



**PRIVATE VIEWING**  
**THURSDAY**  
**12 MAY, 2022,**  
**6pm to 9pm**

**EXHIBITION DATES**  
**12 MAY**  
**to 11 JUNE 2022**

**CURATORS**  
**RANIA MNEIMNEH**  
**GHAZALEH ZOGHEIB**

**RESEARCHER**  
**DR RACHEL SCOTT**

P21 Gallery is proud to present ***Kalila wa Dimna: Ancient Tales for Troubled Times***, a collaborative art exhibition and public programme that brings together academic researchers, artists, curators, and community organizations. The project is inspired by the global journeys of an ancient collection of moral fables that travelled across time and space, language, religion and culture.

**ARTISTS & PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS**

**ALICE KETTLE ALI J.DALLOUL DEMAONE DIMA NACHAWI**  
**JEAN MORRIS RAYAN ELNAYAL VAISHALI PRAZMARI**  
**EAST LONDON TEXTILE ARTS (ELTA) PLAY FOR PROGRESS**

Known in Arabic as *Kalila wa Dimna*, the fables have a long and complex history. Of Indian origin and composed in Sanskrit possibly as early as the third century BC, they were translated into Arabic in the eighth century by the Persian writer and influential courtier Abd Allāh Ibn al-Muqaffa'. Over the centuries they have been translated into more than 40 languages and read and re-interpreted almost continuously by different audiences.

*Kalila wa Dimna* uses storytelling to understand the world and other people, revealing the messy complexity of life, the multiplicity of perspectives and voices that comprise it. The tales reveal that there exists not one world or truth, but many, and unequal at that.

*Kalila wa Dimna: Ancient Tales for Troubled Times* focuses on one of the book's chapters titled the 'Tale of the Four Friends' or 'The Chapter of the Ringdove' – a story about looking beyond perceived differences, working together to overcome adversity and to build a sense of community and home; which is achieved through the exchange of words: in short, through storytelling.

In a live exhibition at the P21 Gallery taking place from 12 May to 11 June 2022, experienced and emerging artists and community arts organizations will become *hakawatis* or 'tellers of tales' and reinterpret the 'Tale of the Four Friends' through their own unique perspectives. Using mixed media, from textile, to illustration, painting, and animation, they will address both universal and highly personal issues. Participants convey the beauty and the challenges of living within multiple identities and languages by sharing their mixed heritage through live and digital storytelling. Alongside the artists, local organizations showcase pieces about finding communities of sanctuary through music and participatory art. Together they address the destructive impact of human actions on society and the natural ecosystem.

The tales' global transmission exemplifies how culture is not fixed or static but rather in perpetual motion and created through contact and exchange between different civilizations. The exhibition sheds light on the undeniable influence of Eastern cultures and languages on Western societies. Using a decolonizing lens, our *hakawatis* question who gets to tell stories and therefore who benefits from their transformative and generative potential. By approaching storytelling through various artistic mediums, the project aims to widen access to and engagement with the arts within communities who don't often engage with and see themselves represented in galleries and mainstream art scenes, but also within formal education settings like schools, giving children an opportunity to explore their mixed heritages through art-based storytelling.

The exhibition proposes a rich public programme including textile and animation workshops, outdoor translation games, live calligraphit and online talks by artists and researchers.

*Kalila wa Dimna: Ancient Tales for Troubled Times* has developed out of the work of *Language Acts and Worldmaking*, a flagship project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project is principally funded by The National Lottery Fund, Arts Council England and *Language Acts and Worldmaking*. The exhibition is hosted by the P21 Gallery.

#### PRESS INFORMATION

For further exhibition information, press images and interview opportunities, please contact:

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[www.kalilawadimnaexhibit.com](http://www.kalilawadimnaexhibit.com)

Check the public programme of events on:

<https://www.kalilawadimnaexhibit.com/exhibition-events>

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