

# Arabic Composition

## Typography Exercise

### Goal:

To explore global letterforms — a step towards decolonizing our educational practice.

### Materials:

- Sketch book
- Arabic/English dictionary (or online resource)
- Adobe Creative Suite
- High quality paper for printing

### Readings:

- [Arabic Type Design is About to Experience an Awakening](#)
- [A Font Inspired by Egyptian Streets That Addresses a Problem for Arabic Designers](#)
- [An Influx of New + Better Arabic Fonts Is Shaking Up the Typography World](#)
- [Adobe: Arabic and Hebrew Type](#)
- For a more comprehensive and in depth study of the evolution of Arabic writing and printing, I recommend *A History of Arab Arabic Design* by Bahia Shebab and Haytham Nawar

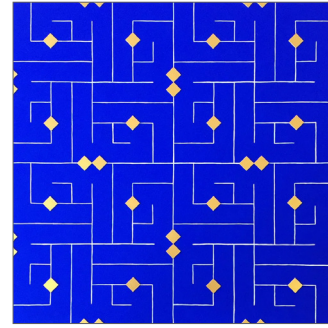
*Dedicated class time for discussion on readings is recommended.*

### Process:

- Review the works of [Joumana Medlej](#) — specifically the pieces that explore a single word such as “[Loss](#),” “[Imagination](#),” and “[Bravery](#).”
- Select a word to ground your own piece. Look up that word in the Arabic dictionary.
- Practice writing the Arabic word in your sketchbook and study the letterforms which make up that word.
- Consider the meaning of your word and start sketching a composition that uses only those Arabic letters. (Prepare for in-class critique and feedback.)
- Based on your revised sketch, create your composition in Adobe Illustrator using an Arabic font within a 10x10 inch artboard. *Note: you can use [Google Translate](#) to generate your word in Arabic and then copy and paste that text into Adobe Illustrator. Make sure you have correct Arabic settings on your Adobe software.*
- Prepare for in-class critique and feedback.

### Final submission

- Print your final composition on high quality paper and trim to 10x10 inch.
- Artist statement: write 1 paragraph describing your piece. Include your full name and date.



*“Imagination” by Joumana Medlej 2017*

### Note to instructors:

For a classroom of primarily English speakers, this project is an opportunity for students to be mindful of concerns around cultural appropriation and encourage them to explore what may be unfamiliar. If you are not an Arabic speaker and are unsure how to responsibly facilitate this exercise, I offer the following framing:

We are all on our journeys to learn new things, and unlearn the systems of oppression that are at the root of Eurocentric arts education.

The classroom is a safe space for that exploration, and we must also be mindful of the power dynamics at play. This means practicing curiosity, apologizing when we make mistakes, and doing our best to course correct in real time. When we are drawing points of inspiration from a culture outside our own, best practices include naming our sources of inspiration, articulating our goals, and continuing to ask questions.

As educators, we can be honest about our own limitations and commitments to continue learning alongside our students as we give and receive feedback.

We should all continue to seek out feedback. In the case of this project, showing our work to Arabic speakers can be part of our process. Many universities and colleges have Muslim Student Associations, Ethnic Studies and Religious Studies departments — consider options for cultural guidance.