



Fatima Killeen, *Gaza as the world stood there to watch 2*, 2014 (detail) in *Collision: Conflict of Sacred Realities* at Belconnen Arts Centre. Picture: Supplied

Serene beauty and urgent tone have a powerful message

Art review

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FATIMA Killeen: *Collision: Conflict of Sacred Realities*. Belconnen Arts Centre, 118 Emu Bank, Belconnen. Until October 27, 2019.

Fatima Killeen is a Moroccan-born artist who has been resident in Canberra since 1994. She studied painting, printmaking and photography at Les Beaux Arts in Casablanca, the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in Washington DC and subsequently at the Canberra School of Art.

Killeen is an artist who is well versed in the Western traditions of art making, but who has remained true to her Arab Muslim heritage. The inherent beauty of Islamic art is a starting point for much of her practice. However, she believes that ornamental beauty can at best be a starting point, and art needs to engage with society and carry a clear, urgent and emphatic message.

Quite a few years ago, I saw an exhibition of Killeen's work titled *Generous Soil*, where she was commenting on the West's "war on terror" as seen through the eyes of the peoples of Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan - those whose lives, communities and livelihood have been destroyed by this war. In this exhibition, there is a growing sophistication in the techniques involved but the tone, if anything, has become more urgent and challenging as the conflicts have heightened in intensity and now threaten to

engulf the world.

Collision: Conflict of Sacred Realities draws on Killeen's art made over the past decade with the earliest piece being *Journey of surrogacy and resilience* (2009) and the most recent the collagraphs, *Welcome to our home*, *Rituals of belonging* and *Picking up the pieces* (2019).

There is a serene beauty that prevails throughout the exhibition and it is only with closer examination that the underlying message becomes apparent.

A key piece is Killeen's *Destination Gaza: garden of tears and peace* (2015), which is a sprawling installation of 75 garden stones on each of which is a beautiful collagraph with Arabic calligraphy, ornamental patterns or sacred shapes. It can be interpreted as either an enclosed enchanted garden or a cemetery of tombstones marking loss and sacrifice. The artist writes about this work, "I have always used motifs inspired from my Islamic heritage and Arabic calligraphy to comment on the injustice and disregard of human rights in zones of war and conflict. Western countries wanting to achieve global control have succeeded in creating civil war and division leaving many victims fleeing from violence and torture."

Although the piece may be anchored to the events that have been taking place in Gaza and the huge loss of life, Killeen's message is more universal - a plea for the dignity and sanctity of all human existence.

Killeen's use of Arabic calligraphy, for an



Fatima Killeen, *Gaza as the world stood there to watch 1*, 2014 (detail) in *Collision: Conflict of Sacred Realities*. Belconnen Arts Centre. Picture: Supplied

outsider, may appear ornamental, but for those able to read the script there is a mixture of religious texts, diaristic quotations and personal communications possibly addressed to the artist's mother whom she lost when she was 14.

Many of the images, such as *Gaza as the world stood there to watch 1* and *2* (2014), are powerful and universal statements pro-

testing against the barbarism that is being inflicted. This is an important exhibition by a sophisticated and versatile artist who, as an insider, presents an account of the wars in the Middle East from the side rarely seen in mainstream media.

It is an exhibition with a quiet and serene beauty that conveys a powerful and urgent message.