

This website or its third-party tools use cookies, which are necessary to its functioning and required to achieve the purposes illustrated in the cookie policy. If you want to know more or withdraw your consent to all or some of the cookies, please refer to the **cookie policy**. By closing this banner, scrolling this page, clicking a link or continuing to browse otherwise, you agree to the use of cookies.

Heba Elkayal / 30 Aug 2018

NEW YORK—The New Museum, known for the respect and recognition it confers on cutting-edge contemporary art, recently presented solo exhibitions by two Middle Eastern artists whose works explore the politics and cultural consequences of war, conquest and forced migration, in the present and in the past.

The shows—*The Loom of History*, by the Armenian-Egyptian artist Anna Boghiguiian, and *Blind as the Mother Tongue*, by the Iraqi-Kurdish artist Hiwa K—were the first solo exhibitions for each artist in the United States, though both were included in a 2014 exhibition that showcased work by a variety of Middle Eastern artists.

“This was an exciting opportunity to get these two artists to come back and tell a wider range of stories,” says Natalie Bell, the associate curator who organized the exhibitions, which came to an end this month.

Boghiguiian’s work includes close examinations of the histories of trade in commodities like spices and cotton to consider their economic and social impact and their enduring influence. “She’s always thinking about the place where she’s exhibiting,” says Bell.

In the *Loom of History*, Boghiguiian focused on the American cotton trade, presenting mixed-media works including a large painted sail, cut-out paper figures staged in vignette-like arrangements, actual cotton plants “planted” on the gallery’s floor, paintings and long passages of text hand-painted on the walls of the gallery.



Anna Boghiguiian, *The People's People* (Photo: Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Hamburg).

This website or its third-party tools use cookies, which are necessary to its functioning and required to achieve the purposes illustrated in the cookie policy. If you want to know more or withdraw your consent to all or some of the cookies, please refer to the **cookie policy**. By closing this banner, scrolling this page, clicking a link or continuing to browse otherwise, you agree to the use of cookies.

Iraq. A video documenting the process of creating the bell was shown as part of the exhibition.

Elucidating the artist's themes, Bell, the curator, spoke about how Hiwa K was examining the intersection of the Spanish conquistadors and the people they colonized in the New World.

"The helmets were used as cooking pots by the Incans," she said. "The sculpture was modeled after the colonial helmet but scaled up so it could hold a lot of things—Hiwa thought at one point of using it to cook a sheep's head stew called *pacha* in Kurdistan during the opening of the show. The piece is a way of thinking of moments of misinterpretation in culture and how culture circulates in strange ways."

Although the metaphors in Hiwa K's work are unusual, they touch on universally recognized themes, helping to make the work easy for viewers to understand. By exploring the effect of colonialism on a nation, and the forced migration of victims of war, a wide audience can relate to his art even though it also has elements that are specific to Iraq.

Although the content of Hiwa K's work is more personal because it reflects his background, Boghiguiian's is equally poignant. Her careful consideration of the impact of the cotton trade and slavery on American history is thematically a continuation of the ideas that have long influenced her practice.

"We're living in a highly politicized moment," says Bell, "and museums can do well to serve as an inspiration for viewers to consider new perspectives."

For Bell, it wasn't simply the artworks themselves that were of interest, but the approach of each artist to their practice and to society, and their philosophy of life.



*Still from Moon Calendar, Iraq*  
(Photo: Hiwa K).



*Still from The Bell Project* (Photo: Hiwa K).

Notice



This website or its third-party tools use cookies, which are necessary to its functioning and required to achieve the purposes illustrated in the cookie policy. If you want to know more or withdraw your consent to all or some of the cookies, please refer to the **cookie policy**.

By closing this banner, scrolling this page, clicking a link or continuing to browse otherwise, you agree to the use of cookies.

“The task is to be curious and to help other people be curious,” she says.

The exhibitions closed after a three-month run that began in May. Not only were the exhibitions critically successful, they also attracted a lot of interest from visitors. Bell says she saw “a lot of people spending a lot of time with the work—and that’s a good sign.”