

February 7, 2024

We, the undersigned faculty and staff of the Eskenazi School of Art, Architecture + Design at Indiana University, oppose the university administration's cancellation of the long-planned exhibition Samia Halaby: Centers of Energy at the Eskenazi Museum of Art.

Undertaking the first retrospective in the U.S. of this renowned American artist of Palestinian origin – whose work belongs to such preeminent art collections as the Guggenheim Museum, the British Museum, and the National Gallery of Art, and is to be included in the 2024 Venice Biennale – demonstrates the extent to which our museum and its curatorial staff are engaged in the international art world; it would have showcased IU's relevance therein and enriched our community in turn.

Instead, the administration's abrupt cancellation of the exhibition compromises IU's reputation as a haven of creative expression, academic freedom, and human rights. An exhibition that could have secured the Eskenazi Museum's identity as a leading cultural institution has, in its cancellation, generated negative publicity for IU in *The New York Times*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Democracy Now!*, *ARTNews*, and *Artforum*, and prompted condemnations by PEN America, the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art Museum Watch, the National Coalition Against Censorship, the American Association of University Professors, the Middle East Studies Association of North America, and other groups.

At the Eskenazi School, we have already experienced collateral damage from this cancellation. Two internationally acclaimed artists who had committed nearly one year ago to participate in our endowed visiting artist series this spring have withdrawn. One of them explained, "To speak and share my work as a Jewish woman while a Palestinian woman is being silenced would be to give cover to those who like to imply that anything Palestinian is automatically antisemitic. This mentality is nothing less than nihilistic ethno-nationalism." A previous participant in the series informed us that in the wake of the cancellation, she plans never to return to IU. We can only anticipate further challenges recruiting faculty, students, and visitors disinclined to participate in an academic environment with such tight administrative control over creative activity and research.

According to a university spokesperson, the administration cancelled the exhibition owing to "concerns about guaranteeing the integrity of the exhibit for its duration"; however no specific, credible threats have been publicly identified. The fact that the exhibition was comprised entirely of abstract paintings, drawings, and digital artworks suggests that the source of the administration's concerns lies not in the work itself, but in Halaby's long, public history of activism for the Palestinian people—activism that she was already known for when the exhibition was planned. This leads us to believe that the administration's decision was a function of current political pressures to suppress Palestinian voices.

The university administration is entrusted with upholding and protecting the open discourse that is the foundation of IU and all credible institutions of higher learning. We believe that the administration's cancellation of Halaby's exhibition undermines the university's stated mission to uphold academic freedom, to protect constitutional rights to free speech, and to affirm our commitment to all members of our community. We live and work in the conviction that confronting painful histories and inconvenient truths and expressing conflicting and sometimes unpopular opinions is vital to a healthy and open-minded society and must be the cornerstone of our institution.

In the Eskenazi School, our research and creative activity speak to our faith in the artist's responsibility to fathom the human experience, offer new perspectives, foster empathy and respect, and contribute to the greater good, refusing to sidestep challenging or controversial issues in the process. Our far-ranging work includes the creation of a memorial and refuge in Marion, Indiana at the site of the state's last known lynching; photographic documentation of the abandoned sites of Japanese-American internment camps; video installations honoring the stories of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia; ceramic surface decoration incorporating and interrogating racially-charged imagery; sustainable and affordable housing initiatives in towns from Indiana to Mexico; participation in

global coalitions to promote ethical sourcing of materials and humane treatment of workers in the fashion and jewelry industries; and countless other critical and sometimes uncomfortable undertakings.

As a unit whose origins date to 1895, the Eskenazi School celebrates and shares our university's historical commitment to academic freedom, global awareness, diversity, and the arts. When Samia Halaby earned her M.F.A. in our painting department in the 1960s, it was already considered one of the nation's leading programs. Halaby contributed to this prestige as a faculty member in the 1970s when she freely exhibited her paintings in what is now the Grunwald Gallery. Fifty-four years later, the Eskenazi School family is heartbroken that we are not able to welcome our alumna and former faculty member back home as a rightful Hoosier and to celebrate her as a world-class artist.

We remain unconvinced of the rationale behind the show's cancellation. If there are indeed legitimate threats, we propose that IU postpone or shorten the exhibition to ensure that adequate safety measures can be put in place. It would be reasonable to start by consulting with our Big Ten peer, Michigan State University, which has been considering the same issues and is proceeding with the exhibition of Halaby's work later this year. We would look forward to welcoming Halaby back to the community to which she already belongs as an alumna and former faculty, and in so doing, confirming that IU is a place where all forms of creative expression can thrive.

Rowland Ricketts	Linda Tien	Kennon Smith	Ben Pines
Heather Akou	Ed Bernstein	Sharron Cherry	Eve Mansdorf
Sara Yourist	Ahmed Ozsever	Daniel Martinez	Jeff Wolin
Tim Kennedy	Hannah Osborn	Yaël Ksander	Melanie Pennington
Sarah Wilkinson	Nicole Jacquard	Kelly Wilson	Bonnie Sklarski
Hassnaa Mohammed	Betsy Stirratt	David Ondrik	Silvia Acosta
Megan Young	Bryan Orthel	Teresa Larrabee	Elke Pessl
Ellen Campbell	Su A Chae	Jennifer Riley	Lulu Loquidis Martinez
Ryan Farley	Chase Gamblin	Lucas Brown	Barry Gealt
Minjeong Kim	Johanna Winters	Mary Embry	Kim Dutkosky
Angela Caldwell	Tracy Templeton	Andrea Stanislav	Jessica Quirk
Justin Bailey	Jooyoung Shin	Martha MacLeish	Hiroko Hanamura
Deborah Christiansen	Karen Atkins	Dan Woerner	Atefeh Farajolahzadeh
Osamu James	Tianrui Ma	Kelly Richardson	Suzanne Halvorson
Nakagawa	Grae Loveless	Chris Cvitkovich	Dominick Rivers
Malcolm Mobutu Smith	Olivia Kalish	Ana Meza	Tim Mather
Gabriel Mo	Elizabeth Elich	Dorian Bybee	Nell Weatherwax
Caleb Weintraub	Tonja Torgerson	Jiangmei Wu	Carissa Carman
Torrey Gleason	Ran Huang	Chris Reinhart	Alexander Landerman