the Online Exhibit

---

- Thinking about how to connect Shadow and Light and Al-Mutanabbi Street online, then broadening our scope and considering how we can highlight Iraqi artists
- Omeka training and image descriptions
- Learning how to focus on the objects and shape a narrative
  - Checking out books from the library such as “Contemporary Iraqi Art”
  - Exploring Dr. Karim’s Archives

# Drafting a Thesis

---

1. Targeted destruction of Iraq's private and public intellectual spheres facilitated the dismantling of Iraqi military resistance abilities and means for the people's intellectual organization against imperialism and sectarianism. In the resulting chaos and segmentation, American oil interests succeeded, unimpaired by budget allocations or negotiations with native Iraqi or their reconstruction goals.
2. Iraqi people, both in diaspora and in Iraq, have continued to use the arts/humanities/intellectual culture... as modes of resistance/resilience even in the face of attacks on those very things
3. Art, which has always been an integral and rich part of Iraqi culture, is now a performance of resilience for Iraqis both at home and in diaspora, as they respond to their national history in the wake of fascism and American occupation.

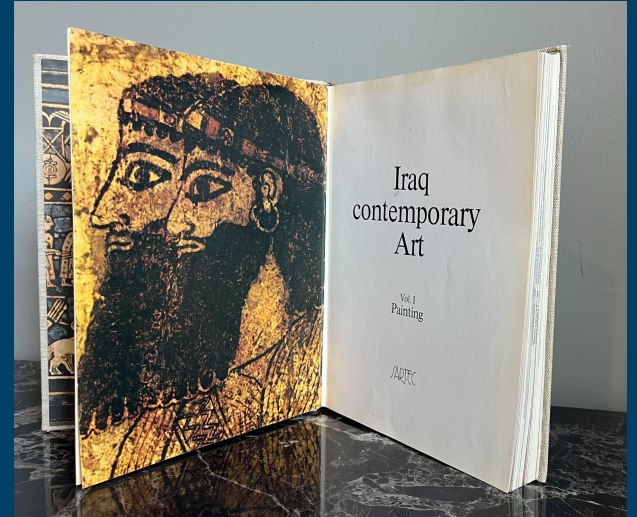
# Art History Becomes a Cornerstone

---

We worked with multiple objects that doubled as pieces of art history and as commentary on art history- lots of metacognition in this narrative.

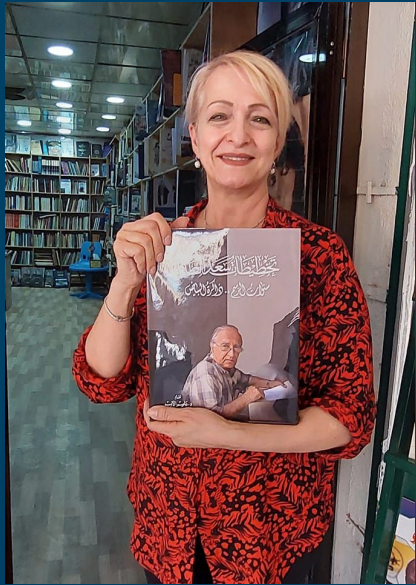
- Objects spanning from 1977-present
- Globally sourced
  - Iraq, the Netherlands, USA, England

Because this is recent history, the subjects are among us; the history is not over. People's lives are living records of the past and its impact. Whatever we collect today is not the conclusion of these events.





# Some Objects from Our Research



# Working with Primary Resources

---

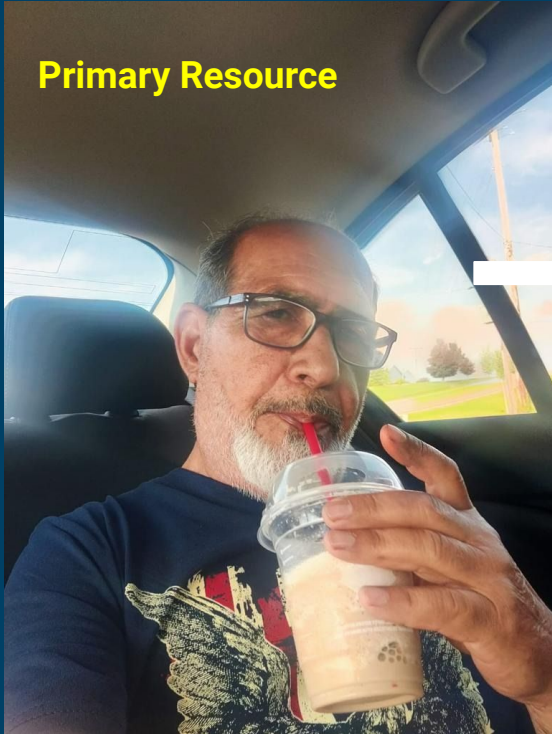
Discovered that Serena's family member was a direct subject of our project: a former art professor in Iraq!



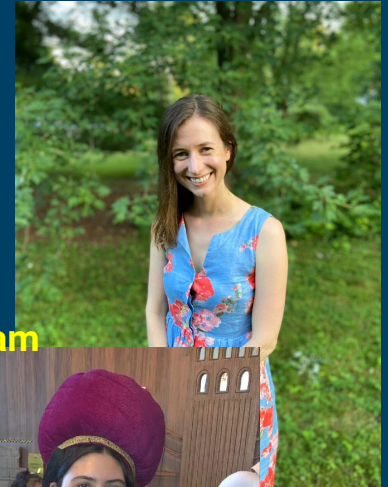


# The Man.. The Legend... Dr. Mohammed Karim

Primary Resource

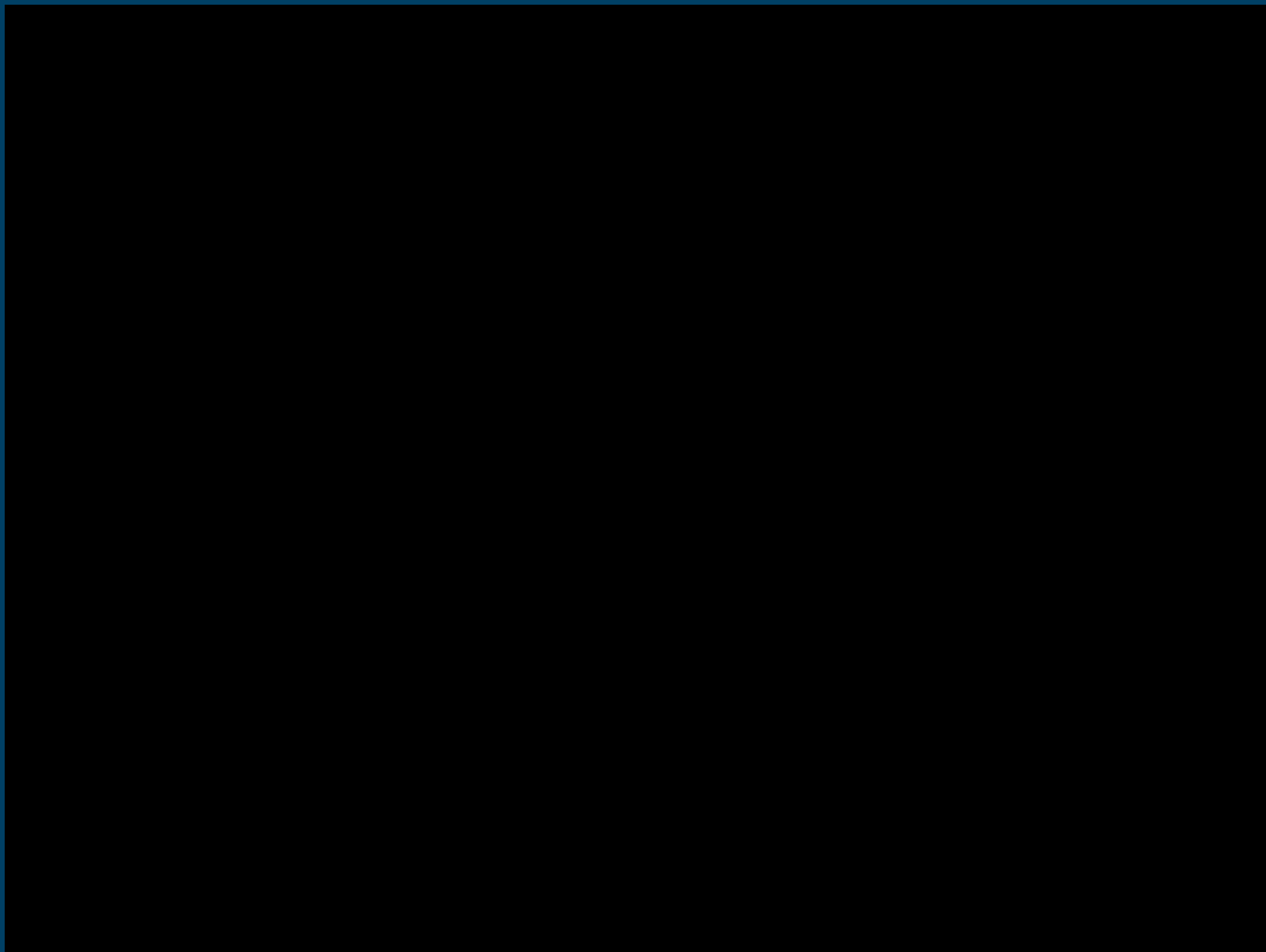


invaluable  
info



MLibrary Team





# Impact For Library

---

- We critiqued the initial project and created something that reflected our backgrounds, our locations, our knowledge and beliefs
- Giving Jamie and Eryn our initial opinions to guide the development of the exhibition, which we hope to be part of

# What We Learned and How We Grew

---

- We discussed all our thoughts from the very beginning, set up a good working relationship and got very comfortable with each others styles of thinking and writing
- When it came time to write the online exhibit, we had a great flow and completely wrote it in person together
- We learned that it is okay and even good to critique something like Shadow and Light (a project that we inherited and that had received praise)
  - We both worked within the bounds of Shadow and Light to make it the best we felt it could be and also innovated outside of it to create something that fully embodied our vision
- Learning about the library! We visited the book arts studio on north campus and saw gallery space in Hatcher

# Thank you MLibrary Scholarship Program for Hosting Us!

---

Thank you to Eryn and Jamie for your trust in us and for your mentorship and to Gabriel Duque for your insight and continuing support!

