Born in Lebanon, Helen Zughaib lived in the Middle East and Europe before relocating to the United States to study art at Syracuse University, where she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Her work in gouache, watercolor and ink has provided a commentary on global politics since the late 1980s. She currently lives and works in Washington. Zughaib’s work has been exhibited in Washington, New York and Paris, and is held in many public collections, including the White House, the World Bank and the Library of Congress. President Obama recently gifted one of her works to Prime Minister Maliki of Iraq during an official state visit.

Zughaib’s deep love of the Arab world is evident in her best-known work, “Stories my Father Told Me”, in which vivid depictions of his memories of village life in the Levant are refracted by time and distance, and blend a modern, ornamental style with the intricate geometric designs of Islamic art. Her paintings of American landmarks such as the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument reflect an equal love of her adopted home, depicted with the same unique merging of modern Western and traditional Islamic elements.

Her Middle Eastern background, combined with her experience of living in the U.S., put Zughaib in the position of being able to make perceptive observations of both Arab and American culture, effectively bridging the cultural divide through her life as well as her art. Her work could be understood as a form of cultural diplomacy, engaged as it is with inter-religious discourses, identity formation processes, the cultural integration of migrants, the refugee experience and much more. Her stated aim is to “further the dialogue between East and West” in an attempt to “continue to try to bring people together in conversation with the hope of mutual understanding, acceptance and respect”.

Public lecture:
“Arab Spring—Unfinished Journeys”
6pm—8pm, Wednesday the 14th of June
Room 105, Hauptgebäude, Hochschulstrasse 4, University of Bern

Künstlerisches Werkgespräch:
“Helen Zughaib: When Tolerance Becomes Form”
9am—12pm, Thursday the 15th of June
Room A-124, UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, University of Bern

SANAS Spring Reading Group:
10am—12pm, Friday the 16th of June
Room A-124, UniS, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, University of Bern