

About the Artist

Born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1959, Doris Bittar's identity straddles several civilizations from the Arab world. Through Lebanon and Palestine, her ethnic heritage, she links to Alexandria and Cairo where her father was born and raised. Upon landing in the United States, she was confronted with the tumultuous era of the late 1960's. As her family struggled with the cultural and economic shock of New York City, Bittar was caught between her mother's rich embroideries and other niceties of Arab culture amidst urban poverty and racial violence. Later, as a young adult Bittar worked with African American and European immigrant communities as a labour organizer. These experiences primed her to seek examples of human vulnerability coupled with cultural patterning. It also motivated her to find paths toward understanding strands of history, personal and cultural, to establish creative foundations for conflict resolution and dialogue.

Bittar received her BFA from the State University of New York at Purchase, and graduated with a MFA from the University of California San Diego. She has lived and taught at the American University in Beirut and currently lives in Southern California teaching art at California State University San Marcos. Bittar shows extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, and her paintings are housed in several public collections around the world. Her latest installation, "Cryptographic" will be on display October 2015 at The Jerusalem Fund Gallery in Washington DC.

She has participated in several international art biennials, including the Sharjah Biennial, Alexandria Biennial, and Venice Biennale. Selected honors and grants include Puffin Foundation Grants, 2007 & 2011; Alexandria Biennale Award, Alexandria, Egypt 2010; University of California San Diego Faculty Grant, 2007; and California Arts Council Artists Fellowship Grant, 1998. Bittar also publishes feature articles, reviews, and opinion pieces in various cultural magazines.

[Collection Descriptions] **Tec Sayings, 2010**

This interactive phrase making installation extracts stories from participants' about family migrations, regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic backgrounds. Tec Sayings presumes culture is a migratory phenomenon for everyone, a gathering mass that also encapsulates its seminal origins. The key for participants is to be empowered by retrieving those origins, claiming them and then reconfiguring them.

Tec Sayings is grounded in two presumptions: ornamental motifs and patterns are a culture's DNA; and the word decorum is extracted from the word decoration, suggesting modes of behavior that encourage conversation around difficult issues. I usually begin with pattern as a structural lattice to provoke or conjure regional, national and international issues. My approach creates links between cultures where all the parts are juxtaposed, blended but remain distinct.

The pattern in Tec Sayings is original. It is based on creating five-pointed stars in the negative or background space out of squared tiles. Its micro repetitions of squares and stars leads to a larger rhythm that is unpredictable, a bit unstable, but lyrical, mirroring the paths that pluralistic cultures may form.

I collaborated with poet Diane Gage to choose words that conjure discussion on migration and heritage. Multiculturalism is an undercurrent in Tec Sayings, continually redefined and under scrutiny, often creates social anxieties. Fear exists regarding a dilution of cultural integrity, and/or exclusion.

We have found that our audiences access their family's migratory histories and heritage through engagement with the installation, which in turn lead to a more grounded understanding of identity within diverse societies. This interactive installation does not dilute the pain, anxieties or joy of sharing culture, but in our initial observations, it has also created bridges of understanding and empathy between people.

Lebanese Linen Paintings, 1999-2000

The series is called Lebanese Linen, drawing from ancestral sources and portraying my family's pre-civil war lives in Lebanon. These particular paintings, Folding Linens Filigree and Folding Linens Araby, have as their source a family photo that I have been fascinated with since I was a child. It shows my parents before they were married with my mother's siblings folding sheets and other linens in the back yard of my grandfather's home in the mountains of Lebanon.

Most of the images are from a pool of photographs taken by my grandfather from the 1960's. They layer the patterns and colors of the era to show the French colonial influence along with Arabic patterns. These paintings show a family going through normal life on the precipice an unknown migration and a pending civil war.

Stripes and Stars, 2001

The series Stripes and Stars represents the American flag, the most profusely patterned flag in the world, as it encounters the most profusely patterned cultures in the world, those from Islamic lands as seen in matrix, floral, or calligraphic designs. Following the tragic day of September 11th, along with a deep sense of mourning and loss, the American and the Arabic cultures jarringly merged within me. The icons of both cultures conflicted and coincided within me. I felt a sense of

loyalty, alienation and anger as symbols and patterns layered in my mind seamlessly. Since the advent of the Anglo/American war in Iraq the militaristic motifs have emerged. The paintings embody a dichotomy that is both oppositional and ambiguous, one that seeks an alternate reality or narrative without the use of figuration. Within these limitations I have found multiple voices and nuanced reflections. Stripes and Stars marries seemingly oppositional icons to probe intertwined concepts of loyalty, identity, nationalism, and power.

Secured States Maps, 2010-2011

The Secured States series of collaged maps hold on to a conceit that these collaged states are now safe due to the very process of covering them with security envelope patterns. I have collected envelope patterns for years not knowing for what purpose. The envelopes are found in paychecks, bills and official documents that come in the mail.

Initially, I made American flags out of them, then I began making maps, thinking that it was a way of addressing the world's anxieties about terrorism and financial ruin. They are darkly humorous, but also address a global anxiety about security – and not only a Western one. In the context of the West, an ironic dynamic unfolds because the whole World, along with the Arab world, has the same anxieties about security as the West. Maps are quite subjective and not really as factual as we may assume.

To create these, the shape of the maps or point of view began with Google Earth maps that along with other maps merged to form a unique map that reflects what I want to emphasize. From these reconstituted map outlines, I choose a different security pattern for each country, cut them out and glue them onto tar paper (another safety material used to weather proof homes). I adjust some of them. I follow up with more research if a particular border does not make sense, etc. My research on each country includes studying their cultural patterns, history and proximity to other countries. Secured States maps mix sense with nonsense that may help us see regions in ways that illuminate our understanding of their histories and connection to us.

[Item Labels]

Stripes 1

Oil on linen

Stripes 2

Oil on linen

Stripes 3

Oil on linen

Stripes and Stars 1

Oil on linen

Stripes and Stars from Zarigossa to Shiraz, 2002

Oil on 12 canvasses

Stripes & Stars Golden

Oil on canvas

Stripes & Stars Isfahan Arch Sharbet

Oil on canvas

Stripes & Stars Opalescent

Oil on canvas

Lebanese Linen Araby

Oil on linen

Folding Linens, 1958

Photo shadow box

Insecure State: Greece, 2011

Security envelope, shadow box

Secured States: the Caribbean with Cuba Out 2, 2010

Collage, security envelope paper

Secured States: the Caribbean 1, 2010

Collage, security envelope paper

A Brief History of Iraq

Oil on canvas

Marbleized Flags, 2014

Digital print, clear primer, oil paint

Lebanese Linen Filigree

Oil on linen

Tec Sayings, 2010

Original pattern stenciled and hand-painted, silk-screened tiles with Velcro