

## ***Let's Talk: Syrian Refugees, Islamophobia and Canadian Identity.***

**VANCOUVER, BC (November 28, 2015)** – On December 5<sup>th</sup> at 2pm, Centre A welcomes Refugee Advocate and Writer Zool Suleman as he hosts “Let’s Talk: Syrian Refugees, Islamophobia and Canadian Identity – Post Harper” a discussion in response to “Abounaddara. The Right to the Image.” an online exhibition currently ongoing at centrea.org.

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*“My comrades and I were frustrated because the media is only interested in the fighting and the political and religious issues, but they never show people during daily life. We thought, ‘Our society, our countrymen, are totally invisible.’”*

Abounaddara spokesman Charif Kiwan in a skype interview with The New School

<http://blogs.newschool.edu/news/2015/10/syrianfilmcollective-offers-humanizing-view-of-a-country-in-conflict/#.VljyBWSrGGG>

Suleman will host a discussion in response to the works of an anonymous collective of volunteer, self-taught artists, Abounaddara. Their weekly short films offer a glimpse of the lives of ordinary Syrians without restricting them to political or religious affiliations, focusing rather, on the details of daily life. While employing the aesthetics of cinema in an open-ended DIY spirit, Abounaddara provides an alternative to the customarily extremely violent representation of the Syrian condition.

This Saturday afternoon discussion will be an opportunity where individuals gain insight on an important political art project that plays on anonymity and dis-identification to construct a space of resistance; and to relate that back to current aspects of the Canadian cultural and political climate.

### **About Abounaddara**

Founded in Damascus in 2010, Abounaddara takes its name from the first Arabic language satirical revue, founded in Cairo in the nineteenth century (Abounaddara = the man with glasses), as well as from Soviet director Dziga Vertov’s film Man with a Movie Camera.

Charif Kiwan a spokesperson of Abounaddara says *“Their work is a kind of “emergency cinema” – like emergency healthcare, only by way of cinema”*.

Abounaddara’s films are shared by Syrians from all sides, to the extent that even a major pro-regime newspaper has written that they represent civil society in a balanced way. The films are garnering ever-greater international recognition, yet they do not benefit from a viable and sustainable mode of production. They depend exclusively on the voluntary involvement of the filmmakers. Everyone is free to use their videos to forward them, present them on video screens, or create an expanded video program or exhibition.

Reverberations of the Syrian revolution have transformed the political landscape of the whole world, including Canada. As it dominates a global discourse on warfare, migration, and media representation, the only voices still reaching us directly from Syria are those of artists. Since April 2010, these voices have produced self-funded, weekly short films and made them freely

available to the public online. These films evoke horror without ever showing it. They aim to empower civil society to independently produce its own image. The films do not look to prove a point, but rather to defend the rights of everyone to a dignified image.

For their courageous and groundbreaking work, Abounaddara have been recognized by Human Rights Watch, the Venice Biennale, the Sundance Film Festival (2014 Sundance Short Film Grand Jury Award), the Vera List Center (2014 Vera List Center Prize for Art and Politics), and many others.

### **About Zool Suleman**

Zool Suleman is a Refugee Advocate and Writer who has been involved at the nexus of law/culture/production for many years. In addition to being a lawyer, he published and edited [Rungh](#), A South Asian Journal of Culture Comment and Criticism from 1990-1997. He has also been on the board of directors of a variety of arts groups including the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, the Vancouver East Cultural Centre, and the Pacific Music Industry Association. He has advised the provincial government on arts policy and he has been on consultative committees or juries for Heritage Canada, the Canada Arts Council, and the City of Vancouver. Since 2005, he has either Chaired, Co-Chaired or been a member of the City of Vancouver Mayor's Working Group on Immigration. Currently he is involved with The Adhan Project, a multi-year, multi-disciplinary project exploring the intersection between the call to prayer in Islam (the Adhan), urban soundscapes, law, and the theories of immigrant belonging, portions of which will be hosted by or done in collaboration with Centre A.

Along with Zool Suleman, a panel of other speakers will also engage with the Abounaddara project from different perspectives.

### **About Abounaddara *The Right to the Image***

*Abounaddara. The Right to the Image* is an online art exhibition that seeks to illuminate the contemporary conditions of the Syrian revolution, show solidarity with civil society in Syria, and provoke new thinking about media representation. Organized by the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School, Slought, and Project Projects/P! in collaboration with Abounaddara, this virtual, distributed online exhibition seeks to spread awareness of Abounaddara's widely acclaimed work as an anonymous collective of volunteer, self-taught artists in Syria.

It is currently on view at [centrea.org](http://centrea.org) where new work is posted at 12pm noon PST on three Fridays: November 20, November 27, and December 4, 2015.

## About Centre A:

Established in 1999, Centre A is Canada's only public gallery devoted to contemporary art of the Asia-Pacific. Located in Chinatown's East Georgia Gallery Cluster, we have presented the works of over 300 Canadian and international artists and produced over 80 original projects. As a key piece of Vancouver's cultural infrastructure, Centre A works with artists, curators and other cultural producers from throughout the region to facilitate critical inquiry and provide a platform for conversation and artistic experimentation. Centre A is also home to the Centre A Reading Room including among a vast collection contemporary Asian art books, the Finlayson Collection of Rare Asian Art Books.

Centre A is a collaborative effort powered by generous support from:



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**Available for comment on *Let's Talk: Syrian Refugees, Islamophobia and Canadian Identity – Post-Harper*:**

Centre A Executive Director/Curator: Tyler Russell  
Event Facilitator: Zool Suleman

**To arrange an interview with any of the above, or for media requests and further information, please contact:**

Cathleen Chow  
T: 604.683.8326  
[info@centrea.org](mailto:info@centrea.org)