

## Letters | Huruf, How Artists Reimagined Language in the Age of Decolonization.

Beginning in the late 1940s, a wide constellation of artists from North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia turned to Arabic calligraphic motifs as elements in new artistic practices. Art historians have designated the phenomenon with a variety of terms, from the modern calligraphic school to *hurufiyya*, meaning letter arts, and examined how political change can spark shifting claims to language and alphabetic systems, including negotiating relationships between colonizer and colonized, making appeals to religious and communal identities, and reinventing literary and folk traditions.

Drawing on diverse holdings in the UC Berkeley Library collections, this exhibition highlights how artists and their contemporaries made use of language as a visual component in work across media. A shared backdrop to the artistic choices on display are decolonization processes and liberation struggles taking place across Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, which sparked desire to create cultural futures in resistance to dominant imperial values and official language politics. Curators for the exhibition include Drew Atkins, Riana Azevedo, Lynn Cunningham, Sharan Dulai, Eva Elfshawy, Mohamed Hamed, Teddy Haynes, Murtaza Hiraj, Viv Kammerer, Shanti Knudsen, Marissa Lee, Anneka Lenssen, Val Machado, Jasmine Nadal-Chung, Reyansh Sathishkumar, A. Wara, Alice Xie, Jinyu Xu, Suri Zheng, and Haley Zupancic.

This exhibition was created as part of the course History of Art 192CU, Exhibiting Calligraphic Modernism. Acknowledgements are due to Dr. Salman Ahmed and The Sadequain Foundation, Nina Bailey, Adam Benkato, Lynn Cunningham, Lily Farhoud, Mohamed Hamed, Aisha Hamilton, Jane Taitano al-Jumaie, Saleh al-Jumaie, Joan Kask, Tom Lyons, Susan McElrath, Catherine Neal, Zubair Simab, Dr. Melike Sümertaş, Dan Vaccaro, and Julie Wolf for help and guidance.