

Canberra's Fatima Killeen weaves memory with resistance in a wonderfully lyrical exhibition

8 May 2026 | By [Sasha Grishin](#)



Fatima Killeen, *Seeds of resistance*, 2024, silk screen, acrylic on wood, 15 pieces: 40 x 30cm each.
Photo: Fatima Killeen.

In the more than 30 years since Fatima Killeen, originally from Casablanca, Morocco, settled in Canberra, she has become a celebrated, nationally awarded and highly acclaimed visual artist.

With scores of solo and group exhibitions to her name, in Canberra, nationally and abroad, she has developed her own distinctive artistic language.

Killeen's training as an artist took place in Casablanca, then the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC and at the Canberra

School of Art, and she has attained a high skill level in various forms of painting and printmaking.

Her imagery could be described as symbolic, touching on magic realism, in which she blends precisely observed imagery with symbolic forms that transform them into powerful and mysterious manifestations.

Killeen is also an artist who works with a strongly expressed Muslim identity. It is estimated that there are about a million Muslims in Australia, and frequently she combines Arabic script and Islamic sayings, traditions and visual patterns into her work.

In 2021, she was awarded the First prize – Australian Muslim Artists Art Prize, held at Latrobe University & IMA, in Melbourne.

Her art generally celebrates a reverence for the natural environment, peace, harmony and a respect for humanity. Nevertheless, in a gentle yet firm voice, she calls out injustice, genocide and all forms of coercion.

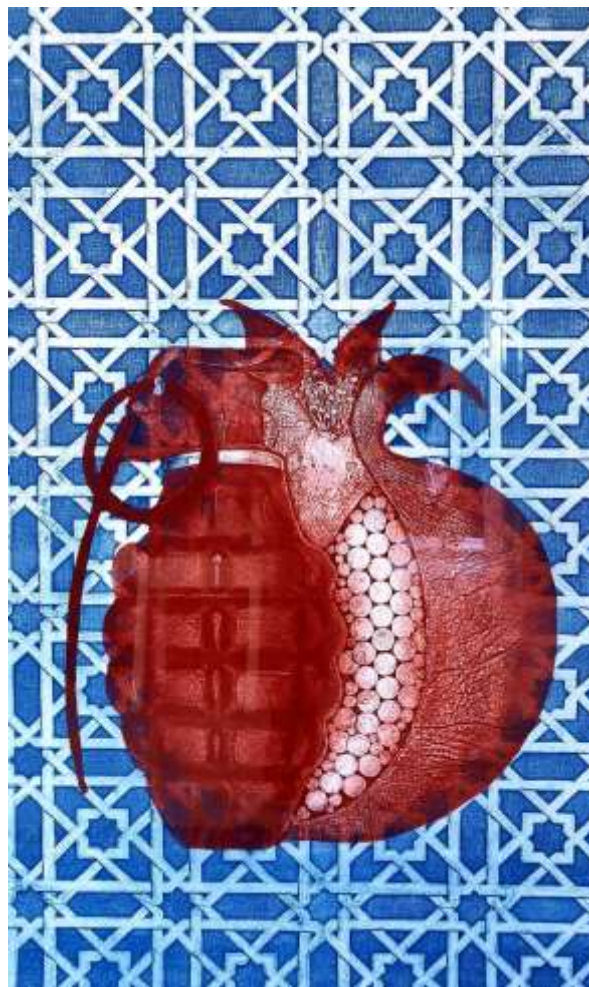
Fatima Killeen, *They tried to bury us; they didn't know we were seeds*, 2024, collagraph print on paper, 85 x 60cm (plate). Photo: Fatima Killeen.



In one powerful work, titled *They tried to bury us*, the inscription in Arabic calligraphy reads “They tried to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds”.

The exotic fruit in the centre is a beautiful pomegranate that is somehow morphed into a hand grenade – a combination of beauty and nourishment with a destructive weapon.

The red fruit is contrasted with the background of a traditional Islamic pattern. The artist in her wall text observes, “The realm of nature provides a generosity and an immense divine beauty as it is an acknowledgment of God’s work on earth. Our existence is brief and transitory. It ought to be a commitment to peace on earth”.



Fatima Killeen, *Crooked narrative*, 2021, collagraph print on paper, 85 x 60cm (plate).

Photo: Fatima Killeen.

In related collagraphs, *Crooked narrative*, 2021 and *We are what we grow 2*, 2023, there are other pomegranate hand grenades,

but the backgrounds alternate between a celestial blue and the universal Damask pattern, which originated in Damascus. In this instance, Killeen references the crisis in Syria caused by the meddling of foreign powers.



Fatima Killeen, *The promise of return*, 2026, acrylic, keys, lace on wood, triptych, 120 x 50cm.
Photo: Fatima Killeen.

A memorable piece at the exhibition is the mixed-media triptych *The promise of return* (2026).

The artist explains, “My work is a tribute to the Holyland and to the resilience of Palestinian women who have woven their home keys into their rugs and embroideries in order not to lose them.

“The key is a powerful symbol of memory and their right to return to the homes they were forced to leave behind that have been bulldozed out of existence.

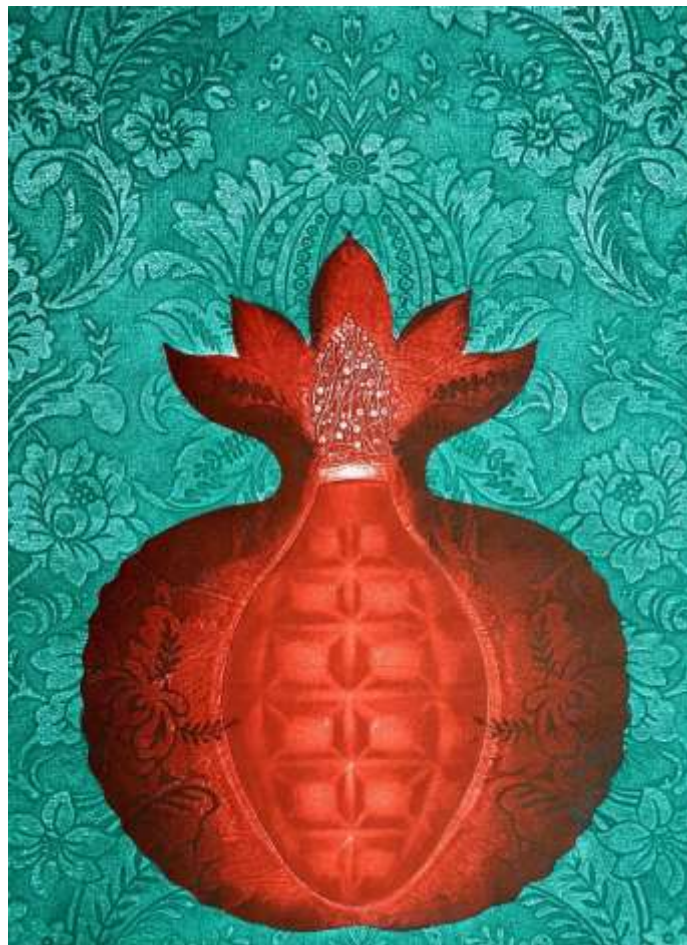
“The key to my house said: ‘In the name of every stone in your little house, resist’, in the words of the Palestinian poet, Muin Bseiso.”

It is a mesmerising piece in which the lace on wood forms a halo around the key, with each image surrounded by a sea of blood-red.

The major piece in the exhibition is a fifteen-panel installation realised as screenprints and titled *Seeds of resistance*, 2024.

The Arabic inscription once more reads, “They tried to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds”, possibly first written by the Greek poet, Dinos Christianopoulos, but subsequently attributed to many freedom fighters, including Che Guevara.

The imagery once more brings together the beauty of nature with the brutality of war and the belief in the will of the people to survive.



Fatima Killeen, *We are what we grow 2*, 2023, collagraph print on paper, 85 x 60cm (plate).

Photo: Fatima Killeen.

The artist dedicates her work to Gaza, “that has sadly become the testing ground for the paraphernalia of modern warfare, contaminated military landfill and mountains of rubble. The massive scale of the aggression levelling Gaza with the unwavering American support is of earthquake proportions, specifically the outlawed phosphorus bombings”.

This is a powerful exhibition that celebrates a people who have endured so much and yet have survived and are determined to survive. Killeen says this with a voice of solemn majesty by celebrating this enduring beauty.

Fatima Killeen, Never the twain shall meet. ANCA Gallery, 1 Rosevear Place, Dickson. Friday, Saturday and Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closes 24 May.

Region Canberra – 8 May 2026