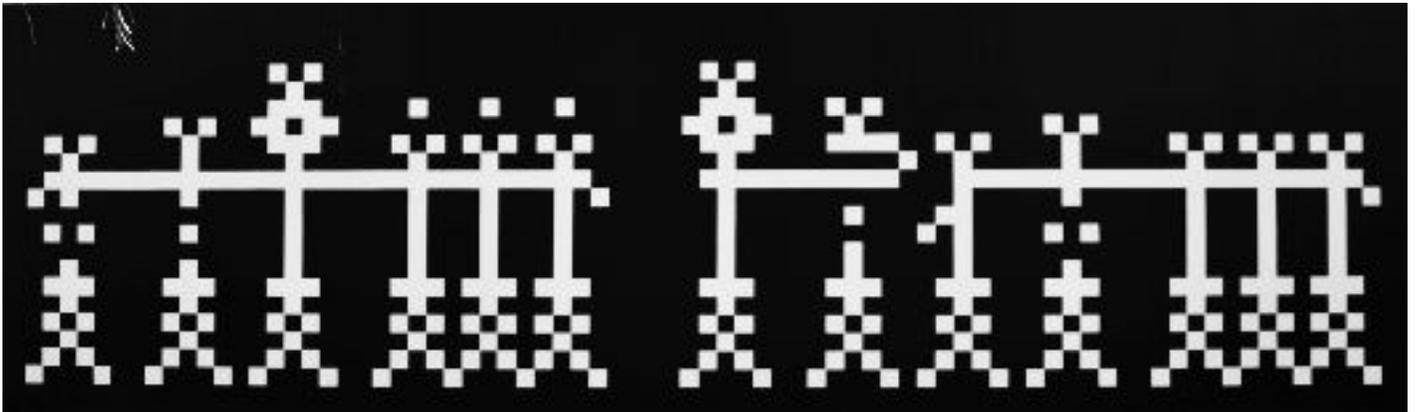


SHANGRI LA

MUSEUM OF ISLAMIC ART, CULTURE & DESIGN

BAHIA SHEHAB, (1977-)

“MY PEOPLE” (2018)



This two-part mural on display in the museum’s Banyan Courtyard represents a verse from *The Penultimate Address of the “Red Indian” in Front of the White Man* (1992) by Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008). The passage reads: **“My people will return as air and light and water.”**

A poem that was originally written in Arabic, artist Bahia Shehab (1977-) has rewritten the passage in a highly stylized interpretation of Arabic calligraphy: She has pixelated and added figurative roots to 13th-century floriated Kufic.

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WHO IS BAHIA SHEHAB?

Bahia Shehab (1977-) is a Lebanese-Egyptian designer, multidisciplinary artist, Islamic art historian, and activist. Shehab was an artist in residence at Shangri La August 9-22, 2018.

WHO WAS MAHMOUD DARWISH?

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) is an award-winning Palestinian poet, author and activist known for works that celebrated Palestine, Palestinians and Arab culture.

WHAT IS KUFIC SCRIPT?

The distinctive Kufic script - named after its place of origin in Kufa, Iraq - is the earliest surviving form of Islamic calligraphy. Kufic originated with thick, entwined letters that later became more elongated. Variations of Kufic include those decorated with vegetation (floriated) or braided ornament (plaited).

Kufic script shaped the early arts of the Islamic world. Its angular style easily lent itself to architectural forms in brick and tile. Most famously, this includes the gold-flecked glass-tile mosaics of Qur'anic verses that ring the inside of the 7th century Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.



AN ARTIST-CREATED SCRIPT?

Most commonly, floriated Kufic has leaf-like vegetation erupting from the “stems” of the letters. In the mural “My People,” Shehab has chosen to invert this tradition and create roots for the letters instead of leaves or flowers, embedding the letters - and their associated meanings - into the “soil” of Hawaii to connect her mural to the political history of the state and the ongoing claims by Native Hawaiians to land and resources that supersede statehood.

By creating a mural that links the experiences of American Indians, Palestinians and Native Hawaiians through a highly stylized vision of Arabic calligraphy, “My People” highlights how design elements like font possess artistic as well as political dimensions.

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DISCUSS:

Bahia Shehab's mural "My People" shares a message with the visitors at Shangri La. What do you think is the significance of her message?

How might Shehab's artist-created script emphasize this message?

Why do you think Shehab created a mural to share her message?

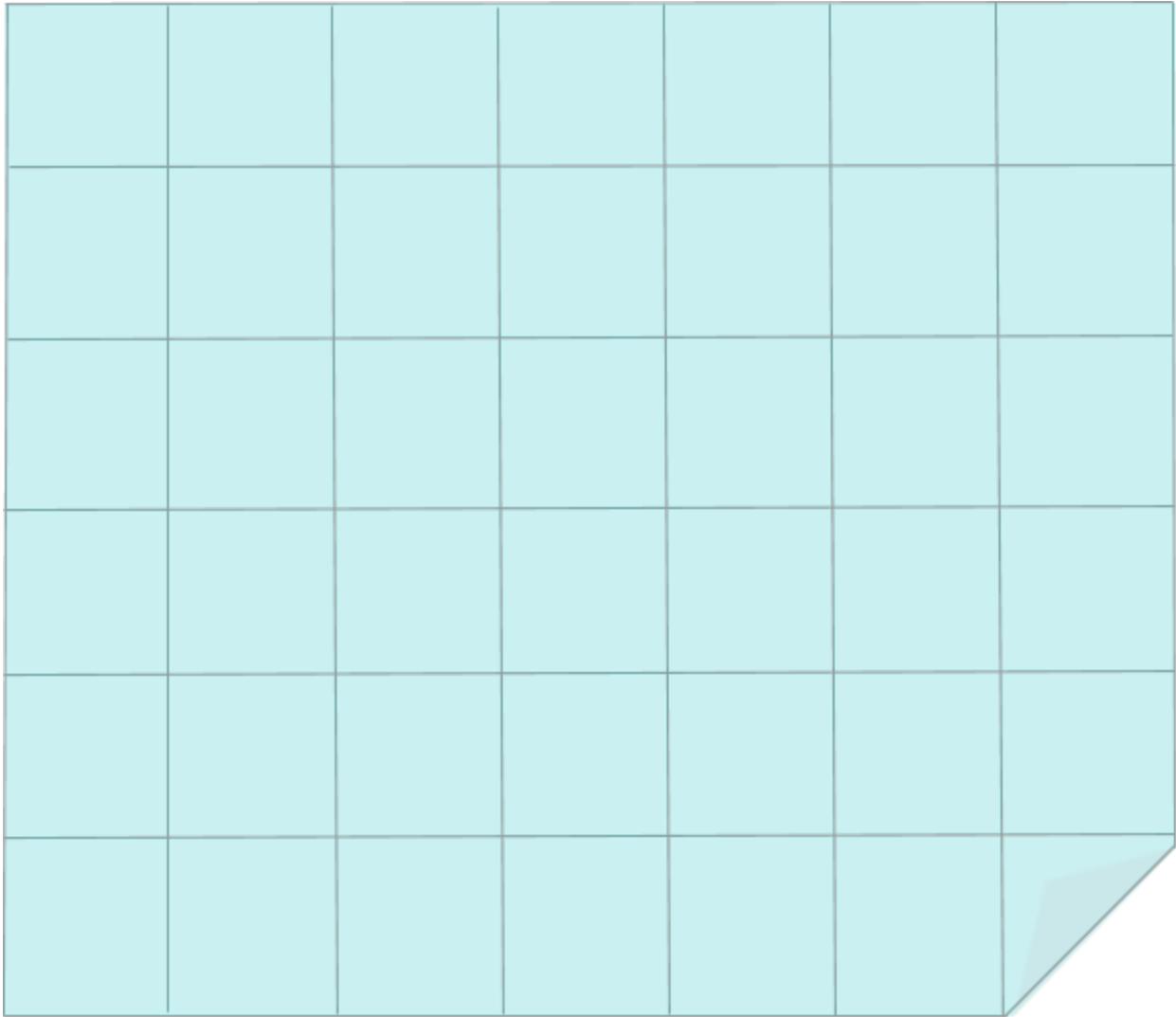
What message would you like to share with the world today? Why?

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CREATE A MURAL, CREATE A FONT

Imagine you are designing a mural displaying your message in your own artist-created script. Sketch your design.



Where would this mural live? Why?
