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# Pittsfield Art Show Looks at Modern Islamic Life

By Andy McKeever

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Aziz Sohail hopes to break stereotypes of the Muslim world with the art show.

PITTSFIELD, Mass. — An artist is spending this month trying to break the stereotypes many people have of Islam.

Aziz Sohail has curated an exhibit that "shows the diversity of culture" among Muslims. The exhibit at the Lichtenstein Center for the Arts shows off the work of artists from across the world, all representing aspects of Islam.

"People start seeing the other as not menacing or scary. Even if they don't know everything about the Muslim world or don't remember it, I think they'll remember the feeling and make a connection," said the Pakistan native earlier this week. "I really do feel like I am making a difference, especially here in the Berkshires."

The show, "Islam Contemporary," features an array artists that span age groups, locations and experience. A small number of well-established artists were invited to submit and there was an open call for emerging artists.

"We have a good mix of established and emerging artists here," said Sohail, a Brandeis University graduate. "I think it is important because contemporary is such a fresh look at what's going on and if you only have established artists then you might just be giving an elite perspective. By showing emerging artists not only do you talk about what is literally happening right now but also you give exposure to these people, exposing them to the world and creating more of a connection."

The show was initially small but quickly grew. In just two months, it grew to incorporate 26 artists with more than 60 pieces of work in two locations. The Lichtenstein has about 70 percent of the work while a secondary space at the Whitney Center for the Arts on Wendell Avenue contains the rest.

The show also ended up incorporating a feast, Eid-Ul-Fitr (<https://www.facebook.com/events/167205793463200/>), which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan from 11 to 2 on Saturday at the Whitney Center. A concert will be held later in the month.

"It is much bigger than expected," Sohail said. "Initially it was going to be a small art show and it became a very big art show."

This isn't the first show for the arts management intern with the Berkshire Hills Internship Program. He has worked with the American Islamic Congress in Boston to put on other shows, making connections with the more established artists who were invited to this show.

Looking over the collection, Sohail said he is happy with the range of perspectives that ended up being incorporated in the show.

"We dealt with gender, identity, nationalism, stories and oral history and culture. It is spanning the anxieties and contemporary lifestyles of Muslims and non-Muslims," he said. "It gives anxieties and perspectives from different eras."

**Tags:** [art show \(/story.php?tag=art+show\)](#), [Cultural Pittsfield \(/story.php?tag=Cultural+Pittsfield\)](#), [Lichtenstein \(/story.php?tag=Lichtenstein\)](#),

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