

KAANA XUSUUSO, KANNA XUS:
Oraah, Muuqaal iyo Kaydkii Gumeysiga
ee Soomaaliya, 1885-1960

**REMEMBER THAT ONE,
& COMMEMORATE THIS ONE:**
Orality, Visuality and the Colonial Archive
of Somalia, 1885-1960

JUNE 25 - AUGUST 14, 2022



Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus: Oraah, Muuqaal iyo Kaydkii Gumeysiga ee Soomaaliya, 1885-1960 waa mashruuc ka kooban kayd, cilmi-baaris iyo farshaxan. Waxay sahaminaysaa gabayada afka Soomaaliga ah iyo heesihii la soo saaray intii u dhaxaysay dabayaaqadii sagaal iyo tobnaad iyo bartamihii qarnigii labaatanaad kuwaasoo ka soo horjeeday gumaysigii ka jiray dhulka Soomaalida.

Intii lagu jiray muddadaas taariikhiga ah, muuqaallada farshaxameysan ee ay Soomaalidu abuureen aad bay u koobnaayeen; lama horumarinin, ama way lumeen, ama waa la burburiyay. Wixii haray ee la xafiday waa gabayadii iyo heesihii afka ahaa ee la curiyay intii muddadan lagu gudo jiray. Qaababkaan waxisgaarsiineed ayaa aasaas u ahaa nidaamka ay Soomaalidu ku xiriiri jirtay iyagoo ku kala sugnaa jaalliyado iyo deegaanno kala duruqsan, oo isku soo uruurin jirtay dad tiro badan, una keydin jirtay dhacdooyinkaas jilka dambe. Si kastaba ha ahaatee, goobaha kaydka ah ee gumaystuhu leeyahay waxaa dhex yaallo tiro badan oo ah sawiro, kaararka boostada, shaabbada boostada, iyo sawiro kale oo kala duwan oo ay Soomaalidu leedahay oo lagu sawiray iyagoo lagu saleeyay aragtida reer Yurub/gumaysiga.

Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus wuxuu soo bandhigi doonaa gabayadii iyo heesihii gumaysi-diidka kaasoo niqaash la sameyn doono kaydii gumaysiga, ka dibna wuxuu *Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus* soo saari doonaa sawiro muujinaya tixraacyada muuqaalka ah ee loo soo gudbiyay qaab ah erayada farshaxankan si dib loogu milicsado, oo dib loogu fasiro, dibna loogu soo celiyo muuqaalkii xilligaan iyadoo laga eegayo dhanka qofka Soomaaliga ah.

Mashruucani waxa uu ka soo baxay cilmi-baaris ballaaran iyo wada-sheekeysii lala yeeshay farshaxanyahanno kale, dadka wax keydiyo, iyo taariikhyahannada si loo helo taariikhda, qaababka iyo tixraacyada muuqaalka farshaxameysan ee dhaqanka Soomaalida. *Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus* waa mashruuc baadi-goobkan ku koobaya uun xilligii gumeysiga ee Soomaaliya. Sidaa awgeeda, mashruucan waa inaan loo qaadan inuu yahay mid dhammaystiran maadaama uu sii kobcin doono wada-hadallada ku xeeran muuqaalka farshaxameysan, oraahda, farshaxanka, iyo kaydka Soomaalida.

Remember That One, and Commemorate This One: Orality, Visuality and the Colonial Archive of Somalia, 1885-1960 is an archive, research and art project. It explores Somali oral poetry and songs produced between the late nineteenth and mid twentieth century as an opposition to colonial rule within Somali territories.

During this historical period, visuals created by the Somalis were very limited; they were either not developed, lost or destroyed. What remained and has been preserved are the oral poetry and songs composed within this timeframe. These forms of communication were the foundational apparatus with which the Somalis corresponded across society and lands, rallied the masses and recorded the events for posterity. However, colonial archival repositories contain a large number of

photographs, postcards, stamps, and various other iconographies of the Somalis framed through the European/colonial gaze.

Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus will bring the anti-colonial poetry and songs in conversation with the colonial archives, and subsequently produce images that illustrate the visual references communicated through the words of these artforms to reimagine, reinterpret and reconstitute the visuality of this period through the lens of the Somalis.

This project emerged from a period of extensive research and conversations with fellow artists, archivists and historians in locating the history, forms and references of visual art in Somali culture. *Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus* isolates this search within the colonial period of Somalia. Therefore, the project should not be considered complete as it will continue to further develop the conversations surrounding visuality, orality, art, and archives of the Somalis.

The exhibit has two components. The first part can be viewed from June 25th till July 24th, and the second and final part from July 30th till August 14th. Together, both parts complete the project and artist's journey of investigations, complexities and ongoing conversations with the findings of his search.

Project by Kaamil A. Haider *with* contributions by Wasima Farah.

GALLERY HOURS:
Saturday/Sunday, 2-5 PM

PROGRAMMING:

June 25, 5-8 PM	—	Opening
July 2, 5-8 PM	—	Open Mic
July 30, 6 PM	—	Artist Talk w/ Kaamil A. Haider, pt. 1
August 12, 8 PM	—	Film screening: <i>Sentinels of Bronze</i> , 1937, 92 min
August 13, 6 PM	—	Conversation w/ Abdi Roble
August 20, 6 PM	—	Artist Talk w/ Wasima Farah, pt. 2

Kaamil A. Haider is a visual artist whose work examines the relationship between objects, meanings, and heritage in contemporary Somali art, with an emphasis on memory. He draws from diverse cultural, archival, and oral tradition references. Kaamil is a cofounder of Soomaal House of Art, an artists collective based in Minneapolis.

Wasima is an illustrator and visual artist based in Minnesota. Her works include vibrant illustrations centering Women of Color, graphic design and videography. She is inspired by Women empowerment and uses primary colors to express a confident message. Her goal is to create art that others can relate to and be motivated from.

History pledges to be faithful to the limits of fact, evidence, and archive, even as those dead certainties are produced by terror. I wanted to write a romance that exceeded the fictions of history—the rumors, scandals, lies, invented evidence, fabricated confessions, volatile facts, impossible metaphors, chance events, and fantasies that constitute the archive and determine what can be said about the past. I longed to write a new story, one unfettered by the constraints of the legal documents and exceeding the restatement and transpositions, which comprised my strategy for disordering and transgressing the protocols of the archive and the authority of its statements and which enabled me to augment and intensify its fictions.

—Saidiya Hartman

An archive assumes a relationship to time. The truth that academic researchers invest in the archive privileges forms that remain static, or virtually static, as time passes. This involves technologies of transcription, reproduction, and storage that permit the least possible data loss. What counts as data, naturally, is only self-evident insofar as one privileges the written form and its digital surrogates as the carrier of truth.¹

The issue of what is omitted in the archive is a multi-part question. There is the first question of what has been kept and not kept. What if what one seeks of the past was never recorded, or at least never stored? This is the condition of the visual culture of the Somali anti-colonial resistance. What exists in the archive are, in Kaamil A. Haider's words, "iconographies of the Somalis framed through the European/colonial gaze"—in short, images of colonial barbarity. In *Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus*, Haider identifies as his objective the recreation of this visual culture that we have no access to.

But this prompts a second question: of what the archival form cannot store. What if, as Haider suggests, the truth of the past is held in an oral form? Even if an authentic visual culture could be found, or be recovered by other means, what if visual culture hadn't been the privileged Somali form of the time? This is the provocative gambit of *Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus*: that the visual culture of Somali anti-colonial resistance isn't hidden in the backgrounds or margins of colonial photography, the interstices of colonial picture-making or other colonial iconographic forms, but in the richness of the oral tradition. Truth is privileged in the elasticity of the oral, rather than the stasis of the document—textual, pictorial, or otherwise.

¹We mean writing in the expansive sense—technologies of photography, phonography, and xerography, as their etymology suggests, are also forms of writing in this sense, as are the data stored in digital archives, rendered in the script of binary code.

This leads us to the third question: what is held in the oral tradition that could not possibly be transcribed? A poetic form, after all, is never only the carrier of semantic meaning. It contains rhythm, cadence, and tone, among other things. Moreover, the oral form is inherently social. It exists in time and passes through time in ways that even a sound recording cannot. It travels, as Haider has explained, through the "higher resolution" memory of oral tradition, and in its traveling between speakers—where its form is elastic, not static—coalesces in social interaction: resistance fomented in the genius of the collective, not of the individual.

In his 1982 study *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, Somali scholar Said S. Samatar described the poet Sayyid Maxammad 'Abdille Xasan as "an African resister of imperialism [who] harnessed a remarkable indigenous resource [oral poetry] in order to mobilize the public in his favor and against his opponents."² In their contrasting study, Dahabo Farah Hasan, Amina H. Adan, and Amina Mohamoud Warsame focus on the collective oral traditions of Somali nomad feminists, who "formed informal networks, kinship groups, work groups or religious associations to strengthen themselves and fight oppression" and "expressed their protests with the means at their disposal—poetry, work songs, children's lullabies."³ Between these two registers, the major and minor, we find a range of the oral from which Haider and his collaborator, illustrator Wasima Farah, "lift out visual references from these poems in the hopes of reconstituting the visuality of this era."

A further question is begged: what is at stake if we consider this reconstruction of the uncollected Somali visual culture of the anti-colonial resistance as archival research, even in a broad, tenuous sense of the archive? Author and literary scholar Dallas Hunt has postulated that Elders be considered archives, the upshot being "an Indigenous archive of memories . . . beyond what settler histories allow."⁴ But it is possible that the archive, with the colonial baggage of its collection practices, its pretense to patrimony, and most of all its static temporality, is integrally an insufficient framework for the ambitions of *Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus*—and moreover an insufficient framework for the kinds of truths that live in orality.

A last question: to what end, the pursuit of an anti-colonial Somali visual culture in the descriptive fecundity of the oral tradition, when the poems have not only survived but in the social form of their survival incarnate the spirit of collective resistance that Haider seeks? In their article "Decolonial Sensibilities: Indigenous Research and Engaging with Archives in Contemporary Colonial Canada," historian Crystal Fraser and anthropologist Zoe Todd reframe the task to "decolonize" archives, preferring to apply a "decolonial sensibility" focused on accessibility and points of access for Indigenous people.⁵ In this spirit, we might identify the visual in *Kaana Xusuuso, Kanna Xus* to be a point of entry for a diasporic Somali culture whose modes of communication and collectivity are now more visual than oral. If Somali oral traditions are nomadic forms, in contrast to the visual and textual documents to be found in the colonial archive, which to simplify might best be described as settler forms, the corrective visuality produced by Haider and Farah imagine a re-settled,

diasporan form: a visuality rooted in wisdoms of the oral. To borrow literary scholar and fabulist Saidiya Hartman's description of her project to redress the violence of the archive, this endeavor might be "finding an aesthetic mode suitable."⁶

Alexandra Alisauskas is a Learning and Engagement Librarian at the University of Calgary. She was a co-recipient of the 2020 W. Kaye Lamb Prize from the Association of Canadian Archivists. Godfre Leung is Artistic Director at The Bows. His recent exhibitions include *Pao Houa Her: Emplotment* at Or Gallery, *Christopher K. Ho: CX 889* at the Vancouver Art Gallery, and *TJ Shin: The Vegetarian* at The Bows. Alex and Godfre live and work as guests in Mohkínstsis (Calgary) in Treaty 7 territory.

REFERENCES

- ²Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Maxammad 'Abdille Xasan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), ix.
- ³Dahabo Farah Hasan, Amina H. Adan, and Amina Mohamoud Warsame, "Somalia: Poetry as Resistance Against Colonialism and Patriarchy," in *Subversive Women: Women's Movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Saska Wieringa (London: Zed Books, 1995), 168.
- ⁴Dallas Hunt, "Níkiwán: Contesting Settler Colonial Archives through Indigenous Oral History," in *Canadian Literature* 230/231 (Autumn/Winter 2016): 26.
- ⁵Crystal Fraser and Zoe Todd, "Decolonial Sensibilities: Indigenous Research and Engaging with Archives in Contemporary Colonial Canada," in *Decolonising Archives*, ed. Rado Ištók (Gothenburg: L'Internationale Online, 2016), 33–39.
- ⁶Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," in *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26 (June 2008): 9.

Soomaal House of Art is an artists collective that provides an artistic community and support through fellowships, programming and exhibitions, studio and gallery space for Somali artists in Minnesota and around the world.

