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Anything but INVISIBLE: Oak Fellow Khalid Albaih marvels at supportive Colby while opening eyes to global suppression

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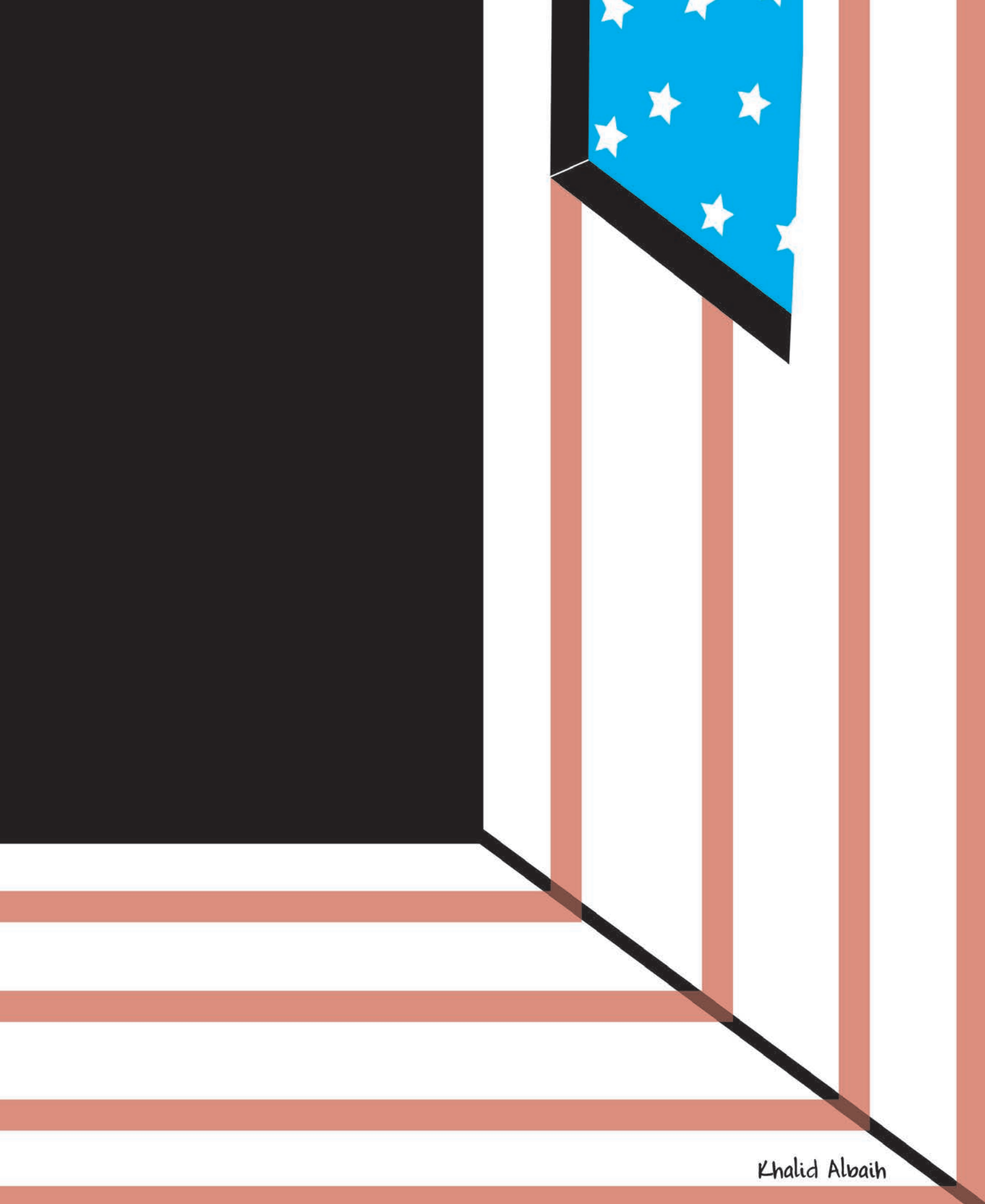
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Khalid Albaih

Anything but INVISIBLE

Oak Fellow Khalid Albaih marvels at supportive Colby while opening eyes to global suppression

By Gerry Boyle '78

A political cartoonist with a global web presence was surprised and gratified to find an equally receptive audience at Colby.

Khalid Albaih, a Sudanese artist who lives in Qatar and the 2016 Oak Fellow for International Human Rights at Colby, said personal relationships between students and faculty are rare in Middle East universities. When he realized that he could be close to his Colby students—and would be expected to be—he was thrilled. “The relationship between the professors and the students, and even the personality of the professors and how young they are—it’s amazing,” Albaih said.

Albaih has gained a viral following for his political cartoons (distributed under the label “Khartoon!”, a play on the name of the capital of Sudan), which feature cutting commentary on world events delivered through simple and direct images.

His images have turned up on the walls of cities caught up in the Arab Spring, including Cairo and Sana’a, the largest city in Yemen.

The cartoonist captures the anger of thousands of people who may have no voice, and certainly no global reach. He also captured the attention of western media, including *The Guardian*, the *New York Times*, and Al Jazeera.

The boundaries between cultures and countries began to dissolve when he stepped into the classroom at Colby and found students eager to learn more about the Middle East, its history and activism there. “I felt that for such a small community [at Colby], there’s a lot of interest in the world,” Albaih said. “And positivity. People want to do things. It’s the total opposite of the ‘Trump’s America’ idea.”

The feeling was mutual as students found the social-media celebrity Oak Fellow was not only approachable but wanted to engage in conversation. “I never met anyone who was so open and wanted to talk to everyone about everything,”

said Amya Bhalla '19 of New Delhi, India. “I know so many people who met him for the first time and that first conversation would last two or three hours, just talking.”

Bhalla, a political cartoonist herself, said that even after Albaih left campus in December, students could feel his influence, with more discussion of foreign policy and international news. “He definitely motivated a lot of students to open their eyes to things that are going on around the world,” she said.

One of the ways Albaih helped open eyes at Colby was an event at the Colby College Museum of Art Dec. 7, at which students, faculty, and staff experienced the lives of refugees through film and discussion. The event was linked to the 2016-17 Center for the Arts and Humanities theme, *Revolutions*.

Albaih said his work at Colby and exposure in the United States and beyond allow him to correct the Western notion that the Middle East is and always has been a violent place, “that we’ve been killing each other forever,” he said.



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—2016 Oak Fellow for International Human Rights Khalid Albaih

“It’s just letting the Global North know where all of that came from,” Albaih said. “We can connect. We’re not enemies. It’s breaking those borders.”

After Colby, Albaih returned to Qatar and then to Sudan, a country whose authoritarian regime he has criticized in his work. “Going now is a test to see what’s going to happen,” Albaih said. “Inshallah, everything will be okay.”

In January Khalid posted on his Facebook page: *I’m back from Sudan after nearly 3 weeks of limited movements, suspicious cars following me and very obvious ‘undercover’ security agents hanging out taking pictures. ... The feeling of not knowing if you’re gonna make it home is indescribable. But I get to leave, activists there don’t. #Respect*

Visit a web page devoted to Albaih’s work at Colby and beyond. colby.edu/mag 