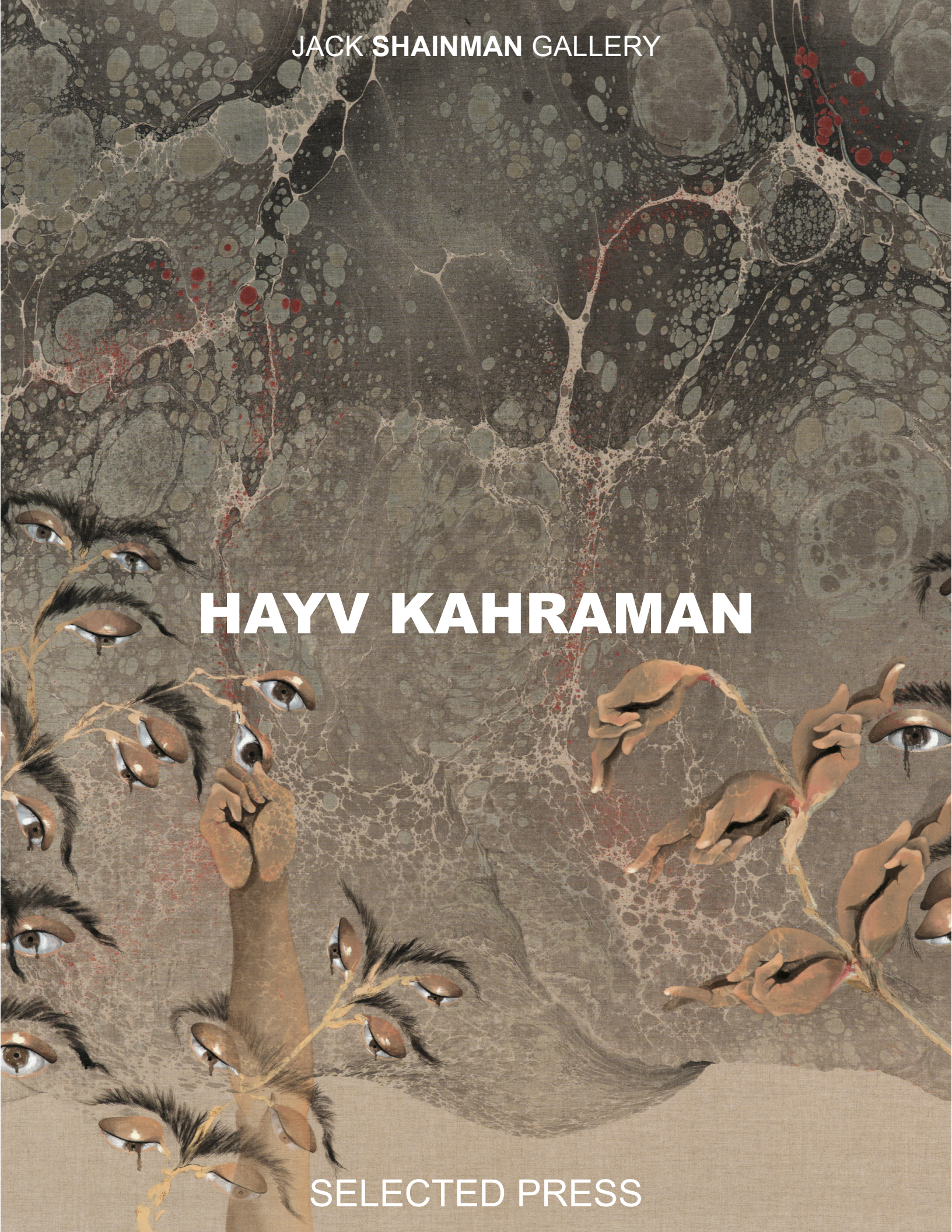
JACK **SHAINMAN** GALLERY



HAYV KAHRAMAN

SELECTED PRESS

The New York Times

The Iraqi-born artist Hayv Kahraman explores displacement from Baghdad and Altadena in her New York show, “Ghost Fires.”

By Aruna D’Souza
Reporting from Los Angeles - Oct. 3, 2025

Hayv Kahraman in her art studio in West Covina, Calif. Nori Rasmussen for The New York Times

The painter Hayv Kahraman returned to her bungalow in Altadena, Los Angeles in January, while the Eaton wildfires were still raging, to check on the damage. At one point, a helicopter flew at a low altitude over her block to douse the flames. While her neighbors clapped and cheered in gratitude, Kahraman ran for cover.

Her reaction was sparked by childhood memories of Baghdad, when approaching helicopters raised fears of impending American bombs.

Kahraman (her first name rhymes with Dave) was only 10 years old when she fled Iraq with her mother and sister in 1991, a few months into Operation Desert Storm. They sought asylum in Sweden after a circuitous journey arranged by a smuggler with stops in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and Frankfurt, Germany. She moved to Italy as a young adult, and then to the United States.

Since she began her career as an artist in the mid-2000s — she is self-taught — her paintings have alluded to the effects of these displacements. But having to flee her home again — this time not forced out by war but by environmental disaster — has put a distinct spin on those longstanding themes. The results of those multiple dislocations are now on view in her Manhattan exhibition, “Ghost Fires,” at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Chelsea, through Oct. 25.

“Rain Ritual,” 2025. Kahraman’s “Ghost Fires” is filled with beautiful women in scorched surroundings, including these, whose movements recall a Sumerian ritual to summon rain. via Jack Shainman Gallery; Photo by Dan Bradica Studio

“The wildfires and the memories they triggered put me into a deep depression,” she said in an interview in her current work space in West Covina, a Los Angeles suburb, in August. “After a few weeks, I finally came to the studio. My work usually involves a lot of preparing and thinking and sketching, but now I just picked up a brush. After about 30 minutes a door opened in my brain — every time I put down a brushstroke, I remembered more and more about who I was.”

“My work has always been about trauma,” she said. “But in a very direct and visceral way, painting was actually healing me.”

“Ghost Fires” is filled with beautiful, often fierce-looking women with masses of unruly black hair, contorted into athletic poses in scorched, otherworldly surroundings. Even though they look more like mythical beings than real people, they sport geometrically patterned bathing suits, similar to the ones Kahraman wears when she takes the mirror selfies and videos she uses in lieu of painting from a live model.

Kahraman's earlier work, including "Not Quite Human 9" (2019), were graphic, with serene women whose bodies fade in and out of visibility against featureless backgrounds. via Pilar Corrias, London, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York and Vielmetter, Los Angeles

In earlier work, Kahraman depicted her women with crisp outlines. She placed them against indeterminate backgrounds as if floating and spinning in space. Sometimes their bodies were barely visible, or half finished — shoulders, arms and face vanishing into the unprimed canvas. Their linear quality nodded to her brief training in graphic design when she lived in Italy, as well as to her varied art historical interests: the medieval Baghdad School of manuscript painting, Renaissance and Baroque drawing and etching, and Japanese Ukiyo-e prints.

But now, Kahraman's brush is freer. Her women's bodies are sinewy, more fully defined and three-dimensional, their faces more expressive. "The looseness that you're seeing in the new work is because my connection with my body has shifted," she said. "Trauma dissociates you from your body, and this healing process has allowed me to regain that."

After her 2022 move to Altadena, nestled in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, she began incorporating techniques — including marbling, created by dipping her canvas into a large, purpose-built vat in her studio and creating a lacy but resilient fabric out of flax fibers that she appliqués onto her canvases — that suggested mountains and craters. "I think buying a home was sort of an anchor for me, as someone whose life has been very nomadic," she said.

Kahraman in her art studio in West Covina. She creates a lacy but unusually resilient fabric out of flax to appliqué onto her canvases, lending them a sense of destruction. Nori Rasmussen for The New York Times

That house is now uninhabitable — still standing but contaminated by chemicals and heavy metals. As we drove through her neighborhood, she recalled the previous times she had been forced from her home.

“Sometimes I think the earth is trying to expel me,” she said.

The migrant’s experience permeates all aspects of these paintings. Kahraman fixates on her subjects’ eyes — they are often left blank or depicted in the figures’ palms, like the hand of Fatima, a symbol popular in the Middle East and North Africa that is said to ward off bad fortune. Her fascination is linked to the constant surveillance that immigrants are subjected to.

“I have heard stories of refugees who burn off their fingerprints to avoid being tracked across borders,” Kahraman said. “I was thinking about iris scans and facial recognition when I left the eyes blank, but also I also wanted to allow them to look inward, refusing to meet the viewer’s gaze.”

This is the first step of her beginning to separate and bind together the flax fibers to create a platform to marble or paint on later. Nori Rasmussen for The New York Times

Some of Kahraman’s handcrafted “paper” of blended flax fibers. Nori Rasmussen for The New York Times

The sheer elegance of Kahraman’s images belies her almost obsessive research process. Over the course of our interview, she discussed, with a great deal of fluency, botany, microbiology, malacology (the study of mollusks), psychoanalysis, the theorist Donna Haraway, history and contemporary politics in West Asia, and more.

Frauke Josenhans, curator of “The Foreign in Us,” Kahraman’s 2024 survey at the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University, Houston, said: “The way she uses those references is subtle but insistent. It’s not the first thing you see.”

The works in “Ghost Fires” were all created after the Los Angeles wildfires. A recurring image in her new paintings is a phoenixlike bird from medieval Arab cosmology that rises from the ashes of a pyre. Some paintings, depicting women sweeping their hair on the ground conjuring rain clouds as they swirl dust into the air, refer to an ancient Sumerian ritual.

In “Rain Birds Ritual” 2025, women drag their hair on the ground to summon rain against a burned-out background covered with distressed, woven flax fiber. via Jack Shainman Gallery; Photo by Dan Bradica Studio

And then there are repeated portrayals of women removing their underpants to sit on flames. These characters derive from a parable told by her great-aunt in Iraqi Kurdistan that begins with a flea falling into a fire. After a series of beings — crow, palm tree, water buffalo, river — destroy themselves out of grief for the insect, the tale ends with a mythical Ur-mother who is so distraught at the carnage that she sits on a hot oven to destroy her womb, signaling the end of humanity.

It is a bizarre tale to tell a child, Kahraman conceded, but it fascinates her. “It speaks of this entanglement of every single creature living,” she said. “They’re all interconnected, and they are all affected by this flea, this pest.”

In multiple works in “Ghost Fires,” women sit, spread-legged, on volcanoes or other sources of heat, referring to a Kurdish folk tale in which the destruction of a flea leads to the extinction of humanity. via Jack Shainman Gallery; Photo by Dan Bradica Studio

The flea is a stand-in for the immigrant, she said. “But really, this is a story about extinction, and the idea that the extinction of one thing can be a trigger event for all kinds of extinctions.”

In one of the biggest canvases in the show, measuring 6½ feet square, Kahraman transforms the oven from the story into a volcano; the woman’s expression is not grief but defiance, as if to say, “I’m not going anywhere.”

Kahraman said she’s trying hard not to decipher every element of her work for the viewer.

“It’s because of being a refugee, being an immigrant, and constantly having to justify my existence and my presence,” she said.

“But now I’m trying to let go.”

Hayv Kahraman: Ghost Fires

Through Oct. 25, Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, Manhattan; 212-645-1701, jackshainman.com.

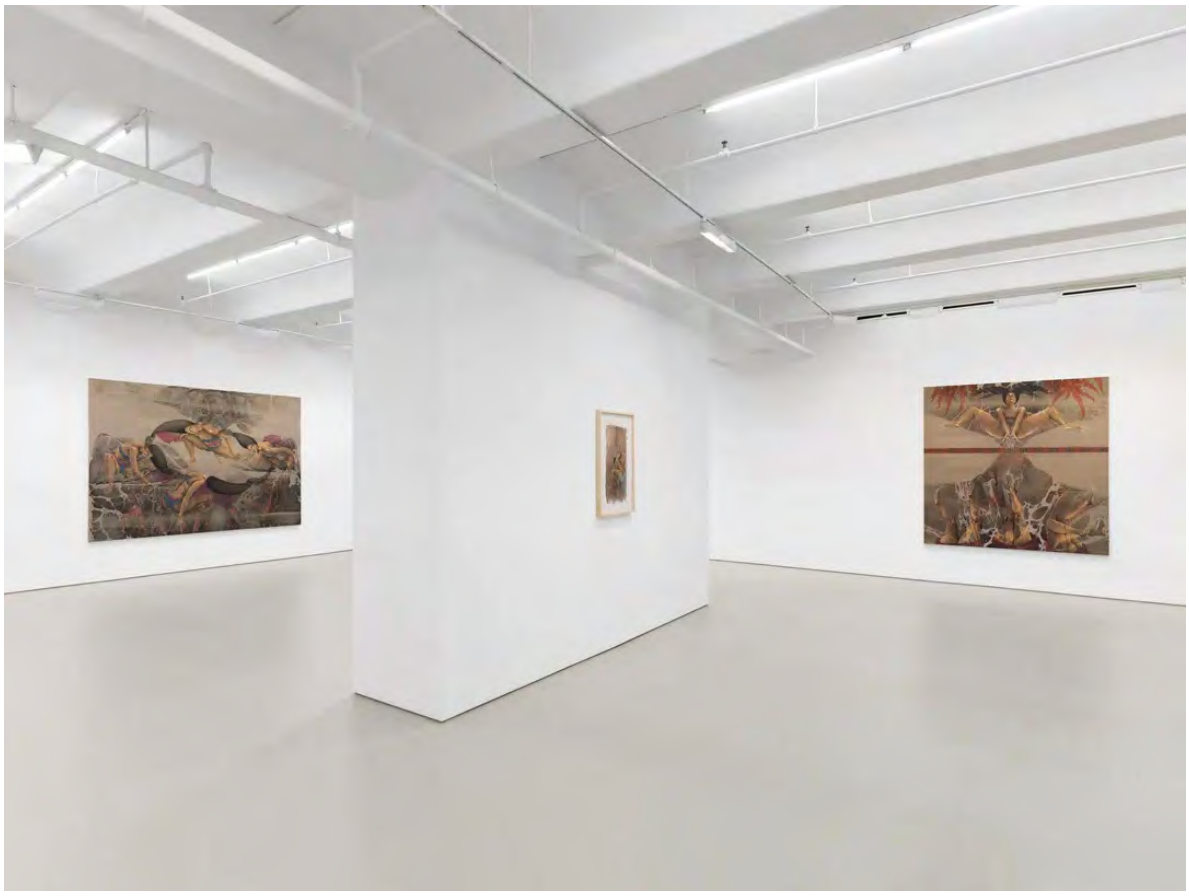
A correction was made on Oct. 3, 2025*: An earlier version of this article referred incorrectly to Hayv Kahraman’s paintings in her new show, “Ghost Fires.” They each have individual names. They don’t share a single title called ‘Untitled (To Be Titled).’”*

A version of this article appears in print on , Section C, Page 9 of the New York edition with the headline: A Painter Creates a Home on Canvas

ARTSEEN | OCTOBER 2025

Hayv Kahraman: *Ghost Fires*

By Joseph Akel



Installation view: *Hayv Kahraman: Ghost Fires,* Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, 2025. © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Dan Bradica Studio.

Hayv Kahraman is on fire. *Ghost Fires*, Kahraman's latest show, is a searing meditation upon the lasting deprivations of war and the elemental forces of natural

disaster. Kahraman knows a thing or two about the many guises violence and dislocation wear. When she was eleven, her family fled the febrile abyss of America's occupation of Iraq. Earlier this year, Kahraman lost her home amid the wildfires which incinerated swathes of Southern California. In many ways, then, *Ghost Fires* is both a response to the loss of her home *and* a continuation of a practice which cuts deep.

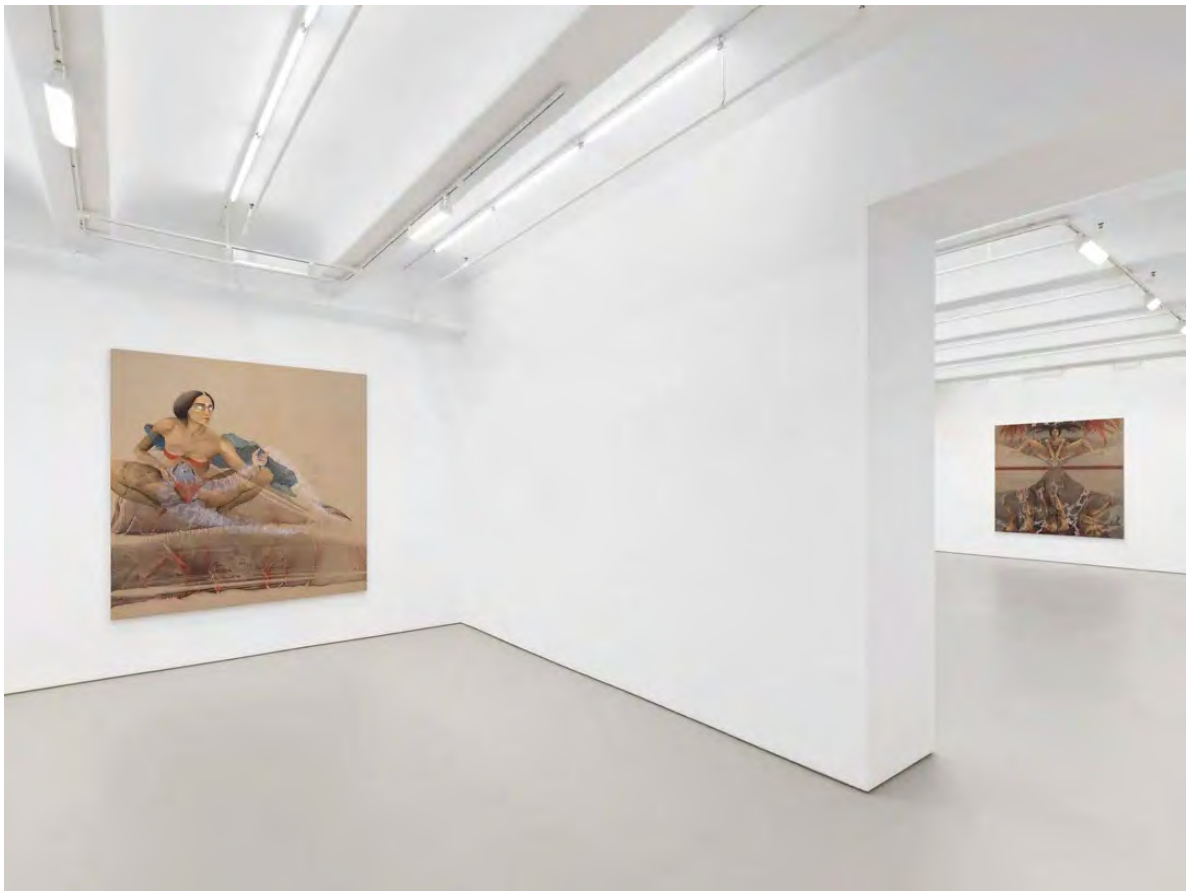
Ghost Fires
Jack Shainman Gallery
September 11–October 25, 2025
New York

In several works, among them *The Sun and the Hair and the Wind* (all works 2025), Kahraman paints her female subjects—an interlocked circle of six women viewed from above, a singular braid of hair tying them together—atop marbleized sheets of woven flax. The fibrous nature of the flax, its coarse, frayed edges, give the work a desiccated, charred quality. This sense is heightened by the painting's marbled background, a wash of sooty black ripples and whorls dotted with flecks and splotches of sanguineous red. Marbling has been an element of Kahraman's visual language for several years. In *Ghost Fires*, however, the carbonous marbling conjures a charged atmosphere. Smoke and flame, ash and ember—this is its language.

Hayv Kahraman, *Rain Ritual,* 2025. Oil and acrylic on linen, 78 × 115 × 1 ½ inches. © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Women—or more appropriately, the same woman with jet-black hair, heavy brow, rose red lips—are a constant subject in Kahraman's body of work. They sometimes

appear as a solitary figure, as in the titular *Ghost Fires*, or as multiples of each other, as with *Ghost Fires Through Eyes*. More recently, Kahraman has taken to portraying her subjects' eyes without irises or pupils. Myth and history, of course, are filled with blind seers—Sophocles's Tiresias, John Milton's Samson—the lack of sight a metaphor for prophetic powers. Revelation is never just a matter of seeing with your own eyes. What is blind faith, after all? The solitary white-eyed women of *Invocation*—hands outstretched, tendrils of plaited white smoke arising from them—and *Rain Bird*—crouched low, the same braided coils of smoke handled like rope—lend the imagery in *Ghost Fires* a sibylline air. Kahraman writes in a statement accompanying the exhibition that she began working on the series well before the fires destroyed her home, rhetorically asking "Can I be intuitive...?" Hybrid symbolism and mythologies are woven together throughout *Ghost Fires*, prophetic sight, references to rituals and invocations, establishing a self-fashioned lore unique to Kahraman, one which spans cultures, centuries, genealogies. Whether or not Kahraman is clairvoyant is beside the point: her vision is an altogether unique form of seeing, eclipsing boundaries and identity, asserting a far more radical act of self-becoming.



Installation view: *Hayv Kahraman: Ghost Fires,* Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, 2025. © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Dan Bradica Studio.

Fire symbolizes many things to many cultures and is often ascribed a dualistic nature: creator and destroyer, source of affliction and means for absolution. Kahraman refers to *jinns* and *Anqas*, mythical figures common to Persian and Arab lore, but with origins stretching to the dawn of Mesopotamia civilization. Both *jinn*—a shape-shifting wish granter—and *Anqa*—a female bird, much like a phoenix, born anew from its own immolation—share fire as agent of becoming and destruction. Among the most arresting of Kahraman's images is *Anqa'*, a large-scale painting which replaces the eponymous mythical bird for the artist's ubiquitous women. Wearing a crown of red and black braids, a white-eyed woman sits in a marbled cloud, legs spread wide, her palms inset with eyes at their center, facing outward and covering her genitals, while below, the upturned legs of three women stand like tentacles, their buttocks exposed. Hayv Kahraman's infernal *Anqa'*, like all the images in *Ghost Fires*, has rage and spectacle in spades. It also gestures toward a far more sublime truth. Destruction's finality is certain only when hope's vision is clouded by despair.

Joseph Akel is a New York-based freelance writer and editor. His non-fiction writing and criticism have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Paris Review, Frieze*, and *Vanity Fair*, among others. Additionally, he has penned several artist monographs, most recently for artist Doug Aitken. Akel is currently working on his first novel. He holds a master's degree in Art History from Oxford University.

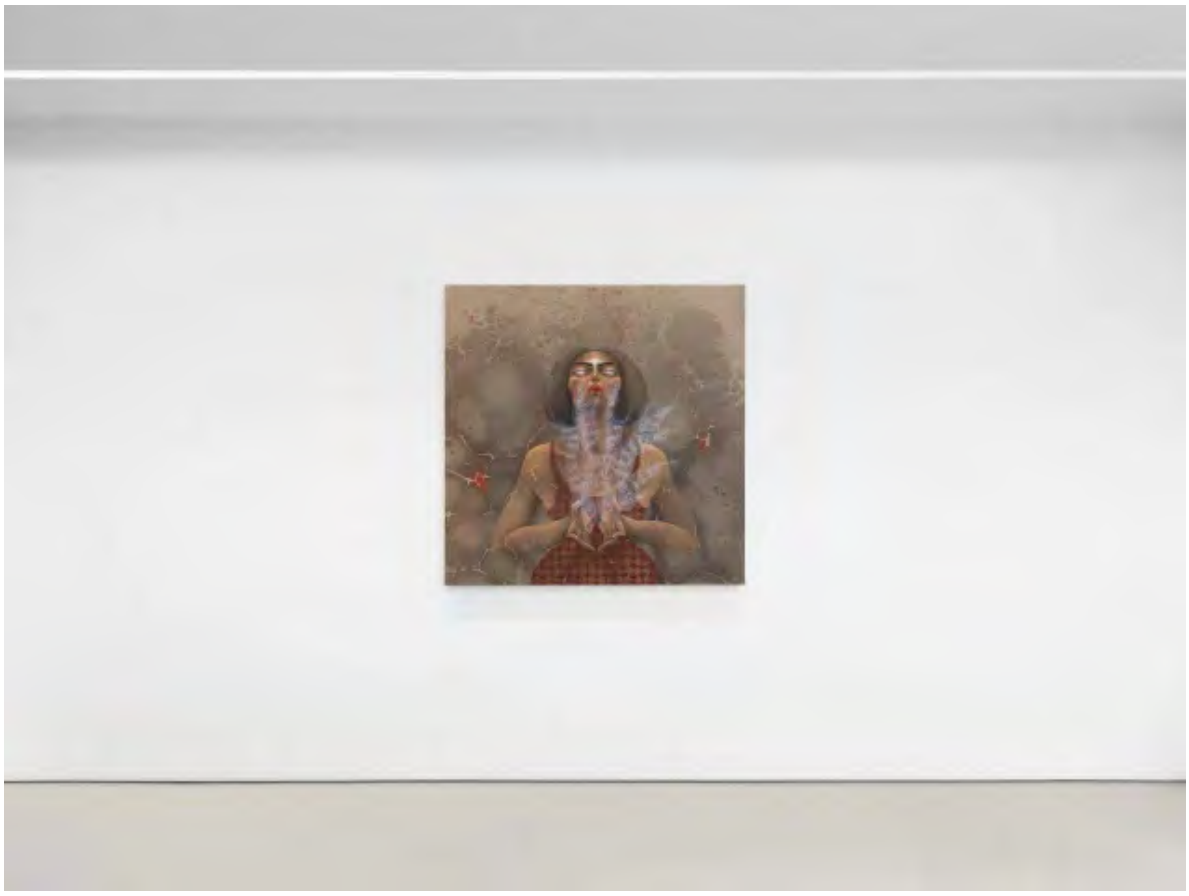
OBSERVER

ARTS • ART REVIEWS

In Hayv Kahraman's 'Ghost Fires,' Grief Becomes a Living Ritual

The artist's new works at Jack Shainman in New York channel fire, folktales and jinn to confront exile, despair and regeneration.

By Elisa Carollo • 10/06/25 11:32am



Hayv Kahraman's "Ghost Fires" is at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York through October 25.

Luminous yet ominous, Hayv Kahraman's work radiates an archetypal force, drawing on ancient symbolism to confront the contemporary condition and timeless existential questions about humanity's place within the entropic cycle of the universe. Her work explores personal and collective stories of displacement, diasporic disorientation and cultural fracture, evoked through mysterious choreographies of feminine bodies drifting in suspended, liminal spaces—as if they are both inhabiting discomfort and, at the same time, finding within that fluidity a freer, more open space of possibility. Contorted and distorted, her figures expand rhizomatically across the canvas, their formations echoing mandalas or branching like trees, suggesting growth with no fixed direction but nonetheless attuned to some universal order.

While Kahraman's work has often been interpreted through the narrow lens of her personal history as an Iraqi émigré—first to Europe, then to the U.S.—her show at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York reaches toward something far more universal. Here, the feminine body becomes a portal: its gestures and gravitational motions converge around energetic centers, channeling unseen flows and enacting quiet rituals of connection to dimensions both within and beyond the body.

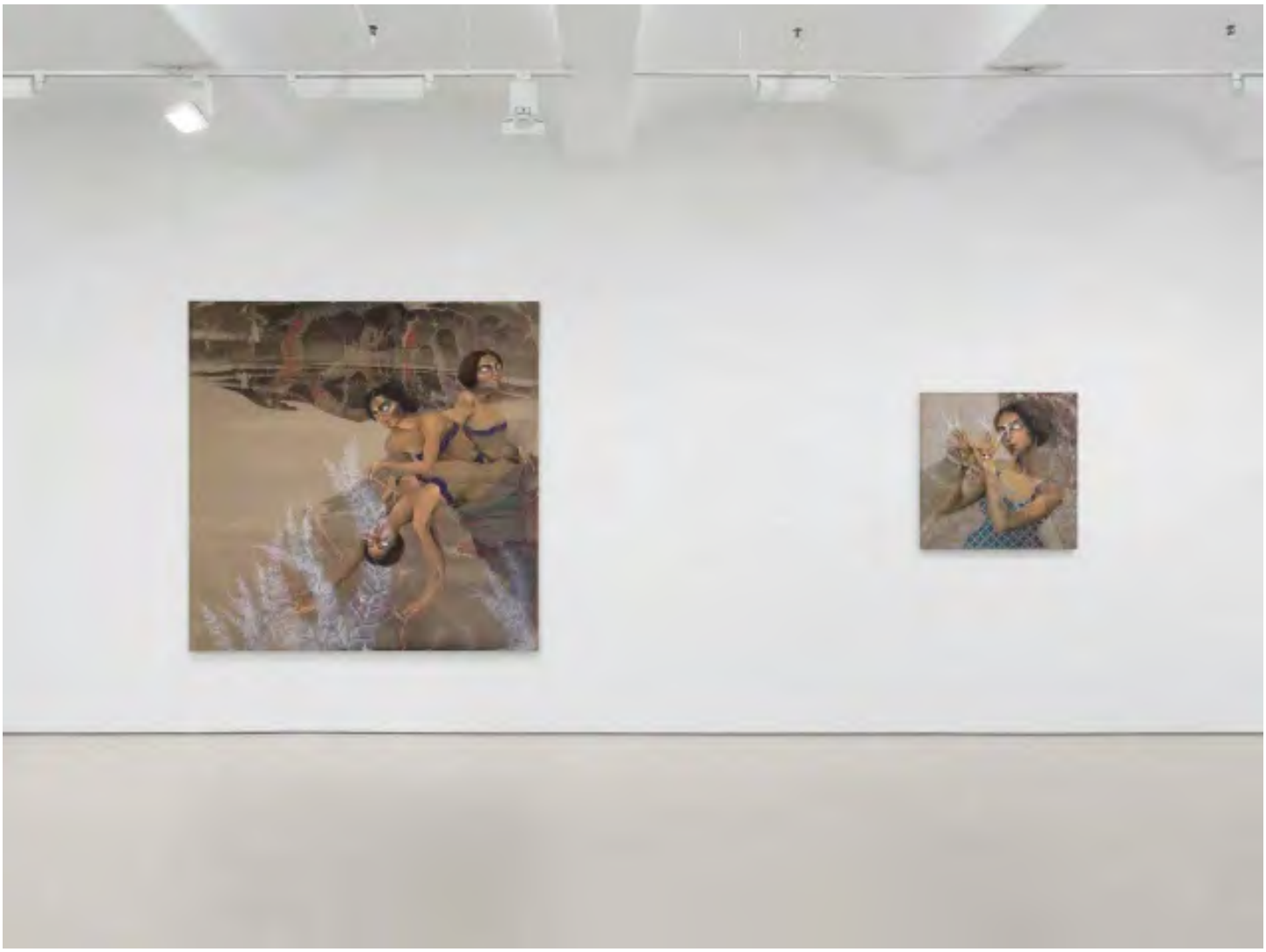
"Portals are something I've been thinking about," Kahraman tells Observer, but she confesses that she was not sure if she was consciously aware of it at the time. "It's one of those things I only discovered after the fact. When I realized it, I saw that this is a very different way of working."

Hayv Kahraman. Photo: Daniel Gurton

Though her work appears epiphanic, as if born solely of vision and intuition, Kahraman's process follows a rigorous methodology rooted in drawing, structure and control. Over the years, she has built her own visual lexicon and compositional system, shaped by the rational discipline she absorbed while studying in Sweden after fleeing Iraq and by the symbolic geometry she encountered in Florence, grounded in the Renaissance ideal of universal harmony. Hearing this, it becomes clear how her art enacts the challenge of making these disparate parts coexist within a single image, alongside the cultural and symbolic tropes she channels. The repetition of her figures also suggests an artistic practice that has evolved into a form of meditation and personal ritual—one through which visions rising from the subconscious are filtered, organized and refined.

"I'm very systematic in the way I work. There are always months of research behind it—I'm not your typical painter," she says. "I read constantly, and I can't think of a time when I haven't anchored the work in a literary text or a scholarly concept that I've become obsessed with. I lose myself in th research, and the ideas, the work itself, really take shape in dialogue with those texts." Yet grounding her work in literary references and self-devised structures may also be a way to contain the entropic ~~nature of~~ her expansive, mythopoetic practice—as if these archetypal presences ultimately surfaced and flowed onto the canvas beyond rational control.

She admits that dismantling rigid frameworks and discovering the potential in surrendering to something primordial—bound to an ancestral dimension already within her—was something she was able to do, perhaps for the first time, with this show. "There was more of a channeling of something that was happening in these works. I don't know if I allowed myself to go there in the past," she considers. "Before, I was more controlled in it, but with these works I felt some blocks had lifted—blocks I had placed on myself without even realizing it." For Kahraman, this was less a conscious decision than a discovery. "I think part of the reason I adopted those blocks goes back to my own history. I fled Iraq and became a refugee in Sweden, where I grew up and entered the Swedish school system, and I think that shaped me in ways I'm still uncovering."



Informed by her previous exploration of displacement, the artist's new body of work is a response to the recent wildfires in Los Angeles and their direct effect on her family. © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Dan Bradica Studio

The recurring feminine figures she paints emerged toward the end of her time in Italy, just as she was preparing to move to the United States. She met her American husband in Florence, and his home in Arizona became the next destination in her journey. The move, however, came with deep ambivalence. She had never been to the U.S. and had little desire to go, and the timing—2005 or 2006, at the height of sectarian violence in Iraq—made the relocation all the more fraught. "I remember thinking, what am I doing moving to a country that's at war with my own?" she recalls. Those conflicting thoughts remained, even as she tried to set them aside. "This figure has become a kind of methodology for me to work through certain ideas" and a symbolic presence through which she could process grief and trauma, reframing them into new narratives of herself and the world around her.

Kahraman acknowledged that the characters in her work could easily be seen as alter egos, given their resemblance to her own body. The process often began with filming herself in motion and using those recordings as the basis for drawing and painting. In this way, her body became both subject and instrument, and the figures became channels through which she transferred both body and psyche into the work.

At one point, Kahraman brought up the story of the Persian poet and Sufi mystic Rumi and his meeting with Shams. As a young man, Rumi was seated by a river surrounded by books, reading in pursuit of knowledge, when Shams suddenly cast the books into the water. The gesture, devastating at first, became a revelation: knowledge cannot rest solely on intellect but must move beyond the written word. “It was this sense of moving past the purely textual that shaped the making of these works,” Kahraman reflects.

“Can I be intuitive-clairvoyant-even as the rational, patriarchal voice in my head demands proof?” Kahraman writes in her own essay accompanying the show, encapsulating the essence of these new works. “How can I birth and be in ceremony with my painting without justifying its existence in this place? Like an asylum seeker justifying her pain to the immigration officer.”

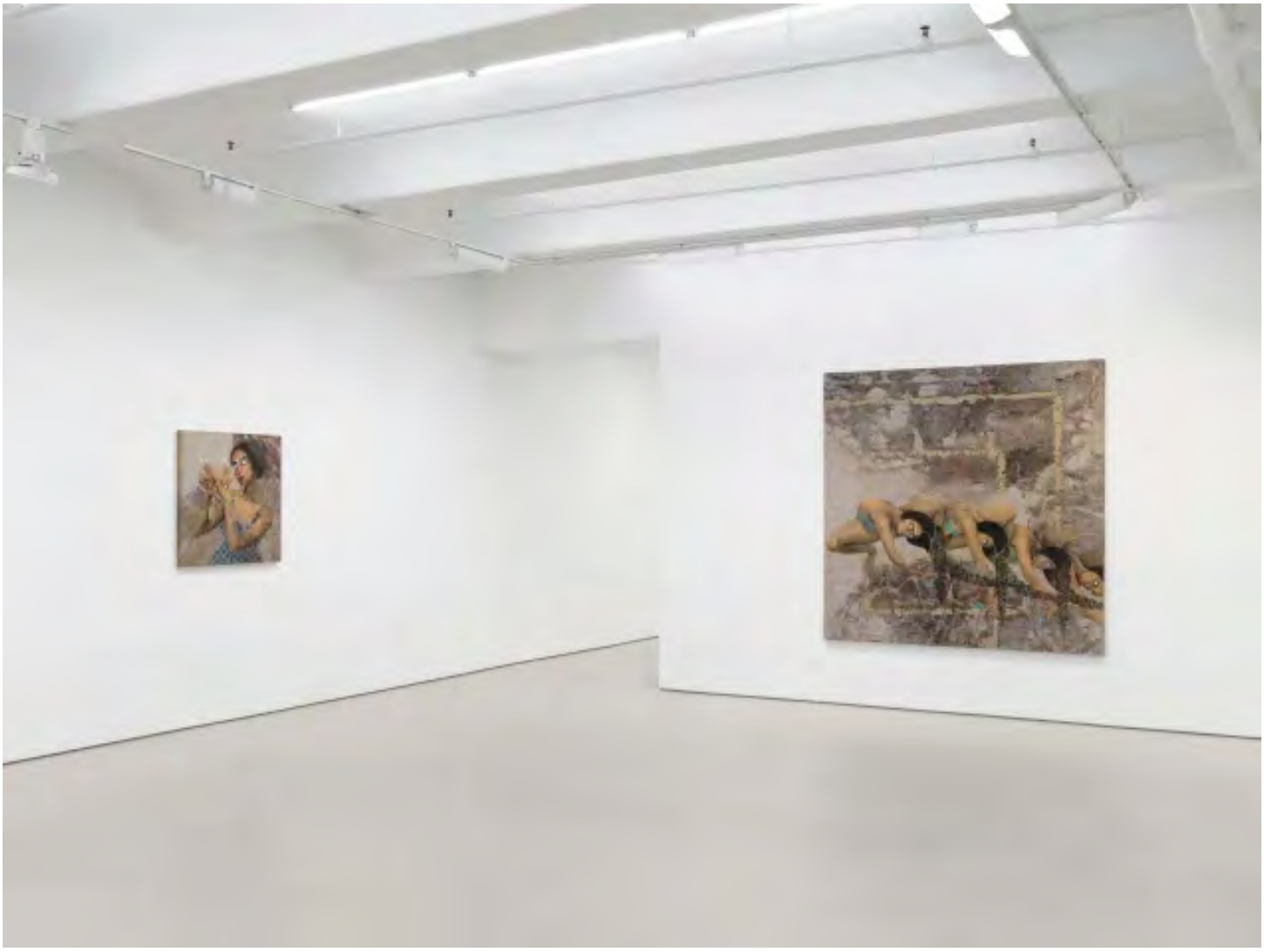
As the title “Ghost Fires” suggests, the artist takes fire as her central motif—at once cathartic and destructive. These ghostly fires began appearing in her imagery more than a year ago, foreshadowing the devastating Los Angeles wildfires that later left her family without a livable home. The exhibition is anchored in Etel Adnan’s *The Arab Apocalypse*, which Kahraman was determined to rescue from the ruins despite the chemical stench of toxins that made it difficult to breathe. Adnan once wrote of the sun, “Because the sun is dangerous, it can kill you—burn you. But the sun is also life,” a line Kahraman recalled vividly. Fire, in her hands, operates in much the same way: an archetypal presence embodying both life and death, regeneration and decay, part of the eternal cycle of matter and energy transforming endlessly into one another.

Kahraman's recent body of work, "Ghost Fires," explores the intertwined forces of ecocidal destruction, memory and regeneration.

In Islamic cosmology, humans were created from clay and earth, angels from light and jinn from smokeless fire. Read against Kahraman's new work, it becomes clear that these feminine presences are much more than alter egos despite their resemblance. They appear as jinn—feminine spirits, invisible and constantly transforming, beings of volatility and energy capable of both creation and destruction. Acting as guides or forces of chaos, they channel a relentless current of life that ensures renewal after the ashes. "I think they're always marching—or at least I hope they are," she reflects. "I really hope they're always moving and changing, always in flux. I truly believe nothing is ever static anyway."

This body of work was also inspired by a dystopian Kurdish folktale her great-aunt once told her, about a louse and a flea warming themselves by a bread oven on a cold night. When the louse's thimble falls into the fire, the flea dives in to retrieve it, only to catch fire and explode. Grief spreads outward in a cascading chain: the louse pulls out her hair, the crow sheds its feathers, the palm tree drops its fronds, even the river dries up. The story ends with the mother figure at the oven, who, in her mourning, burns her womb. In this tale, the feminine body becomes both a vessel of grief and a site of regeneration, a reminder that loss and renewal are forever intertwined.

In New York, Kahraman's work weaves together a similar narrative of cyclical forces—destruction, memory and rebirth. As she describes it, each composition unfolds as an act of "reworlding": a process of remembering, reimagining and reclaiming.



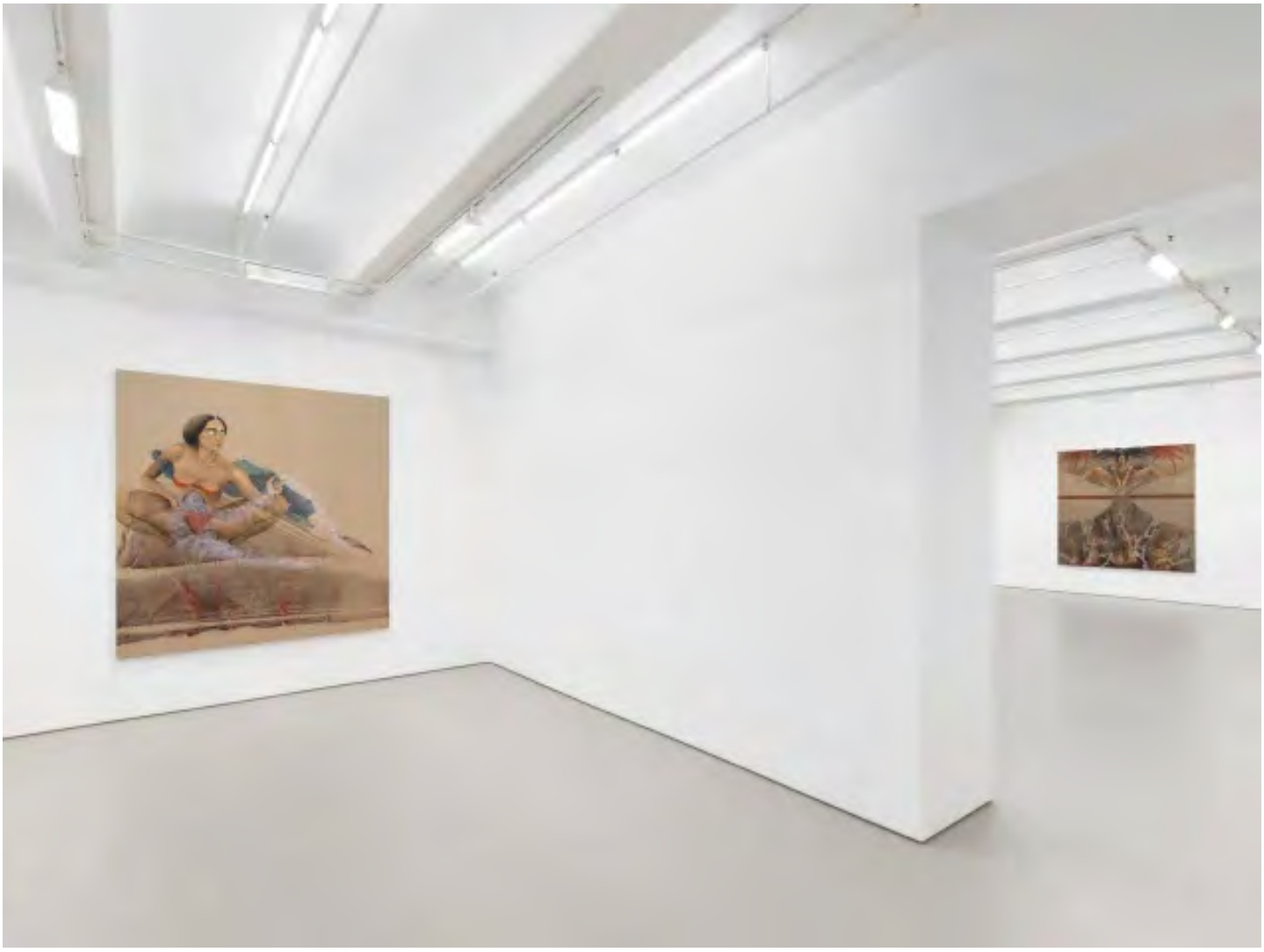
These works began before the L.A. wildfires and now feel uncannily prophetic.

At the same time, the figures in Kahraman's new works all have empty eyes. This symbolic element first appeared about two years ago, when she was making work about the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees. Her research was both personal and academic: a cousin in Sweden, who worked with unaccompanied Afghan minors, told her about the brutal tactics some used to avoid biometric tracking. Many arrived with the tips of their fingers sliced off, burned with acid or rubbed raw with sandpaper to erase their fingerprints. The story left her with a visceral, physical reaction that lingered. She learned that border authorities were also scanning irises, turning the body into a map of control. "That became my train of thought—this need to erase the traces on your body as a way of creating agency, or as a form of radical protest, even though it means erasing part of yourself. That's how I came to the figures without irises. I wanted the figures to refuse that access, so that my audience wouldn't get to enter through their gaze either."

After our exchange, however, even these blank pupils appear as more than gestures of erasure: they become portals that look both inward and outward, openings to deeper ~~dimensio~~ns—the inner eye of the psyche as well as mythic and spiritual realms that allow an escape from earthly grief. "I've been painting figures without irises for a while, but at some point it shifted inward," she explains. At first, they arose from anger and indignation, tied to questions of what is visible and what is concealed. Over time, though, they began to suggest something else. "It's more about this place of protection, a turning inward, a space of mystery. Now that's how it reads to me, as existing in the realms of the unseen."

Ultimately, this exhibition shows Kahraman embracing the transformative power of her spontaneous mythopoiesis through art. Like myths and folktales, her densely symbolic works act as vessels of ancestral memory, turning her practice into a storytelling ritual that links individual pain to collective experience. As Michael Meade writes, myths and archetypes do not explain grief so much as create a vessel for it—a kind of medicine for times of rupture and destruction such as those we face today, and that Kahraman has personally endured. Coded with archetypal struggles that mirror humanity's deepest ordeals—abandonment, betrayal, exile, death, rebirth—her work, like that Kurdish folktale or any ancient myth, ultimately offers a symbolic path through trauma, a rhythm that situates even the most devastating experiences within the wider arc of human and cosmic story.

Hayv Kahraman's "Ghost Fires" is at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York through October 25.



All the figures in the show enact performative and ritualistic movements alluding to practices of care and renewal. © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. Photo: Dan Bradica Studio

Ghost Fires: Hayv Kahraman @ Jack Shainman Gallery, NYC

Jack Shainman Gallery, NYC
September 11, 2025 - October 25, 2025
October 01, 2025 | in Painting

Jack Shainman Gallery is honored to present *Ghost Fires,* an exhibition of new work by Hayv Kahraman, the artist's fifth solo presentation with the gallery. Informed by Kahraman's longstanding exploration of displacement, this new body of work is also a response to the recent wildfires in Los Angeles and their direct effect on Kahraman and her family. In a text written specifically for the exhibition and included here in full, Kahraman reflects on the ongoing process of understanding these events and continuing to find meaning in the world around her:

Hayv Kahraman —

The chemical stench of the toxins left behind by the fire in my home in Altadena made it hard to breathe, but I was determined to find what I had left behind before fleeing: Etel Adnan's book, *The Arab Apocalypse.* Adnan once said of the sun, "Because the sun is dangerous it can kill you — burn you. But the sun is also life."

Don't look up at the sun, we are told. Our irises burned, scraped abraded-like the migrants burning their fingerprints to evade border police. Burning the traces on your fingers to circumvent erasure. Edouard Glissant comes to mind as I think of burning irises seizing the right to be illegible. The paradox is damning. This is a story that mingles in the interstices of decay and fecundity. In the unseen realms of jinn and spirit. In the Anqa; an illusory female bird who induces renewal andresurrection by burning herself in a nest of palm fronds.

One of the many erasures my body has had to contend with after becoming a refugee in the west is of an embodied *connection* to sentient and non sentient kin. To be connected with the ecologies I touch and to whom I am touched by. To be attuned to what Gloria Anzaldúa named as *spirit* and what I think of as *jinn*. Did the jinn originate from the flames of the sundescending on the planet to live unseen with us humans?

Depression after the fires has made my dissociation palpable and infuriating. I felt severed from my body. *You stole my connection to my ancestors. To my ghosts and jinns anddreams. To my place of birth and the cosmologies it houses. To my wind.* How do you paint the wind? I've been obsessing about this for many years. Wind is movement, change and life. Wind is also fire. If change is God, like Octavia Butler says, then wind is also God. To celebrate the birth of each year, we dance around fires in west Asia. My ancestors worshiped fire.

Can I be intuitive-clairvoyant-even as the rational, patriarchal voice in my head demands proof? How can I birth and be in ceremony with my painting without justifying its existence in this place? Like an asylum seeker justifying her pain to the immigration officer.

My own ghost fires began showing up in my paintings months before the fires in Los Angeles. "Nature is at war with itself," Adnan says. The womb is burning like in the story I was told as a child in West Asia. An eschatological tale of an entangled, more-than-human, cascading event ignited when a small 'pest' — the flea-slips into a tannour oven and explodes. The death of the flea affects all other sentient beings on the planet. Ending apocalyptically with the mother, sitting on ahot saj, burning her womb.

I am reminded of what my people say: we have no friends but the mountains. This is why I chose this house, because of its proximity to the mountains — that are now barren and charred. Today is the shadow of tomorrow. War refugee, climate refugee. Now what? How can I re-*member* my connection to this land? Can the ghost fires be generative? The womb is furiously burning like the volcano in Hawaii and it will smolder even once the fires are extinguished. Just like the endless burn pits left in Iraq releasing toxins that our windsbring to us. This is what war does. It silently haunts.

A few weeks after the fires, I returned to my house. The cacti in the yard had bloomed wildly. I had never seen them this healthy and yet, across the street, everything was ash. It became glaringly obvious to me then that this devastation also brought life, perhaps even the emergence of another world. Parallel to this nascent world are the ghost fires that haunt me as I replay the few memories my mind has chosen to keep of the war, in my body, today, in LA. They haunt me so that I re-member. For how can I dream of an emergent world if I close my eyes to the ghosts around me?

CULTURE

In Hayv Kahraman's New Show, the Artist Heals From Devastation

"Ghost Fires" sees the Iraqi American painter processing the loss of her home in Altadena, L.A. earlier this year—and how it connects to her complicated upbringing.

by **Janelle Zara**
Sep. 10, 2025

Hayv Kahraman's "Ghost Fires Through Eyes", 2025. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman

Hayv Kahraman is best known for painting women with prominent eyebrows and dark hair, often contorted in surrealist poses. In "Ghost Fires," her latest solo show at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, wisps of smoke rise from her subjects' fingertips, and they have no pupils in their eyes. Several paintings feature a fine layer of loosely woven flax and marbled black-and-red pigment, a texture that appears scorched, or like bandages fraying off of a wound. "That's something that I really feel and think of the world," the artist recently told *W*. "Shit is falling apart."

"Ghost Fires" is Kahraman's first body of work since Los Angeles's devastating January wildfires, which displaced the artist and her family along with thousands of others. While the compositions radiate with anguish, they do not depict any literal fires, but instead white plumes with a spectral translucency. Although fires themselves are ephemeral, "they haunt," Kahraman explains, leaving behind a trail of ghosts. They linger in the form of smoke, or the sheen of toxins left on everything they touch—the remains of Kahraman's Altadena home are coated in unlivable amounts of lead, other heavy metals, and arsenic. Ghosts can also store themselves as memories, or deeper in the subconscious, resurfacing at unexpected times.

Hayv Kahraman, *Ghost Fires*, 2025
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman

On the night of the Eaton Fires, Kahraman saw the flames from her daughter's bedroom window and felt instantly transported to the past. She suddenly found herself in her childhood bedroom in Baghdad, where she had watched air raids falling from the sky. "I was 10 years old," Kahraman recalls, the same age that her daughter is now.

Having moved to Altadena in 2022, Kahraman was born in Baghdad in 1981, and fled Iraq with her family during the Gulf War in 1991. Although she has few conscious memories of the war, recurring similarities with the fire have unwittingly forced her to relive them. When Kahraman drove back to her home the morning after the fire, the charred rubble on the ground and devastation in her neighbors' eyes closely resembled the remnants of war. Scorched palm trees summoned images of the family orchard in Iraq, and active flames still burned in the streets. As a fire department helicopter passed overhead, opening its hatch to release water to the ground below, Kahraman instinctively dove to the floor in terror, imagining it would drop a bomb. "The problem is, I can't connect that reaction to an actual memory," she says. "My brain has somehow decided to lock that time away." Feelings she cannot rationalize or put into words exist more as a visceral sensation, she adds. "It's an embodied sense of fear."

Hayv Kahraman, *Rain Birds Ritual*, 2025
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman

Having lived with complex PTSD for the majority of her life, Kahrman was already familiar with the debilitating effects of depression. After the fire, it overcame her with a severity she had never experienced. She had plowed through the first months after the disaster, on a mission to secure the logistics of insurance, housing, and a new school for her daughter. It was the moment she had the opportunity to rest that depression struck her all at once. “I fully detached from reality,” she says. “I didn’t want to get out of bed. I didn’t want to eat.”

Her studio, thankfully, had been unaffected, and after several debilitating weeks, she emerged from the worst of her depression to attempt to paint. “I don’t know how I made it to my studio, but I did,” Kahraman says. After sweeping the floor and picking up a brush, it took about half an hour for her true sense of self to start creeping back in. “It truly felt like this door appeared in front of me, and I opened it, and walked through,” she said. The marbling process—dipping the canvas into a water bath layered with pigments—was especially therapeutic. “I am very controlled in the way I make work, and this was a way to relinquish control of the final outcome,” she says. “The tiniest speck of dust in the studio will change how the pigment moves on the water.”

Hayv Kahraman, *Anqa'*, 2025
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman

While her Altadena home is still standing, there's a long road ahead before it can be livable again. In the meantime, Kahraman and her family were able to find an apartment farther east in Los Angeles, "away from the toxins, and closer to her studio," she says, and where her daughter loves her new school.

Recognizing herself as both a war refugee and now also a climate refugee, Kahraman reflects for a moment on how one devastation can prepare you for the next. "I still manage to go on with life. That's something that I know very well." In her artist's statement for "Ghost Fires," she recounted returning to her Altadena home and finding the cacti in her yard the healthiest it had ever been. "It became glaringly obvious," she wrote, "that this devastation also brought life, perhaps even the emergence of another world."

ArtReview

The 10 Exhibitions to See in September 2025

ArtReview Previews 04 September 2025 artreview.com

Our editors on the exhibitions they're looking forward to this month, from the 36th Bienal de São Paulo to 'Global Fascisms' at HKW, Berlin

Hayv Kahraman, *Ghost Fires*, 2025, acrylic on linen, 127 x 127 cm. Photo: Dan Bradica Studio. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Hayv Kahraman: *Ghost Fires*
Jack Shainman, New York, 11 September – 25 October

As a teenager in the early 1990s, Hayv Kahraman fled the first Gulf War in Iraq and arrived in Sweden as an undocumented refugee. In the mid-2000s, she went on to study at the Academy of Art and Design in Florence, Italy. There, immersed in the work of the Old Masters, she picked up a visual vocabulary that she would combine with techniques from Persian miniature painting to craft a body of work centred on an iconlike female figure. At the start of Kahraman's career, this figure represented what the artist called 'a colonised body', one that was 'taught to think and believe that… white European art history was the ultimate ideal.' Since then, this body has evolved to encompass a wide range of expressive forms, which Kahraman employs to explore memories and feelings of difference and alterity. In *Ghost Fires*, her fifth exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, her icon appears again in oil and acrylic paintings on linen, both alone and in legion. Here are tempests of marbled paint raging around a tribe of larger-than-life women, entangled in each other's hair and entrails, their bodies athletic and unabashedly sensual, their limbs at once supple and disarticulated. In response to the recent Los Angeles wildfires, Kahraman – who now lives in the city – has opted to 'burn' away the irises and pupils of these figures, leaving a sheen of electric white in their place. But she makes fugitive eyes reappear like offerings in some open palms. *Jenny Wu*

VOGUE

ARTS

In a Breakthrough Show at ICA SF, Hayv Kahraman Stares Down Her Demons

BY GRACE EDQUIST

January 29, 2024

Hayv Kahraman, *Love Me Love Me Not* (2023). Oil and acrylic on linen, 80" x 100". Courtesy of the Artist, Pilar Corrias, London, Jack Shainman Gallery, NY, Vielmetter Los Angeles and The Third Line, Dubai. Photo: Glen C. Cheriton

About a year ago, the artist Hayv Kahraman immersed herself in marbling, a technique ancient in origin but entirely new to her. “It’s a total obsession,” she says. “I just marbled every single thing I could get a hold of.” After a deep dive into marbling’s history (tracing back to the early 12th century in Japan) and various methods (which are often surprisingly “secretive,” she says), Kahraman opted to work with acrylic paints suspended in water and carrageenan, a thickening agent made from moss. The more she marbled in her Los Angeles studio, the more she realized how the process forced her to cede control. Her paintings, usually so carefully rendered, took on a new spontaneity.

The marbling coincided with another nascent interest: colonial botany and its hierarchical, Eurocentric system of naming and categorizing plant life. Kahraman—who became a refugee in Sweden at age 11 after she, along with her family, fled their home in Iraq in 1992, during the Gulf War—saw an obvious connection to the unjust taxonomies foisted upon humans, especially migrants and minorities.

These parallel pursuits led to “Look Me in the Eyes,” Kahraman’s beguiling new solo exhibition, and her largest solo museum show to date, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in San Francisco. On her linen canvases, sprouting plants, eyes, lips, and hands mingle with dark-haired, poppy-lipped women. As in her earlier paintings, Kahraman’s semi-autobiographical forms nod to Renaissance figuration, Japanese woodblock prints, and Persian miniatures, but there’s a ferocity to this body of work that feels fresh.

The artist with *Look me in the eyes no 7* (2023) at ICA SF. Photo: Glen C. Cheriton

"What's powerful is that you see the consistency and the through line, yet this is a dramatic moment of push in terms of subject matter and formal composition," Ali Gass, ICA SF's director, said on the show's opening night earlier this month.

The women are agents of rebellion, standing their ground amid swirling marbled seas. They seem hungry, even angry, desirous of what's theirs for the taking. Call them women on the verge of getting what they want. In the evocative *Love Me Love Me Not* (all works are from 2023), three women hover around a flower-like object, plucking off eyeballs as if they were petals. The central figure slurps one into her mouth, a faint trickle of paint running down her chin. In *Eyeris*, a riveting, stormy scene, one figure appears ready to pop a loose eyeball into her own socket, like a contact.

Eyeris (2023). Oil and acrylic on linen, 80" x 115". Courtesy of the Artist, Pilar Corrias, London, Jack Shainman Gallery, NY, Vielmetter Los Angeles and The Third Line, Dubai. Photo: Glen C. Cheriton

Jarringly, across the exhibition, the women's own milky white eyes have no irises. Only the disembodied eyes do. Kahraman says she found herself painting eyes this way for months without knowing why. "And then it just clicked," she says. She remembered that a cousin in Sweden had told her about refugees she worked with, mostly coming from Afghanistan. Many of them had used acid or sandpaper to remove their fingerprints —"anything that would prevent them from being scanned and being placed in the biometric system of tracing and identifying who they are," Kahraman says. It was an act of resistance: erasing a part of their bodies in order not to be erased themselves. She realized that was what she was doing with the eyes. "I'm removing the irises as a way of saying, 'No, you don't get to scan me. You don't get to see inside me.'"

Kahraman plays with this idea of personhood in the way she layers her paintings as well. She marbles first and then hand-paints her figures and intricate Kurdish patterns on top, but with such a translucency that it's not easy to decipher her order of operations. This

blurring of back- and foreground is intentional. “As someone who has been very ‘othered,’ that’s important to me, to demolish these polarities of self,” she says.

Lip plants (2023). Oil and acrylic on linen, 80" x 115". Courtesy of the Artist, Pilar Corrias, London, Jack Shainman Gallery, NY, Vielmetter Los Angeles and The Third Line, Dubai. Photo: Glen C. Cheriton

Kahraman is an artist who researches her interests deeply. Her curiosity about botany was piqued when she came across an article critical of the 18th-century Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus, who created the system of naming and categorizing living organisms and who Kahraman had learned about growing up in Sweden. “He’s also considered the father of biological racism, because he categorized the human species in four ‘varieties,’ as he called them, but essentially races,” Kahraman says. “He had, of course, the white European race always in the top of the hierarchy, and the African at the bottom.”

To undo the hierarchies Linnaeus’s work imposed on all things living, Kahraman focused on what she calls her “oppressed plants.” Mimicking the taped-and-pressed style of an

herbarium, she depicts plants native to Iraq, like berbeen (a nutritious weed), botnij (a type of mint), and qazan (berries you'd put in a smoothie). These plants feature throughout the show, including on wallpaper she designed for the occasion, and they are perhaps most astonishing in her small flax fiber works. From afar, they seem almost 3D, as if the leaves—and eyes, those ubiquitous emblems of surveillance—are popping off the delicate fibers. In *Qazan,* strands of inflorescence from a palm tree are woven into the fiber and dangle off the bottom edge, root-like. Her sculptures of "zombie" palm trees made from marbled bricks stand nearby, metaphors for the way palm trees remain erect long after they die due to their entwined roots.

Foreground: *Brick palm 1, Brick palm 2, Brick palm 3*. Far right: *Weedwreath*. All 2023. Courtesy Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco. Photo: Glen C. Cheriton

Her oppressed-plants wallpaper covers a small room at the back of the museum, offset from the main space, where a 1997 recording of her late mother, Sizar, pleading her family's case to immigration officials plays on loop. Five years after their family entered Sweden as undocumented asylum seekers, they applied for citizenship to stay in the country. They were denied. Sizar recorded this tape as an appeal. "The basis for the denial

was that my mom couldn't prove that she was who she was. She was a 49-year-old woman at the time. Imagine being told, 'Well, we don't believe who you are.' That was a massive trigger for her," says Kahraman. "She uses all of these metaphors, like: If you don't believe who I am, come take a cell from my body, look inside my body."

For a show that is so much about looking, this 21-minute recording, which Kahraman and her sister uncovered after their mother's death in 2020, forces you to listen. And what you hear is one woman's undeniable fear of being erased. Kahraman, now a mother herself, understands what a desperate attempt for control looks (and sounds) like. "When you've lived through wars, through trauma—I'm a survivor of domestic violence—you tend to want to control your environment in order to protect yourself," she says. "And my work, and my life, tends to be very controlled. It's a form, for me, of safety. But it becomes excessive."

"That's part of what marbling has taught me," she continues. "To not have to know everything. Because there is no way to control the marbled surface…. You lift the canvas, and it's gorgeous. Sometimes it's not perfect, but it allows you to be okay with that."

For Kahraman, maybe that's what it means to progress: to accept the mistakes as a feature, not a bug. "I've been pushing for this for a long time. This marbling, it allowed me to get there. I mean, I'm not 'there,' you're never 'there,' but I'm closer."

"Look Me in the Eyes" is on view at ICA SF, 901 Minnesota Street in San Francisco, through May 19, 2024.

Artists(https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artists)

Why Hayv Kahraman’s Women Won’t Let You See Them

The artist's largest institutional show to date at the ICA San Francisco confronts the legacy of colonialism in botany.

Hayv Kahraman, *Love Me Love Me Not Date* (2023). Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, Pilar Corrias, London, The Third Line, Dubai, and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Courtesy Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco. Photo: Glen Cheriton, Impart Photography.

by Katie White (https://news.artnet.com/about/katie-white-1066) May 5, 2024

Women stare out from the canvases with emptied eyes—orbs of white nothingness in their sockets. Plants, with vegetal tendrils, grow up between them. The plants sprout lips, eyebrows, and even eyes, though these eyes possess perfect irises unlike the women’s. Swirls of marbled color softly cascade across these canvases like clouds or veils of smoke beneath and around these encounters. These scenes, painted by the Iraqi-American artist Hayv Kahraman, are eerily beautiful, as these sightless women and unreal plants seem to form an unspoken symbiosis.

Hayv Kahraman, *Eyeris* (2023). Courtesy of the Artist, Pilar Corrias, London, Jack Shainman Gallery, NY, Vielmetter Los Angeles and The Third Line, Dubai. Photo: Glen C. Cheriton

For the artist, the paintings are also deeply personal, even cathartic. “I’ve lived through two wars in my life. I’ve been an illegal, undocumented refugee in Europe. I was in a marriage with domestic violence for 10 years. I’ve had a lot to work through a lot of trauma,” said the artist on a phone call earlier this year. “Making art is therapeutic for me in general. The new work has pushed me further. I’ve learned I don’t have to have control over everything in my environment. Control was what I thought could keep me safe.”

In “Look Me in the Eyes (https://www.icasf.org/exhibitions/7-look-me-in-the-eyes)” the artist’s current exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in San Francisco, the artist is embracing chance for the first time—the results are compelling, raw, and longing visions (the show is on view through May 19; the show travels to the Fry Museum in Seattle this October). These developments have carried through to “She Has No Name (https://www.pilarcorrias.com/exhibitions/396-hayv-kahraman-she-has-no-name/)” the artist’s concurrent gallery exhibition at Pillar Corrias in London (through May 25).

Hayv Kahraman, *Look me in the eyes no 5* (2023). Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, Pilar Corrias, London, The Third Line, Dubai, and Vielmetter Los Angeles

Over the past several years, the Los Angeles-based artist has emerged as a dynamic force pioneering a new figuration with her contorted, fractured, and even surrealist visions of women's bodies that engage body politics, colonial legacies, and migration. Raised in Baghdad, Kahraman (b.1981) fled from Iraq to Sweden with her family during the Gulf War. Her family crossed "illegally with fake passports and a smuggler." The artist arrived in Sweden at 11 years old. Her painted women, with their spliced and reconfigured forms, have often been interpreted as oblique self-portraits, and metaphors for the psychic ruptures of life in diaspora.

In this exhibition, Kahraman's newfound lightness of touch comes through the addition of plant life and the marble swirls of color—additions born of chance encounters. Last year, the artist stumbled upon an article that questioned racial biases in the work of the storied 18th-century Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, and the lasting implications.

Hayv Kahraman and view of the exhibition Hayv Kahraman: Look Me in the Eyes, Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco, 2024. Courtesy Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco. Photo: Glen Cheriton, Impart Photography

"I was raised thinking, feeling, and believing Linnaeus was an absolute genius. His portrait was on the 100 Krona bill in Sweden. We took field trips to Uppsula. Statues of him were everywhere," she said. "Reverence surrounded him. But this random article, in very simple language, exposed the colonial legacies he brought to the table. For me, it was as though the blindfolds had come off." Kahraman quickly began to see the parallels between Linnaeus's classification of plants and the racial classifications of peoples, particularly immigrants. "I started to think of the plants I felt affinities with," she said.

In the exhibition, a series of small paintings of gauche on flax paper, reference plants native to Iraq most often found in California where she now lives, such as botnij, berbeen, and qazwan. "These are all weeds, really resilient plants," she explained.

Around the same time, Kahraman says she'd become enamored of social media videos of artists marbling paper, an art form dating back to 12th century Japan which she found "mesmerizing." Then chance intervened. The artist had decided to visit the Huntington Library, a trove of rare books, in Los Angeles, which held Linnaeus's book *Hortus Cliffortianus.*

"I thought, okay, I need to just go, open it, and feel the pages on my finger. But when I opened the book and the frontispiece was this incredible marbled paper," she said, "It felt fated." The experience led Kahraman to dive into marbling. All the works in the show began with marbling, the artist using a Turkish method, called Ebru.

Installation view of the exhibition “Hayv Kahraman: Look Me in the Eyes” at the Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco, 2024. Courtesy of Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco.
Photo: Glen Cheriton, Impart Photography.

“The most minute thing in your environment will affect your marbling,” Kahraman elaborated, “I found the process incredibly unpredictable. My work had been very controlled before this. It was liberating.” Kahraman also found herself welcoming new, spontaneous imagery into her practice. “I allowed myself to draw and not scrutinize for the first time. The imagery used to emerge from the research. Now eye plants, hand plants, lip plants, finger plants, all began to appear,” she said. For Kahraman, these plants ultimately prodded her to consider, “who we choose to see, who we allow a voice.”

Her recent works, the artist believes, are a way of communicating with her late mother, a homeopath, whose life was reshaped by war and erasure. “She was a naturalist who practiced integrative medicine. She was called in Arabic ‘doctor of herb’” she said. The exhibition also includes an audio component, which draws from a recording of her mother’s interviews with Swedish immigration agents in the 1990s, taken from a long-overlooked cassette. Her mother had petitioned for citizenship five years after their arrival in Sweden but since the family’s documents had been forged she had no way to prove who she truly was.

“This work is my way of reaching my mother, feeling her experience. If you listen to the recording she says, ‘I’m not an insect in your yard’ really speaking to her sense of dehumanization. She was 49 years old and was having to prove her identity. She is pleading. She says ‘Come take a cell from my body,” the artist shared.

Hayv Kahraman, *qazwandate* (2023). Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, Pilar Corrias, London, The Third Line, Dubai, and Vielmetter Los Angeles.

The paintings also speak to the contemporary experiences of refugees today.

“My cousin works with undocumented minors who come into Sweden, mostly Afghanis. Some of these kids scrape their fingerprints with sandpaper or pour acid on their fingers. They cut their fingerprints. All so they cannot be traced by the European centralized data system,” she explained.

“With new systems, if you seek asylum in one country in Europe and are denied you cannot seek asylum in a different European country. It’s devastating to these people. now they’re also scanning irises,” she said, “So what do they do? They remove parts of their bodies. In that violent act of cutting, they are trying to circumvent being erased, to avoid being pinned down, categorized just as Linnaeus did to plants. In my past works, there was resistance in the gaze looking back, but there is also resistance in not allowing yourself to be seen.”

Ultimately, she sees these paintings as places of healing, anthropocentric visions where women heal themselves, through a unification with the natural world.”Eating these plants is a kind of healing, I’m eating this because I’m part of it. Its contradictory and circular at once,” she said.

Wallpaper*

Don’t miss: Hayv Kahraman intertwines colonialism and botany in London

Artist Hayv Kahraman draws parallels between colonial botany and her experiences as an Iraqi refugee transplanted into Europe, at Pilar Corrias in London

(Image credit: Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London)

BY HANNAH SILVER
PUBLISHED YESTERDAY

As an Iraqi refugee growing up in Sweden, artist Hayv Kahraman absorbed the teachings of 18th-century Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus. Famed for his habit of transporting plants from around the world into Europe and for his system of reclassifying them with genus and species names, in Latin, he and his colonialist experiments became an inextricable part of Swedish identity for Kahraman, who saw parallels with her struggles to assimilate in a new country. In artworks by Hayv, who is now based in Los Angeles, these botanical references become synonymous with the idea of the Other. The painted forms of figures become dreamlike symbols, juxtaposed against diaphanous, dreamlike clouds of marbling.

We talked to the artist about the story behind her works.

Hayv Kahraman on reframing the narrative at Pilar Corrias in London

Hayv Kahraman, *Eye-dates*, 2024
(Image credit: Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London)

Wallpaper*: By considering the colonial implications in a single piece of work, you embrace a juxtaposition of artistic forms and cultural references. Can you tell us why Linnaeus' work was so clearly meriting attention for you?

Hayv Kahraman: When I started my schooling in Sweden, I was taught that Carl Linnaeus was a genius and a heroic figure. He was on the 100 Krona bill, and I remember visiting his herbarium in Uppsala during a school field trip. Linnaeus was a Swedish botanist who lived in the 18th century. His taxonomic contributions to the natural sciences by means of collecting plants from elsewhere, bringing them back to Europe and renaming them into his latinised binomial nomenclature, contributed to erasing the indigenous histories surrounding that plant. These colonial practices of renaming flowers and plants, a vocabulary that centered the white European heteronormative man (most famously Linnaeus) and propelled nationalistic, eugenic and nativist pulses into botany were crucial in the expansion of empire.

But what irked me the most as I was researching, was his incessant urge to 'acclimatize' certain plants to the Swedish climate, which of course utterly failed. I am here reminded of the potent assimilation process I underwent in Sweden as a newly arrived Iraqi refugee back in the 1990s. How I was taught to think like a 'Swede', to act like a 'Swede' in order to be worthy of staying in that country. And it is this feeling of indignation that fuelled the work. I needed to unpack his volatile legacy, and then find alternative ways of sensing the world in which hope can be found.

Hayv Kahraman, *Generational Eyebrows*, 2024
(Image credit: Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London)

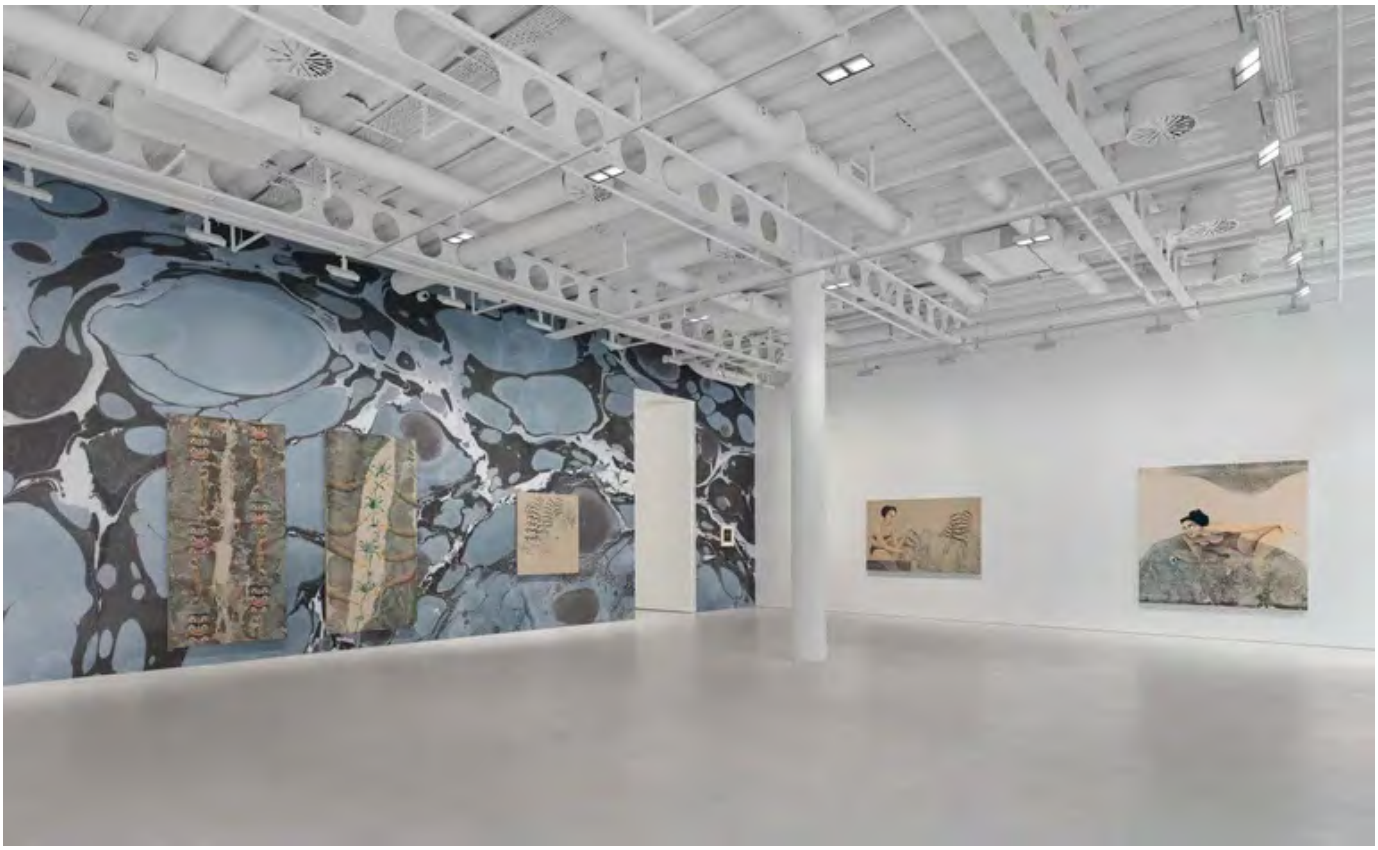
W*: By taking control of techniques with roots in other societies, such as marbling, how did you celebrate a new perspective, separate from the historical implications?

HK: My interest in marbling started when I went to the Huntington Library in California to actually see/open/touch/feel one of Linnaeus' books, and as I flipped open the cover I saw a marbled front piece

and knew that I needed to look into this art form. Marbling has a long history, starting in Japan, travelling to central and west Asia and then Europe. It was used in the Ottoman region on legal documents to prevent forgery. Historical implications aside, I found it fascinating that an art medium was used to prevent appropriation, that it's a mono print that cannot be duplicated/appropriated/forged because of its incredible unpredictability.

What turned things for me personally, though, was when I actually started marbling and experimenting in my studio. I found the process incredibly therapeutic.

[Not] being concerned about how things will 'look'/ how things will be 'perceived'/how legible/ knowable the work will be – it allows me to not categorise, to not order things, to break away from that kind of thinking that I've been plagued by since I became a refugee in Europe. I found that there's an acceptance that happens in this process. An acceptance of the flow and movement of life somehow. And as a survivor of domestic violence, relinquishing control can be incredibly difficult, but marbling feels freeing. As if paving a way to heal.



Installation view, 'Hayv Kahraman: She has no name', Pilar Corrias, London
(Image credit: Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London. Photography: Eva Herzog)

W*: The works themselves marry these techniques with powerful proportions that make strong female figures central. How did your process inform this otherworldly narrative?

HK: The figure, the body, has always been a means for me to negotiate things around me. I studied ballet in Baghdad at a very young age and since then I've always composed choreographies of bodies in my mind. I think of the figures as snapshots in my paintings. They are caught in an act of performing something. A doing and an undoing of something. They've become my methodology to think through difficult topics, such as colonial botany in this instance.

'She Has No Name' is at Pilar Corrias, London, until 25 May 2024

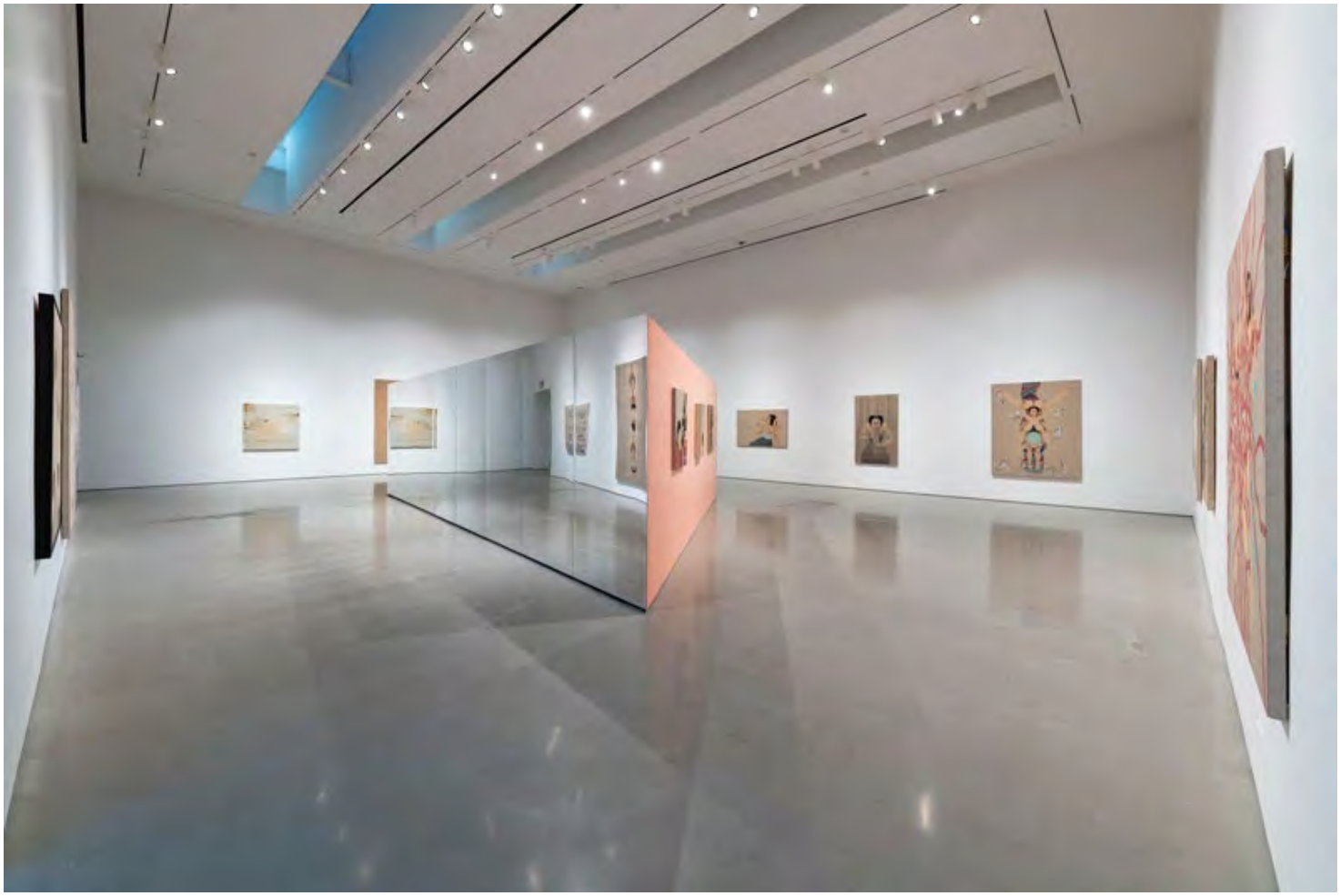
pilarcorrias.com

Topics

Hayv Kahraman: *The Foreign in Us*

APRIL 2024

By Rosa Boshier González



Installation view: *The Foreign In Us*, at the Moody Center For The Arts, Rice University, 2024. Courtesy the Moody Center for the Arts. January 12 - May 11, 2024

Moody Center For The Arts, Rice University

The Foreign In Us
January 12–May 11, 2024
Houston

Hayv Kahraman's exhibition *The Foreign in Us* at the Moody Center for the Arts, Rice University in Houston is framed by an Audre Lorde quote: "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences." Kahraman was born in Baghdad and raised in Sweden after moving there as a refugee. The exhibition focuses on paintings and drawings from the last five years of Kahraman's work.

Kahraman gives a vital tactility to her flat surfaces by employing centuries-old marbling practices and incorporating patterns from Kurdish textiles. During a preview of the exhibition, curator Frauke V. Josenhans described the Ebru technique of marbling, and listed the various objects Kahraman puts into the pigmentation liquid, including bricks, leaves, and sandpaper. "What else?" Josenhan asked the artist, who laughingly replied, "my body, my daughter's body."

Kahraman's canvases are populated with women in Beyoncé-like formation. Bodies fold in on themselves—knees over foreheads, thighs over ears, heads nestled into groins—making the self a home, a sufficient unit of one's own. No one of the women takes primacy; rather, they are all equally engaged in refusing to be a background. "It's become a necessity for me to reiterate her again and again in the work," Kahraman has said of the repeated femme figure that has populated her paintings for years now. "I look around the studio and I'm surrounded by these women…an army here. It's almost compulsive, you repeat again and again. It becomes a form of repair." While their bodies are highly expressive, the femmes' stony faces betray nothing. They question who is looking at whom, flipping the gaze between subject and viewer so much that it becomes a continuum, collapsing any start and endpoint of the looking beyond judgment or analysis.

Hayv Kahraman, *Entanglements with torshi no. 2*, 2022. Oil and torshi on linen. 70 x 70 inches. Courtesy the artist and Moody Center for the Arts.

An interest in bioscience began when Kahraman's mother was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2019. In a January 2024 interview with *Rice News*, Kahraman recalls her mother asking after doctor's appointments "why do I have to be fighting? I've lived through so many wars throughout my lifetime, and now I'm at war with my body." Kahraman then realized that how immunology characterizes the battle between self and other in the language of disease mirrored the rhetoric of migration. Many pieces in the exhibition draw on Kahraman's examination of the metaphorical weight of antibodies. The front wall of the opening gallery is awash in pink pigment made from the juices of *torshi*, pickled vegetables popular in cuisines of the SWANA region. *Entanglements with torshi no. 2* (2022), features a quartet of women with thick strands of what look like pink guts tied up into their hair, the loose ends entwining. *Torshi* becomes an allegory for how human beings can live symbiotically with the "other." Kahraman takes gut health to a whole new level, pushing the stomach beyond a symbol in pop psychology to tether it to the condition of exile.

Experts have long called the stomach the second brain. Our second brain feeds on bacteria, or foreign bodies, in order to survive. One's relationship to self, and the literal function of our bodies, is predicated on letting the other in. Kahraman asks not just what it means to be treated as a foreign body but also what it means to live not despite but as a result of foreign bodies. In *NeuroBust no. 4* (2022), a work of oil on linen, black intestines act as a breathing tube to a stunning armless bust.

In *The Foreign in Us*, the innocuous transforms into the sinister before your eyes. The more one looks, the more one can see the writhing critique of xenophobia just under Kahraman's immaculate paint. In *Say Aah* (2021), a woman stares down the viewer, her lean-muscled shoulders hunched as she attempts to consume a fish-shaped grenade whole. In *Swallowing Antibodies* (2021), the femme figure defiantly dangles Y-shaped structures (the same shape as antibodies) before her mouth. She clutches other similar shapes with her multiple arms, daring the viewer to stop her.

Hayv Kahraman, *Say Aah*, 2021. Oil on linen. 68 x 42 in. Courtesy the artist and Moody Center for the Arts.

An entire room is dedicated to Kahraman's delicate drawings, which she uses to model her paintings. A large wooden board displays tracing paper laced with Kahraman's choreographed women, as well as trial marbling squares dipped into small bits of paper and fabric. These miniature pieces showcase her skill on the line level as well as her investment in experimentation. In *Antibody Drawing 2* (2021), a five-legged woman threads her head through a pair of her thighs, carrying rolls of paper between her toes. Some of these works are less embodied and more abstract. *Not Yet Titled* (2023), features clusters of eyeballs painted over a marbled surface of shredded paper.

While *The Foreign in Us* asks audiences to recognize difference, Kharaman does not assign a narrative. There's repetition and a clear message behind the exhibition's crown of symbols—steely, contortionist femmes, grenades, bacteria-ridden *torshi*, antibodies—but Kahraman refrains from feeding her viewers neat ideology. Stunning yet impenetrable, Kahraman's army of women engages as much with selfhood as with the other; an ode to, rather than a manual for, living with difference.

Contributor

Rosa Boshier González

Rosa Boshier González is a writer and editor from Los Angeles. Her fiction, essays, and art criticism appear in *Guernica*, *Catapult*, *Literary Hub*, the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Hyperallergic*, *The Rumpus*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, among others. She serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *Gulf Coast Journal*.

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Art

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Hayv Kahraman's 'The Foreign in Us' explores the artist's lived experience

Curator Frauke V. Josenhans connects the show at the Moody Center for the Arts to Kahraman's history and fight against control, in an interview with STIR.

by Manu Sharma | Published on : Feb 27, 2024

NeuroBust no.5, 2022, oil on linen, Hayv Kahraman
Image: Anthony Rathburn, Courtesy of Hayv Kahraman and the Moody Center for the Arts

Discussing the contorted bodies of Kahraman's protagonists, Josenhans tells STIR, "Hayv Kahraman's work consists of various layers, literally and figuratively, that draw from her own personal experience as a refugee. She depicts human figures in various postures that at times seem unnatural and even mannerist, characterised by an extreme distortion of the physical body. The intertwined limbs of the depicted figures create structures not unlike architectural features that evolve in an unidentified space without any tangible context." She explains that Kahraman's figures tend to stare directly at the viewer, as though they are issuing a challenge of sorts: to not look away, and to engage with them, building a connection between our world and theirs. There is a clear parallel that one may draw here, to refugees seeking to connect with the citizenry of the nations they flee to.

The Foreign in Us exhibition view, 2024
Image: Anthony Rathburn, Courtesy of Hayv Kahraman and the Moody Center for the Arts

Kahraman was born in Baghdad in 1981 and her family fled to Sweden with the assistance of a hired smuggler in the aftermath of the Gulf War (1990-1991). She would go on to study in Italy before coming to live and work in the United States. As Josenhans explains, "Hayv Kahraman's multifaceted work echoes her migratory experience. Questions around gender, memory and diaspora inform her subject matter, compositions and material approach. Kahraman's art is an act of getting the viewer involved, of questioning our own behaviour… Through her works, she advocates for tolerance and acceptance of what we might consider different or 'foreign'."

Not Quite Human 7, 2019, oil on linen, Hayv Kahraman
Image: Anthony Rathburn, Courtesy of Hayv Kahraman and the Moody Center for the Arts

While the works being shown at the Moody Center for the Arts reflect the artist's journey, and the features of her protagonists are modelled after her own, Josenhans makes it a point to mention that these are not self-portraits. Kahraman's focus is a wider human experience, hinted at by her repetitive depiction of human bodies—at once deeply personal and resoundingly universal.

Say Ahh, 2021, oil on linen, Hayv Kahraman
Image: Anthony Rathburn, Courtesy of Hayv Kahraman and the Moody Center for the Arts

Hayv Kahraman and Frauke V. Josenhans at the opening reception, 2024
Image: Frank Hernandez, Courtesy of Hayv Kahraman and the Moody Center for the Arts

> With her powerful visual language, Kahraman counters any attempt to categorise her work, to reduce it to only her experience as a refugee.
> – Frauke V. Josenhans, Curator, Moody Center for the Arts

The presence of a bomb in Say Ahh (2021) is a disquieting reminder of the events that led to Kahraman's life as a refugee: the extensive aerial campaign led by the United States Air Force (USAF) during the Gulf War saw nearly 90,000 tons of munitions detonated across Iraqi soil. This caused human and material destruction that is difficult to quantify or even comprehend. At the same time, Kahraman's art militates against the standards of beauty projected onto women in Euro-American art and against efforts to contain women, perhaps more globally. Josenhans ends her interview with STIR, saying, "With her powerful visual language, Kahraman counters any attempt to categorise her work, to reduce it to only her experience as a refugee." Going beyond the ongoing art exhibition, the Moody Center for the Arts will be releasing a catalogue in May 2024 to highlight Kahraman's bold practice further, and its exploration of "otherness", which audiences of The Foreign in Us will eagerly look forward to.

'The Foreign in Us' is on at the Moody Center for the Arts, Rice University, Texas until May 11, 2024.

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OUTSIDE INTERESTS

JARROD BAUMANN

Since launching his San Francisco firm, Zeterre, in 2006, landscape architect Jarrod Baumann has increasingly combined ornamental and edible plantings into his work. In addition to residential endeavors, he has two exciting Sonoma projects in progress: a redesign of the grounds at Vintners Resort, which boasts a farm-to-table restaurant, and a collaboration with a renowned Michelin-starred chef. Here, Baumann shares his thoughts on gardens with more than just decorative appeal. **zeterre.com**

These days, do all your projects have a culinary element? My clients get a little bit of whatever I'm into, and it's something that I'm researching like crazy right now. I am super passionate about integrating edible plants and herbs throughout the garden—not limiting them to one specific area.

Can you give an example? In Los Altos I did apples, pomegranates and mandarins mixed in with roses along the entire length of a double-lot driveway (left). When I'm out in my own garden pruning roses and can also pick a few blueberries as I'm walking down the road? That's fantastic.

You're taking gardens to another level! I love this concept of gardens giving back. When a plant flowers, I feel like it's giving back to you. But when it's giving you fruits and vegetables—things that can nourish your body—that's even better. I'm pushing clients to see how amazing it is to grow your own produce and how far superior the flavor is when they're perfectly ripe.

Any plant that you're particularly keen on? I'm personally obsessed with rare passion fruit. For myself and my clients, I want anything that you can't get at the supermarket and won't see in your friends' gardens.

ON VIEW

"LOOK ME IN THE EYES"

With an exhibition running through May 19 at the Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco, artist Hayv Kahraman has expanded her repertoire. According to Ali Gass, the museum's founding director, "The mark of a strong artist is often their ability to develop their practice in new directions while pulling the through lines of the work consistently." Along with the debut of a dozen large paintings, works on paper and a custom wallpaper, "Look Me in the Eyes" presents some firsts for Kahraman: the incorporation of a marbling technique, which is connected to her experience assimilating as an Iraqi refugee in Sweden; three sculptures, each standing about 8 feet tall and composed of painted bricks (with her trademark eyes); and an audio installation featuring her mother speaking after she was denied Swedish citizenship. With "constant tension between beauty and discomfort," Gass says, the artist "deals with painful political issues, but she enables the viewer to find a way in through elements of visual delight or artistic exquisiteness." **icasf.org**

OUTSIDE INTERESTS PHOTOS: PORTRAIT, DEVLIN SHAND, COURTESY JARROD BAUMANN; EXTERIOR, ADAM POTTS. ON VIEW PHOTO: HAYV KAHRAMAN, DETAIL OF *NEUROBUST NO. 5*, 2023. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, PILAR CORRIAS GALLERY, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES AND THE THIRD LINE.

CULTURED

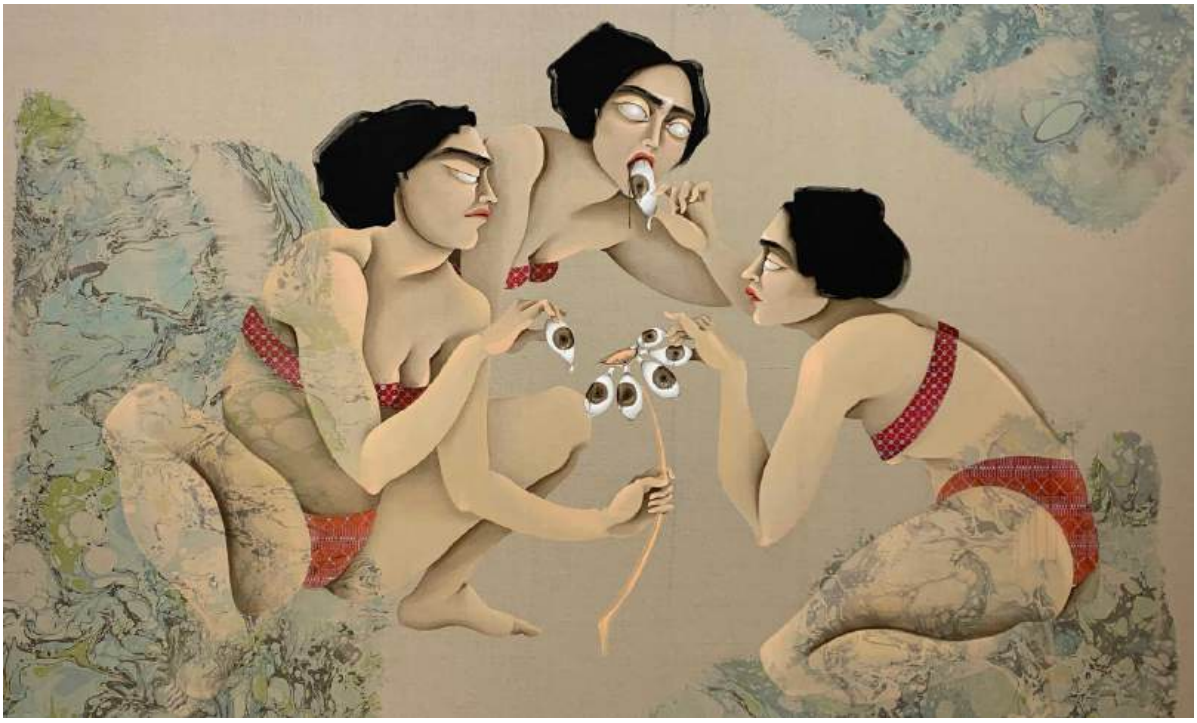
ART (/ART)

In San Francisco for FOG? Don't Miss These 7 Exhibitions Around the City

If you're planning to touch down in the city during art week, make sure to put a few of these shows on your itinerary.

Anyone who has weaved through endless rows of booths at an art fair knows there is limited exhibition space in even the largest of stalls. While certain San Franciscan outposts will be bringing their program to this year's edition of FOG Design + Art—including Et al., Berggruen, and Fraenkel Gallery—the full breadth of their capabilities is currently on view in a number of enticing local exhibitions.

Meanwhile, San Francisco's institutions are championing both historical and contemporary names, with deep dives into the work of artists like Pacita Abad, Sandro Botticelli, and Hayv Kahraman. Anyone in town for the annual fair would be remiss to not get out into the city and, luckily, *CULTURED* has compiled the seven best stops around town.



Hayv Kahraman, *Love Me Love Me Not*, 2023. Image courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, Pilar Corrias Gallery, The Third Line Dubai, Vielmetter Los Angeles, and the ICA San Francisco.

"Look Me in the Eyes (https://www.icasf.org/exhibitions/7-look-me-in-the-eyes)" by Hayv Kahraman
January 16–May 19, 2024
ICA San Francisco

In her largest museum exhibition to date, Hayv Kahraman is showing an entirely new body of work. A collection of paintings (https://www.culturedmag.com/article/2023/11/17/artist-jenna-gribbon-new-york) and large-scale sculpture are accompanied by the artist's first audio installation. The piece explores Kahraman's experience as an Iraqi/Kurdish refugee in Sweden. A motif of the artist's eyes, complete with thick, emotive brows, follow visitors through the winding exhibition. Several pieces show forays into a new marbling technique that splashes blues, blacks, and greens over the deeply personal collection of artwork.

WORDS
Sophie Lee (/@/sophie-lee)

January 17, 2024

the Rice Thresher

RICE UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT NEWSPAPER — SINCE 1916

Moody's new exhibit examines 'The Foreign in Us'

Kahraman's exhibit features a variety of paintings evoking vulnerability and the human body. Ahitagni Das / Thresher

By **Thomas Pickell** 1/16/24 9:34pm

Hayv Kahraman's solo exhibit, "The Foreign in Us," **debuted at the Moody Center** for the Arts Jan. 12. Consisting of over 40 drawings and paintings, the newest exhibit tackles themes of identity and belonging, framed through Kahraman's personal experience as a refugee grappling with themes of isolation, migration, colonization and fear.

Kahraman, an Iraqi-Kurdish artist, has been featured in numerous American and European museums. Forced to flee from her home at a young age due to the **Gulf War**, Kahraman became intimately familiar with the struggles of isolation and non-belonging that populate her works. These themes permeate over two decades of works using paintings, drawings and various other media through which she spreads her message.

Frauke Josenhans, a curator at the Moody, said that acquisition and organization of the collection began several years ago. Pieces have been borrowed from numerous collections in an effort to convey Kahraman's message of overcoming cultural isolation and adaptation.

“She went through … trying to assimilate, to adapt. It was a very violent experience for her that stayed with her,” Josenhans said. “That experience of displacement [is] certainly something a lot of people can relate to.”

In the central gallery, four large paintings are prominently displayed. Within them, human figures are depicted in vulnerable positions. Layered atop these figures are smatterings of Ebru, a Turkish marbling technique, and the backgrounds are enhanced with intricate geometric patterns.

Entering the Brown Foundation gallery reveals a few dozen more paintings and drawings. Figures sprawled over canvas hang across from walls of paneled mirrors, inviting observers to identify with the vulnerability of the paintings.

“I was thinking about what it means to bend so violently, yet not break and not feel pain,” Kahraman said.

Josenhans believes that despite the artist’s exceptional life story, the exhibit is grounded through Kahraman’s frequent use of the human form.

“Although her experience is extremely personal and it’s hard for someone to understand who didn’t go through the same experience of being a refugee, she presents this experience through the human body,” Josenhans said. “She shows human bodies … in ways that are extremely powerful.”

Various texts around the collection explain the themes conveyed, in addition to QR codes than scan to audio files, allowing guests to listen to Kahraman’s own explanations of her work. Maddie Garrity, president of the Moody Student collaborative, said she hopes that students will connect with themes and sentiments that Kahraman aims to capture.

“She talks about her experiences … experiencing otherness and cultural isolation,” Garrity, a Hanszen College junior, said. “I think that’s something probably a lot of Rice students can connect with. Just being able to see her reflections and her experience will help you feel maybe less alone … and kind of help people figure things out.”

Garrity said she also appreciates the degree of dedication and academic experience that Kahraman puts into her pieces.

“She’s done a lot of research in microbiology and immunology, and she … pulls from that when creating some of her pieces to look at how your experiences inform your microbiology,” Garrity explained. “I think it’s really cool how science and art interact [in her work].”

Josenhans said she hopes that students will be able to use “The Foreign in Us” as a looking-glass through which to evaluate their struggles, and that they may each see it through the lens of their own cultures and frames of reference.

“Someone from Italy will see some Renaissance postures in the paintings, someone who comes from Japan may see some calligraphy or Japanese wood cuts, someone from the United States may see some abstract expressionist brush strokes,” Josenhans said. “I think people will really find different ways to connect with these paintings and drawings.”

Hayv Kahraman’s solo exhibit, titled “The Foreign in Us,” debuted at the Moody Center for the Arts Jan. 12. Kahraman’s art is centered in her refugee identity and explores themes of isolation and migration. Ahitagni Das / Thresher

OCULA

Advisory Perspective

8 Artists to See at Biennale of Sydney 2024

By Phoebe Bradford
Sydney, 28 February 2024
Biennales

Organised by Artistic Directors Cosmin Costinaș and Inti Guerrero, the 24th Biennale of Sydney returns to Australia's east coast, featuring 96 artists and collectives from 50 countries.

Running from 9 March to 10 June, *Ten Thousand Suns* confronts Western apocalyptic depictions, focusing on themes celebrating First Nations, queer resilience, and the rejection of a bleak future for a joy-filled one.

Held at multiple locations, including the historic reopening of White Bay Power Station after more than a century, Art Gallery of New South Wales, and Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, the event promises three months abuzz with creation and curation.

Ahead of the opening, Ocula Advisors share the artists they most look forward to seeing. From Malaysian sculptor Anne Samat and First Nations artist Dylan Mooney, to American filmmaker Andrew Thomas Huang and Iraqi painter Hayv Kahraman, a diverse range of talent awaits.

Hayv Kahraman, *Snakes* (2021). Oil on linen. 254 x 172.7 x 4.4 cm. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Vielmetter, Los Angeles; and The Third Line, Dubai. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.

Hayv Kahraman at Museum of Contemporary Art Australia

Hayv Kahraman is set to take over the foyer wall of Museum of Contemporary Art Australia with a newly commissioned work.

The Iraqi-Swedish-American artist of Kurdish descent uses oil on linen to create unsettling paintings of women. Her work blends traditional Iraqi art forms with European and Asian motifs, drawing from her experience as a migrant.

For the Biennale, Kahraman pays homage to undocumented immigrants travelling to Australia via sea, prompting reflections on their hardships and vulnerability. Her new work draws connections between water, migration, and Ebru—the ancient Turkish art of marbling.

Kahraman's paintings are currently on view at Moody Center for the Arts in her inaugural solo exhibition in Texas, U.S., *The Foreign in Us* (12 January–11 May 2024).

Video Ad Feedback

Exploring trauma through art

Hide Description

Artist Hayv Kahraman's art explores how the key to healing from trauma lies in the gut. Her latest solo show exploring these themes is on now at The Third Line gallery in Dubai.

04:19 - Source: CNN

Stories worth watching

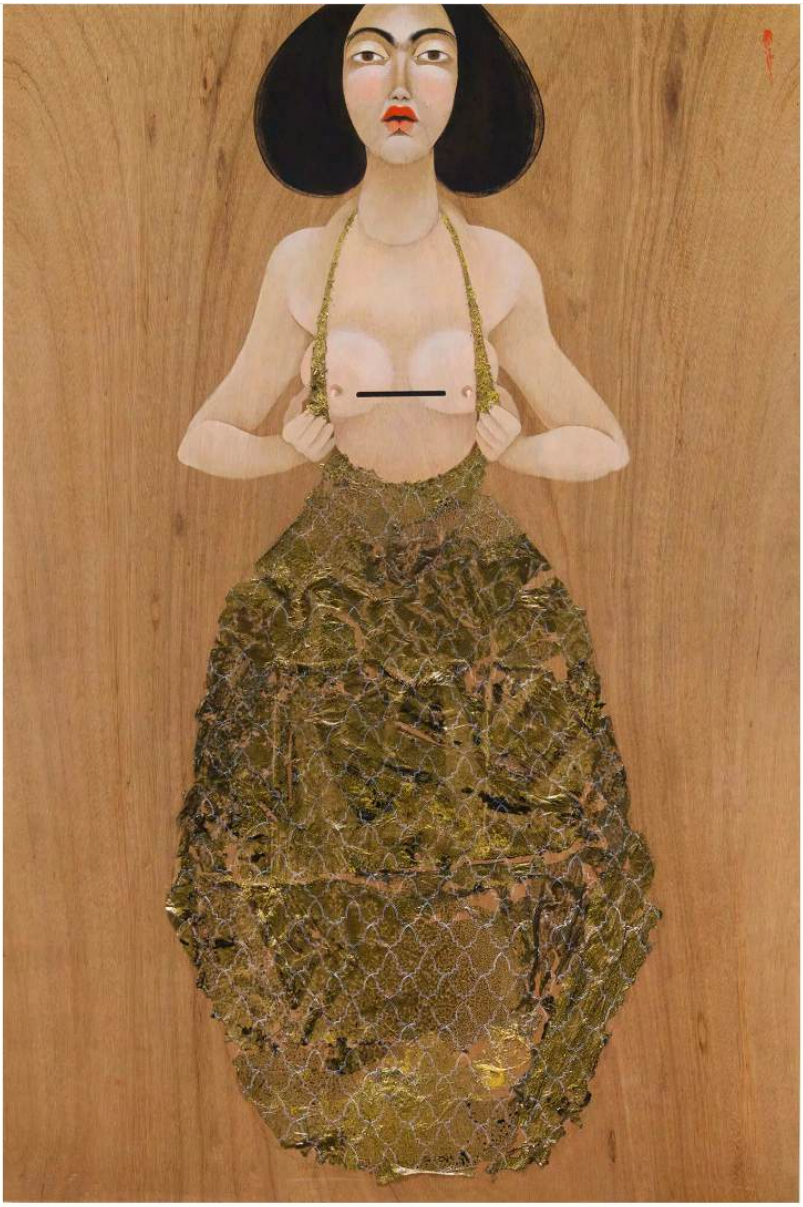
Watch here - Exploring trauma through art

04:19

The New York Times Style Magazine

The Artists Depicting the Power and Strangeness of Breasts

New generations of women painters are challenging centuries of art history with their nuanced, empathetic renderings of bare-chested bodies.



Hayv Kahraman's "Boob Gold" (2018) is one of several works by the artist addressing the objectification of immigrants and refugees. © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, and Vielmetter, Los Angeles

The New York Times Style Magazine

By Zoë Lescaze
Published May 16, 2023 Updated May 21, 2023

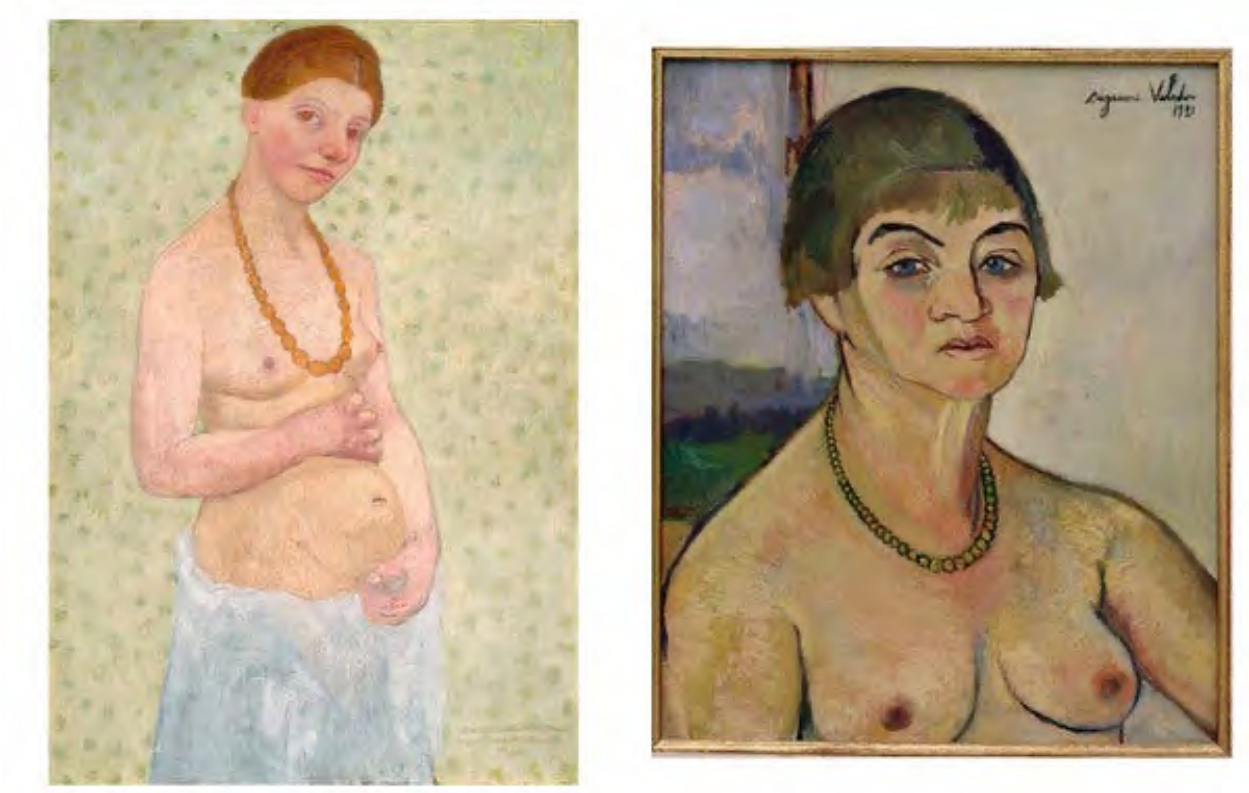
Women's breasts have been a fixation of Western artists since Western art began. The prehistoric sculptor who carved a hunk of mammoth ivory into the "Venus of Hohle Fels" — the earliest known depiction of a human being, unearthed in Germany in 2008 — gave her proportions fit for the pages of Juggs magazine. Since then, male artists have portrayed breasts as erotic objects, fonts of nourishment and sometimes both at once, as in the case of racy Baroque depictions of the Roman virtue Caritas as a young woman nursing her father. Bare-chested women have represented our brightest political ideals (as in the French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix's 1830 allegorical work "Liberty Leading the People") but also our worst transgressions: In medieval European art, lust often appeared as a woman with snakes biting her breasts, an allusion to their supposedly ruinous seductive power. Indeed, these humble mounds of tissue, as the feminist scholar Marilyn Yalom writes in her 1998 book, "A History of the Breast," have long been the focal points for various desires: "Babies see food. Men see sex. Doctors see disease. Businessmen see dollar signs."
Image

Bare-breasted women have served as allegories for political causes in paintings such as "Liberty Leading the People" (1830) by Eugène Delacroix.Credit...© 2013 RMN-Grand Palais (Louvre Museum). Photo: Michel Urtado

But what do female painters see? It was only in the early 20th century that women began to regularly depict their own nude bodies. In 1906, the German artist Paula Modersohn-Becker,

who had recently left her husband to pursue a bohemian life in Paris, scandalized viewers with two portraits of herself wearing little more than a favorite amber necklace. The French model turned painter Suzanne Valadon began to produce nude self-portraits in 1917 and continued to do so as she aged — a radical pursuit then as now. By the end of the century, the American artist Joan Semmel had taken the project of women regarding their own bodies to its logical extension by painting first-person views of herself — incandescent landscapes of pink and ocher flesh in which breasts dominate the foreground — and the British artist Jenny Saville had launched a career depicting, with urgent slashes and stippled patches of oil paint, bulging breasts that flop and sag on bodies that defy mainstream standards of beauty.

Image



Left: the German artist Paula Modersohn-Becker was the first woman known to have painted and exhibited nude self-portraits, including “Self-Portrait on Sixth Wedding Anniversary” (1906). Right: the French model turned artist Suzanne Valadon’s “Autoportrait aux Seins Nus (Topless Self-Portrait)" (1931), currently part of a retrospective exhibition at the Centre Pompidou-Metz.Credit...From left: Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen; © Akg-Images

When women paint nude women, it’s often said that they are “reversing” the male gaze that has dominated art history. But the reality is more complex, and the range of perspectives among these artists is broader than this shorthand would suggest. New generations of painters are depicting breasts in unorthodox shapes and colors, adding them to figures who are not necessarily female and challenging other conventions, both social and stylistic. We might think we know what a breast looks like, but even the most basic preconceptions falter in much of their work.

“In some ways there are parallels between my gaze and the male gaze,” says the Brooklyn-based artist Jenna Gribbon, 44, who mostly paints her spouse, the musician Mackenzie Scott. “There is a sexual and romantic component to my depictions of my wife. But the difference is, as a woman, I’m painting her from a deep well of experience of knowing what it is to be seen and regarded and to have my image consumed.” Tall and blond, Scott appears semi-undressed or fully naked in everyday domestic settings — hunched over a laptop on the couch in one canvas, clipping her toenails above the toilet in another — and in more theatrical tableaus involving harsh lights, mirrors, blindfolds and green-screen backdrops. In all these works, Gribbon renders Scott’s nipples in a searing shade of fluorescent pink, a hue so electric, it makes the viewer inescapably aware of themselves as a voyeur and, Gribbon hopes, more empathetic with the person on display.

Image

Jenna Gribbon paints her wife, the musician Mackenzie Scott, with fluorescent pink nipples, infusing domestic scenes such as "Toe Nail Trim" (2021) with a dash of science fiction.Credit...Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery

Hayv Kahraman, 42, who was born in Baghdad and now lives in Los Angeles, remembers wandering the halls of Florentine museums as a young woman, surrounded by pale painted bodies with small, spherical breasts. “I was so enamored with that aesthetic,” she says. “I still thought Europe was the epitome.” Kahraman spent her adolescent years in Sweden, where she perfected a Stockholm accent and bleached her dark hair blond, and in her 20s, this cultural

dissonance unleashed a hybrid avatar in her work: an alluring, almond-eyed woman with a jet black unibrow, white skin and impossibly round breasts. She has rendered the character as an acrobat, whose body contorts without breaking, and with breasts mutating into the mortars Kahraman saw on the streets of Baghdad as a child — a comment on the idea of being "at war with one's own body." Breasts become weapons in less literal ways in other works. The woman in "Boob Gold," an oil painting on wood from 2018, stares defiantly back at us as she tugs open her dress to expose a coin slot, the kind you might find on a donation box, at the center of her chest. The work addresses what Kahraman sees as the exploitative dimensions of humanitarian aid. "Your body becomes a spectacle," she says. "But on the other side, she's exuding this power." Sexual objectification may be an unavoidable condition of being a woman, especially one seen as exotic by the West, but Kahraman suggests it comes with its own forms of strength.

Left: Sarah Slappey, who painted "Cloud Tangle" (2020), has chafed against erotic interpretations of her work. Right: nipple hairs are proudly on display in the work of Larissa De Jesús Negrón, including "Soy Libre Mami" (2023).Credit...From left: courtesy of the artist and Sargent's Daughters; courtesy of the artist

Not all artists painting breasts are interested in them as sexual objects, but their erotic associations can be difficult to shake. In 2020, the American artist Sarah Slappey, 39, exhibited a series of surreal canvases in which disembodied arms, creamy lozenges and liquid tendrils collide with petal pink breasts resembling long balloons, complete with puffy areolas and noodle-like, upturned nipples. Some breasts ooze drops of milk that morph into strings of pearls. Slappey, who painted these works after night feeding her nephew with a bottle for several weeks, was thinking about the transformation of nipples after childbirth, and the mingled pleasure and pain of being in a woman's body (she compares it to a "cupcake full of thumbtacks"). Still, viewers were quick to read the tangles of rosy limbs as erotic. "Maybe in

our language we don't have enough separation between eroticism and sensuality or touch and the body, so people just overlap them too much," says Slappey. "Or people just like sex." Frustrated, she took a temporary break from breasts to focus on ankles and hands.

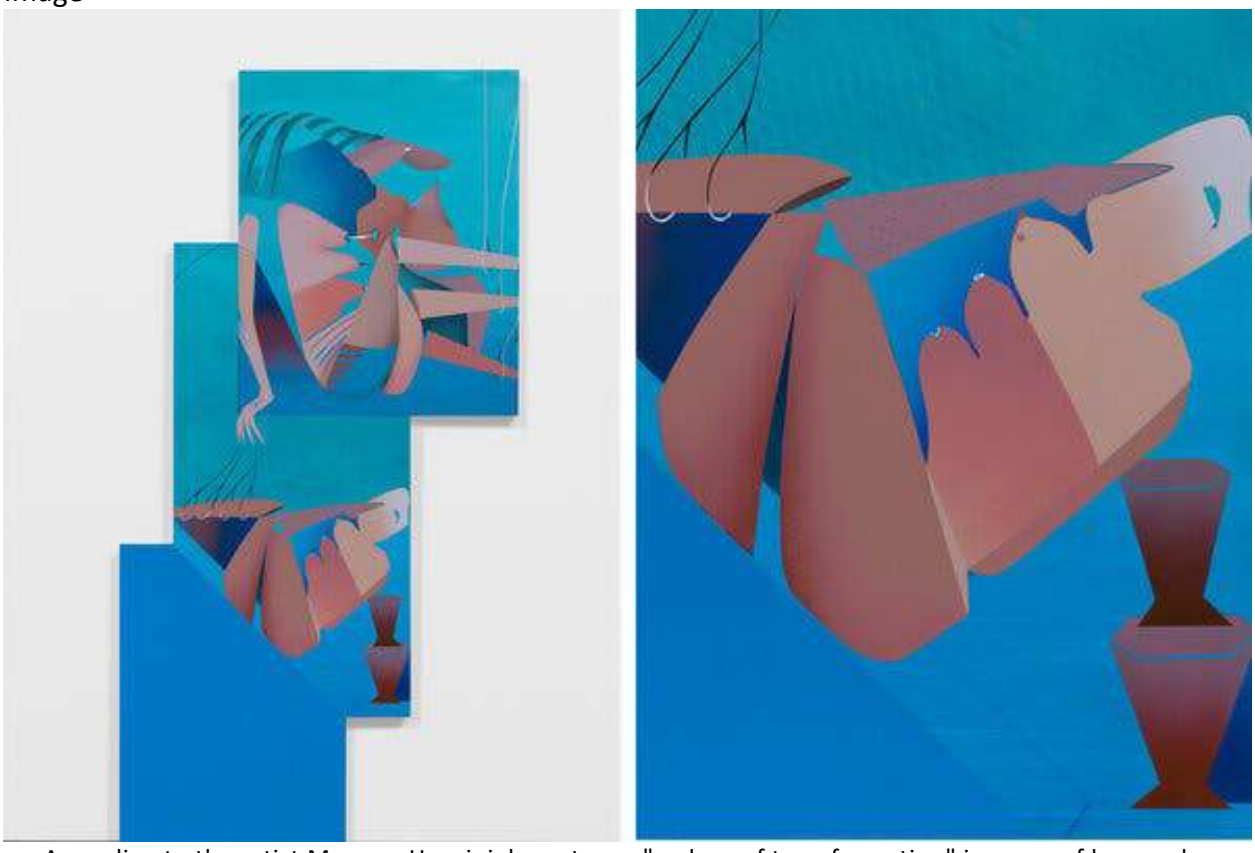
In oil paintings such as "Figure and Monstera" (2022), Somaya Critchlow imbues her subjects with a sense of interiority and unapologetic sensuality.Credit...© Somaya Critchlow. Courtesy of the artist, private collection, London, and Maximillian William, London. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates

The British artist Somaya Critchlow, 30, who depicts Black women with big hair and pneumatic breasts in compact oil paintings saturated with warm earth tones and jewel-hued shadows, has similarly expressed exasperation with one-note readings of her work. "People try to position my work as being sex-positive or political or whatever — and it's not, it's just investigative," she told The Guardian. Her subjects might lie back luxuriously or bend forward, squeezing their breasts together, like pinup girls, but they also tend to exude a strong sense of interiority —

mingled states of ambivalence, mischief and desire that make them whole human beings. Endowing them with exaggerated breasts is a provocation to the viewer to move past the obvious. “I’m just going to blow this up as big and silly as I can,” she told one journalist, and still “make it a serious painting. And what can you say to me about that?”

Larissa De Jesús Negrón, 28, renders breasts more realistically than some of her peers, using airbrushed acrylic and soft pastels to create subtle gradients of color, but they also speak, in her work, to the ways in which selves can transform. Raised in a devout Christian family in Puerto Rico with what she describes as “really harsh rules revolving around being modest and not showing too much skin,” she began painting naked women as a teenage rebellion. Soon it became a form of therapy. “I was able to process a lot of self-hate and shame that I felt around my body, and nudity in particular,” she says. Now based in Queens, De Jesús Negrón portrays herself, in all-consuming bouts of worry, spells of serene self-acceptance and ambiguous moods somewhere in between, flaunting the nipple hairs her mother once told her to pluck. In “Soy Libre Mami ” (2023), a close-up view of a single breast in shades of green and mauve, the curlicue strands form cursive letters spelling the first two words of the title. Translation: “I’m free.”

Image



According to the artist Maryam Hoseini, breasts are "a place of transformation" in many of her works, including "Hello-Goodbye Bad Dreams” (2020), above left. At right, a detail of the painting.Credit...Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai. Photo: Lance Brewer

Queer painters, perhaps because they understand better than most that body parts aren't always reliable indications of identity, are creating some of the most original images of breasts, ones that topple assumptions and rigid categories. The New York-based Iranian artist Maryam Hoseini, 34, depicts breasts without necessarily depicting women. Some of the headless figures in her paintings — bodies composed of flat, interlocking shapes inhabiting science fiction landscapes and fragmented rooms rendered in vivid shades of violet, teal and acidic blue — have three or more. Others have needle-sharp nipples or geometric voids instead. "For me, breasts are a place of transformation," says Hoseini, whose desire to imagine alternative, futuristic worlds in art reflects, among other things, her experiences with restrictive laws dictating gender expression and sexuality in Iran. "I use them in a way to subvert this power structure, as a place to empower my figures."

Christina Quarles, whose work "They'll Cut Us Down Again" (2020) is pictured here, observes that factors beyond sex and gender, including age and weight, can determine the presence or absence of breasts.Credit...© Christina Quarles. Courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth and Pilar Corrias, London. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

The 38-year-old Los Angeles-based painter Christina Quarles, whose riotously unpredictable figures embrace, merge and collide in kaleidoscopic environments of gestural shapes and patterns, is always amused when critics call her characters women just because they have what look like breasts. “Sometimes, gender is the last thing in the world that’s indicated by a breast,” says the artist, who regularly attends life drawing classes and references a range of different models with each figure she paints. A woman whose fair skin belies her multiracial heritage, Quarles is acutely aware that physical features can be misleading. “Boobs are an interesting marker of gender because they interact with age and weight so much,” she says. “I think, regardless of your gender identity, it’s a part of your body that does shift over time.” Her figures have breasts that dangle low, point skyward or sink into what might be rolls of flesh or stacks of ribs.

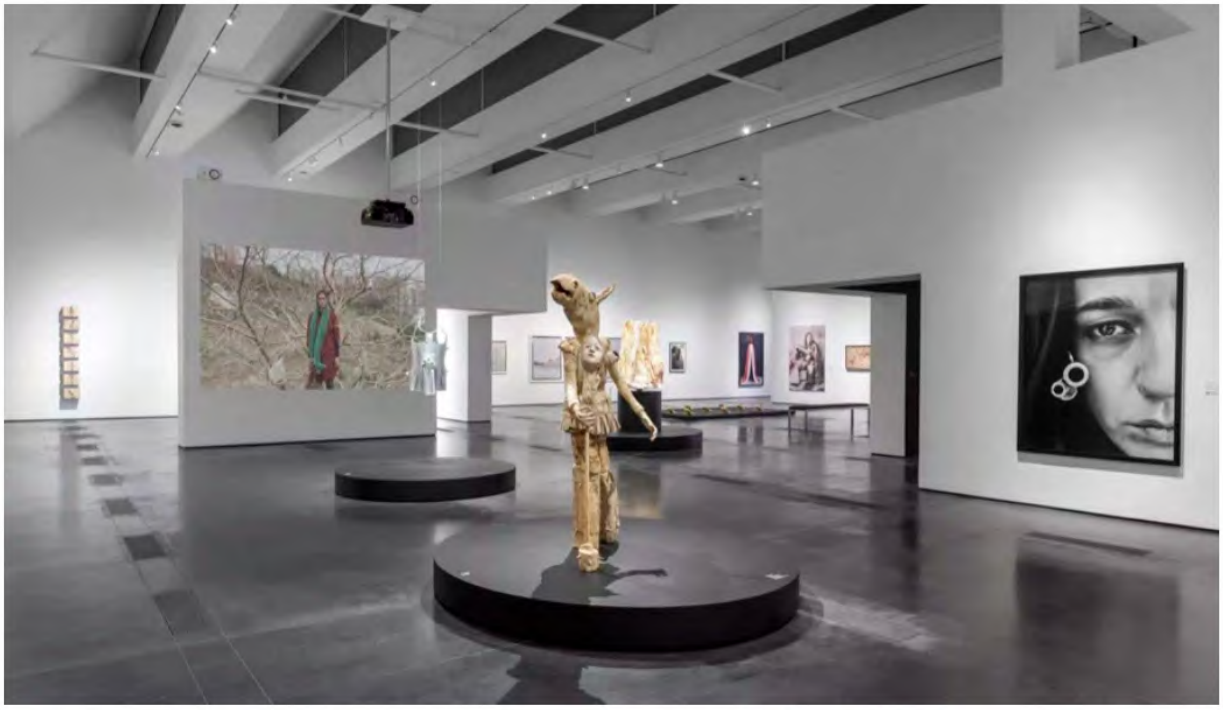
When Quarles was pursuing her M.F.A. at Yale University, a teacher once told her, “The boobs in your paintings are like the eyes: the windows to the soul.” She remembers thinking this “was kind of a weird thing to say,” but that it “may be true in some ways.” Depictions of breasts — objects of both obsessive fascination and strict social control — have long provided insight into the mores and politics of their time. But in the work of these painters, breasts also communicate something more personal; not simply metaphors for larger ideas, they give form to individual experiences. They are weird, unruly and sometimes playful. If this work conjures something universal, it’s the constant flux of flesh — the bizarre phenomenon of being in a body that is changing by the second.

Art

7 Boundary-Pushing Artists Challenging the Stereotypes of Middle Eastern Women

Cath Pound

Jun 8, 2023 6:35PM



Installation view of "Women Defining Women in Contemporary Art of the Middle East and Beyond" at LACMA, 2023. Courtesy of LACMA.

Middle Eastern women have long been subject to persistent stereotypes in the West. A new show, "Women Defining Women in Contemporary Art of the Middle East and Beyond," currently on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art through September 24th, hopes to act as a corrective.

The featured artists are all aiming to fashion definitions of self, and challenge the idea that they are voiceless and invisible, in their own individual ways. "American stereotypes are informed by American misogyny," said the show's curator, Linda Komaroff. "I wanted to use what the artists are doing to change American preconceptions, but I also wanted it to be kind of a wake-up call to American women. We're not so different. It's an illusion, I think, in America that women are free and equal to men."

At the same time, Komaroff is hoping the exhibition will attract and inspire a younger audience, especially those who may feel marginalized by their gender, faith, ethnicity, or race. “They can go to this exhibition and see themselves, or they can relate to the names of the artists or where they come from,” said Komaroff.

A downloadable guide also means that the powerful, thought-provoking artworks can be accessed by a global audience of women, who have more in common than they may think. “We’re all kind of in the same boat,” said Komaroff. “It’s about the cultural entrenchment of patriarchal views.”

Here, we look at seven works in the exhibition by female artists from the Middle East who challenge the narrow definitions which are so often imposed upon them.

Hayv Kahraman, *Search*, 2016

Hayv Kahraman, *Search*, 2016. © Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and LACMA.

Born in Baghdad when Iraq was still under the rule of Saddam Hussein, Hayv Kahraman and her family left to find refuge in Sweden. Having studied in Florence, the artist is now based in Los Angeles. Her practice primarily engages with the female form, using her own body as the model.

Komaroff, the show's curator, believes that much of Kahraman's art is about "her own search for identity and finding a place for herself." Some of the disembodied torsos and limbs in *Search* (2016) are joined by a pencil outline as they gradually come together, suggesting the contortions the artist had to put herself through in order to emerge as the confident figure in the top left-hand corner.

ARAB NEWS

Iraqi Kurdish artist Hayv Kahraman explores how an understanding of microbiology can help deal with trauma

Hayv Kahraman. (Supplied)

DUBAI: The latest exhibition from Los Angeles-based Iraqi Kurdish artist Hayv Kahraman, on show at Dubai's The Third Line gallery, is called "Gut Feelings: Part II." The title is both instructive — the majority of works depict a female figure, or figures, with a knot of guts spilling from some part of their bodies — and allusive, as the show is informed by Kahraman's exhaustive research into the gut microbiome and its effect on our mental and physical health, as well as by her own experiences of trauma. The imagery somehow manages to be unsettling, funny and comforting all at once.

The most immediate influence from Kahraman's own life on this body of work was her mother's diagnosis with lung cancer, which she received in 2018.

"That's when I started digging into the biosciences and immunology," Kahraman tells Arab News. "My mom was a naturopath, she tried a lot of alternative (medicine). If my mom were alive, she would have so much input into this. And it is a way of getting closer to her; it's all connected to this work.

"I started with immunology and I was struck by how militaristic the language was. You're 'fighting cancer.' You're constantly at war with your body, you know? Why can't we have something that's looking at it as more of a journey, rather than something you're fighting against? I really reacted to the semantics," she continues.

"From immunology I shifted into microbiology, and that's where this (show) was born. I really got into a rabbit hole," Kahraman explains. "There are ecosystems of microbiota all over our bodies; inside, outside, around. There's something called aura microbiota, so right now, as we're sitting next to each other, my microbiota is mixing with your microbiota, which is just beautiful if you think of it, because then all of these notions of 'us and them' or where I end and you begin — these dichotomies — shatter. I found out — and this was mindblowing — our bodies have a 1:1 ratio of human cells and microbial cells. So where do 'you' start and where do 'you' end? You're equally other: microbe, germ, dirty. As somebody who's been an immigrant, a refugee, 'othered' in so many ways, I'm constantly thinking about difference. So with the microbes, it was, like, 'Ooh, these are my friends.'"

Hayv Kahraman, Feeding on entanglements, 2022. (Supplied)

Kahraman was born in 1981 and grew up in Baghdad. Her mother worked for the United Nations and her father was a university professor. “My parents were very liberal. We had a little playroom in our home that we could paint all over; walls, ceiling, doors. That was very empowering. That room was filled with all kinds of stories — our concerns, things that we wanted to celebrate,” she says.

Her parents also hosted regular soirees attended by Iraqi creatives. “I’d sit in the room next door and do these quick gestural paintings, and every now and then one of these creatives would come in and look at my painting and give me a mini critique. And that was amazing; to get that from multiple voices,” she says. “That was pivotal to my life.”

The family fled Iraq to Sweden when Kahraman was 10, after the first Gulf War. They arrived as undocumented refugees and were eventually granted asylum. “I went through a process of assimilation when I arrived; I wanted so desperately to belong and become Swedish,” she says. “And when that happens to you, you’re robbed of who you thought that you really were; whatever that is. I did everything I could to become Swedish; dyed my hair, had a perfect accent, so I didn’t sound like an immigrant. And that’s a very violent thing to undergo, because you really are erasing something. This is something I revisit in my work all the time; I’m so concerned with not being erased. ‘I’m here. I exist. Listen to me. Hear me. See me.’”

Hayv Kahraman, Neurobust, 2022. (Supplied)

That, she says, is why the female figure in “Gut Feelings: Part II” has been recurrent throughout her work. It was first created in Italy, where she moved to intern as a librarian at an art school. There have been many “transmutations” of the figure, however. In 2007, for example, at the height of Iraq’s sectarian violence, when thousands of people were dying there each day, Kahraman had just moved to Phoenix, Arizona. “I was consumed by guilt, being in this country that was currently at war with my own. So the work was very violent — you had women setting themselves on fire, women hanging themselves...” She was also in an abusive relationship at the time, although she says it took her many years to realize it, “but it came out in the work.”

Having lived through so much trauma, it's unsurprising that Kahraman describes herself as having a tendency to be "very dark" and to regularly become obsessed with certain topics (such as microbia).

"If I could, I would just live in my obsessions," she says. "My work is about working through things — trauma and those obsessions. Why am I obsessing about the microbiome, and health, and torshi (fermented beetroot, which features heavily in the show, and is rich in 'good' bacteria)? My mom used to make torshi when we were kids and we used to paint with it. I didn't consciously link it at first. The academic research came before, and then I'm like, 'Oh my god. Yes. That's why I'm here…'"

She stresses, however, that as much as her art doubles as therapy, it also brings her joy. And there is lightness in the exhibition too — the comic book-style gut-spillage has a certain humorous appeal.

"I am trying to channel that levity. I think I've got a nice balance between the really grotesque and… I wouldn't say beauty, because that's subjective. I'd say, connection, maybe," she says. "I wanted the audience to walk in and feel like they're inside the body and that it's comforting and that there's compassion and healing and that it's a safe space."

Art

Hayv Kahraman's Provocative New Paintings Express Trauma and Healing

Rawaa Talass

Mar 17, 2023 3:22PM

Portrait of Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist.

The Iraqi American artist Hayv Kahraman doesn't have many vivid memories of her childhood, but there is one that stands out. Growing up in Baghdad during the Iran–Iraq War and the Gulf War, she remembers how her parents allowed her and her younger sister to freely paint the doors, ceiling, and walls of what they called the "play room" in their house.

"Saying to a nine-year-old that you can paint anywhere in this entire room, it was just everything," she told Artsy from Los Angeles, where she is based. "Imagine living in a space where you can't just be you. You have to be aware of everything around you, because if you're not you can actually be killed. So to have that kind of freedom in that context was emancipatory. It meant a lot and I think that was the first push towards where I wanted to go."

Installation view of Hayv Kahraman, “Gut Feelings: Part II,” at The Third Line, Dubai, 2023. Courtesy of The Third Line, Dubai.

She also recalls how she and her mother would dip their paint brushes into the colored and salty liquid of *torshi* (fermented pickled vegetables) and paint away on paper. That personal memory has been recreated on a larger scale as an installation on a wall, as part of her latest exhibition, “Gut Feelings: Part II,” at The Third Line in Dubai, now on view through March 24th (part one was held at The Mosaic Rooms, London, in 2022). The artist presents a selection of provocative paintings and drawings that tap into trauma and healing, expressed through figures literally grappling with the gut, an important organ that affects the human psyche.

In essence, the show was inspired by Kahraman’s late mother, who was a naturopath, studying natural ways of healing. “She had her own trauma. She was actively trying to heal,” said the artist.

In 2020, after her mother passed away in Sweden, where the family took refuge in 1992, Kahraman was clearing out her mother’s personal belongings when she found a book on a term she’d never heard of before: Neurosculpting. “It’s a science in which you can rewire the neural pathways in your brain,” explained Kahraman. “You actually have the ability to unlearn traumatic patterns or any difficulties you have endured, and then resculpt them.”

Hayv Kahraman
Ties and Y, 2022
The Third Line

Hayv Kahraman
Neurobust no 7, 2022
The Third Line

Kahraman found herself researching this eye-opening topic, leading to the gut, which is often dubbed as the “second brain.” The brain is connected to the gut, which is full of millions of

neurons and its internal bacteria—though undesirable to most—"regulates the hormones that control our feelings," according to exhibitions's press release.

The artist said that she has found "an ally with germs," tying them to the notions of difference and otherness, which have been part of her life experience. And so the gut became a central and symbolic motif in Kahraman's new body of figurative paintings, depicted as entanglements—long, twisted lengths of intestines. Some are painted in black, whereas others are rendered using pale pink torshi liquid.

Working on this series for the past three years has been a cathartic experience for the artist, who herself has dealt with trauma, displacement, and violence from the age of 10 onwards. For Kahraman, picking up the paintbrush is a form of therapy and release, a way to work through what she had endured.

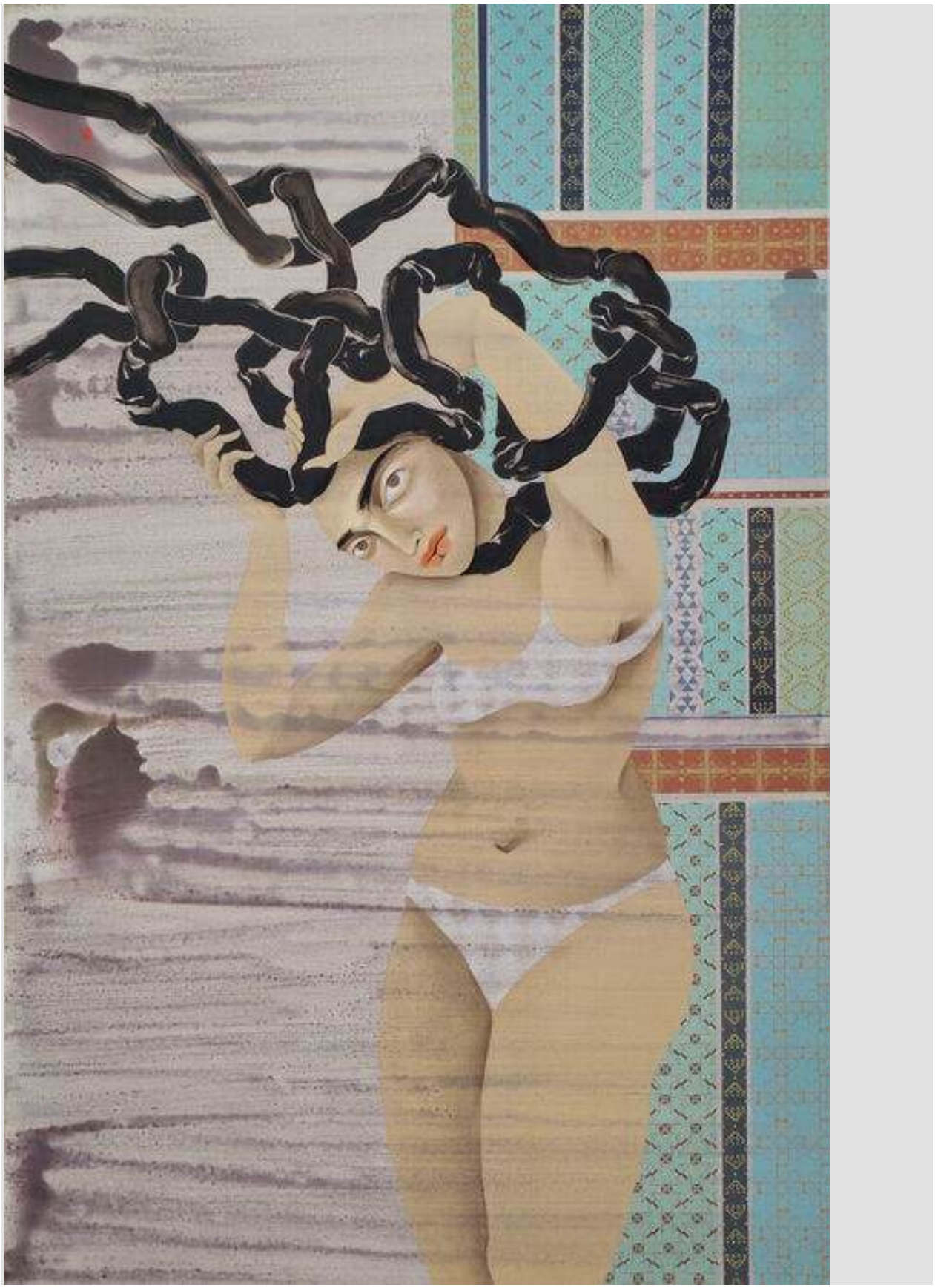
Hayv Kahraman
Tentacular eye boobs, 2023
The Third Line

Hayv Kahraman
Torshi eye boobs drawing, 2023
The Third Line

Fleeing Iraq at a young age, Kahraman and her family were refugees, who made their way to Sweden, thanks to fake passports provided by a smuggler. She tried to fit in in Swedish society, including bleaching her hair. Later, she found herself in the midst of an abusive marriage. “You

carry that abuse silently in your body, but it came out in the work," she said of her earlier pieces. "I could not see it at the time. I had some people come up to me and say, 'Are you okay?'"

"Painting is the way that I speak," Kahraman said. "This whole body of work started out to somehow, maybe naively, find some sort of utopian way to reach healing. But as I started making them, I started realizing it's not about the endpoint, it's really about the process of painting.…Finding joy in the process versus wanting to reach an end goal—that's what I learned.…If there was any big lesson for me it was probably being present in these entanglements and being okay with that pain."



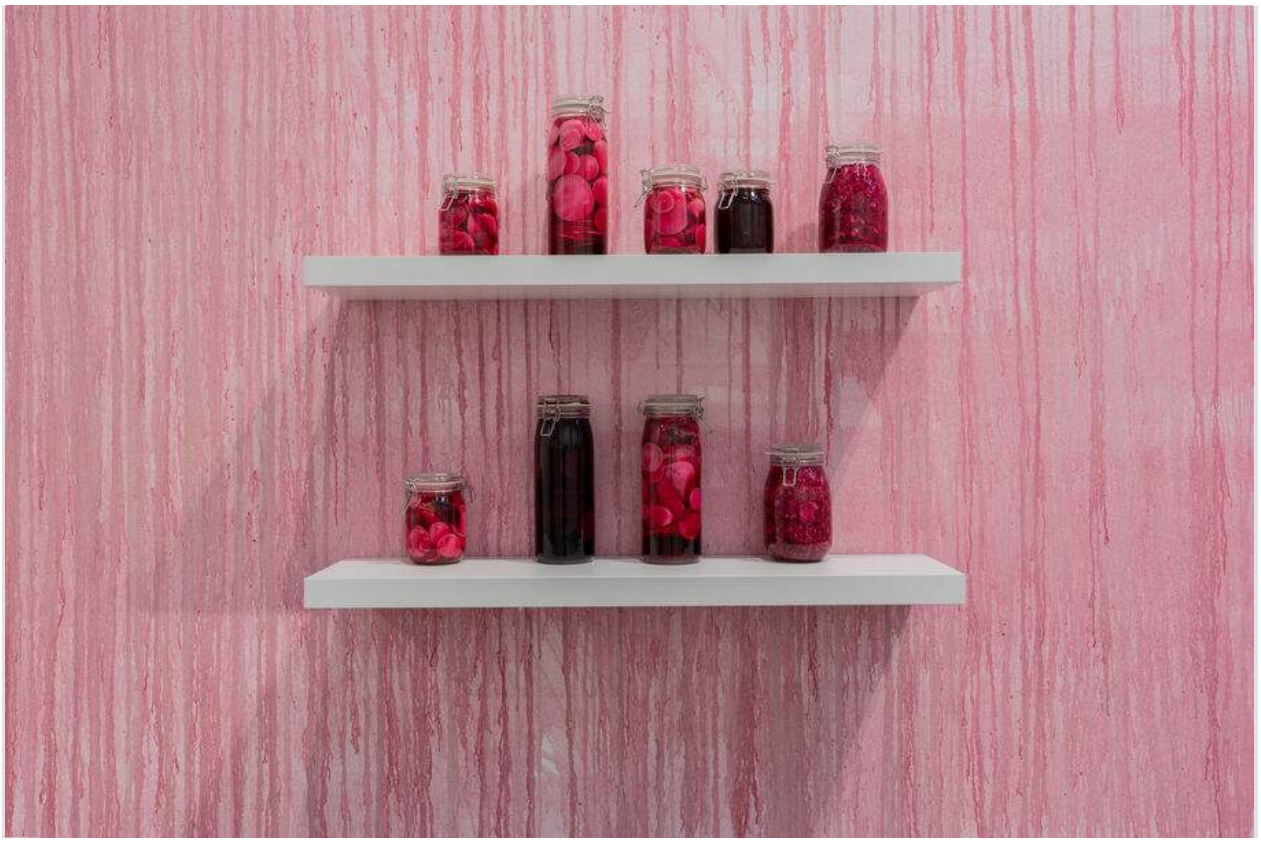
Hayv Kahraman
Brain wash, 2022
The Third Line

Hayv Kahraman
Lizard hair, 2023
The Third Line

In the paintings of “Gut Feelings: Part II,” displayed on The Third Line’s two floors, the viewer comes across a familiar female protagonist that has long been present in Kahraman’s oeuvre. She has black hair, sometimes a thick unibrow or a mustache, dressed in attire with delicate geometric patterns, a nod to the artist’s heritage. “I think it’s a way for me to be closer to home, but I do find that it brings structure to the painting,” she said. “In the recent work, a lot of the patterns are mostly inspired by Kurdish rugs that are woven by nomadic women. Each symbol has a meaning. A lot of the symbols that I’ve taken mean fertility, life, womanhood, love.”

Her work has also been inspired by illuminated manuscripts, Renaissance, and Persian miniature painting, as well as the Baghdad School of Miniature Paintings, stretching back to the 12th century.

The entanglements are created in a surreal manner, where they float atop the protagonist’s head (as seen in *Brain wash*, 2022) and come out of the mouth, as if to get it out of one’s system. Elsewhere, three women are pulling the entanglements from looming eyes, and octopus tentacles emerge from a woman’s breasts.



Installation view of Hayv Kahraman, “Gut Feelings: Part II,” at The Third Line, Dubai, 2023. Courtesy of The Third Line, Dubai.

“I don’t want to shock people. The objective is to communicate something,” Kahraman said. “Surreal is a good word to use, because now I feel like where I’m veering towards is trying to let more of whatever my hand is willing to produce.”

Separate from the paintings, a full wall is painted with torshi, filled with pink drippings, accompanied by glass jars of fermented beetroot. The display taps into how fermented foods are full of good bacteria that the gut requires. It is perhaps the most intimate part of the show.

“We wanted a space where entering into this show is entering into the inside of the body somehow. We wanted it to feel like a safe place,” Kahraman said. “We painted the entire wall and that was very cathartic and therapeutic. That’s a nice little circle: Starting out as a child in Baghdad painting with torshi with my mom. So, maybe it’s an homage to my mom.”

Rawaa Talass

Art

Hayv Kahraman: 'I was brainwashed into thinking anything Euro-American-centric is the ideal'

The Kurdish artist draws on Baghdad's miniature tradition, self-portraiture, plant bacteria and neurosculpting for artworks that provoke a gut reaction

Hayv Kahraman's Neurobust No 1 , 2021. Photograph: Fredrik Nilsen Studio/Courtesy of the artist/Pilar Corrias

Skye Sherwin

Mon 21 Feb 2022 04.00 EST

In 2006, the artist Hayv Kahraman moved to the US, then occupying her homeland, Iraq, and began painting a woman who has been a fixture of her work ever since. With parchment-pale skin, a swoosh of raven hair, scarlet lips and strong brows, this figure recalls the characters set against unadorned backgrounds in 12th-century Baghdad's miniature painting, while her apple-round breasts and cool, heavy-lidded gaze suggest a quattrocento nude, rendered with the clean lines of Japanese prints.

It is a composite identity its maker understands well. Kahraman was 11 when she was smuggled out of Iraq during the first Gulf war. Her family settled in Sweden, where she spent her teens; she now lives in Los Angeles. "As an immigrant, I've always felt on the periphery of society," she says.

Watching her mother work as a translator for government agencies, Kahraman saw the demand for refugees to repeat their trauma. "It creates an economy of pain where suffering becomes a currency," she says. "So how do we get unstuck? How do we not only survive but thrive?"

In the past 15 years she has used her painted women to investigate the refugee condition from often surprising angles. The figures have become contortionists; canvases have been sliced up and rewoven into abstract patterns, in an allegory of the fragmented nature of memory, culture and trauma. A recent Covid-centric series interrogated the martial language of immunology, in which the human fortress is seen to be "invaded" or "colonised" by foreign bodies.

Inside out … Hayv Kahraman. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist/Pilar Corrias

Her latest exhibition, Gut Feelings, draws on recent research into the possibility of actively "rewiring" neural pathways through the gut microbiome. "The bacteria in our gut is responsible for regulating hormones like dopamine and serotonin that give us feelings," she says.

It is clear, though, from her work's unsettling tone, that she sees any restorative process as complicated. Beauty is tempered by a jolt of body horror as the women in her paintings strike acrobat poses, entangled in thick, intestine-like nets, or crouch low, passing ropes of lilac guts between them. In small canvases she calls "neurobusts", a woman's body has been fragmented into a bust and displayed on a steel rod like a museum artefact. Sausage-like innards protrude from her mouth. Umbilical cords and blowjobs come to mind. These challenging images make us reflect on what we are taught to consider "normal": "I was brainwashed into thinking anything Euro-American-centric is the ideal," Kahraman says.

The ambiguity that permeates Kahraman's work goes far beyond its mix of the gorgeous and grotesque. Are these female prisoners or nest-builders, nurtured or force-fed? "It's not about erasing the pain and entanglement," she says. "It's about thinking, feeling and working through it."

Body of work – recent pieces by Kahraman

Hayv Kahraman's Entanglements With Torshi, 2021. Photograph: Fredrik Nilsen Studio/Courtesy of the artist/Pilar Corrias

Entanglements With Torshi, 2021
Kahraman has found novel ways to "collaborate with microbes" in her paintings exploring the gut microbiome. The lilac in this painting comes from the Middle Eastern beetroot torshi. "Bacteria permeates the vegetables to create this fermented food," she says. "My mum and I used to paint with it when I was a kid."

Neurobust No 1, 2021 (pictured top)
Kahraman's interest in neuroscience began with the loss of her mother. The artist discovered that one of the last books she had been reading before her death concerned "neurosculpting", the potential for changing neural pathways that were previously considered set. "In the field of

PTSD, this is massive," she says. "It was interesting that she, an Iraqi immigrant, had chosen this book."

Hayv Kahraman's Beard-Gut-Brain Axis, 2021. Photograph: Fredrik Nilsen Studio/Courtesy of the artist/Pilar Corrias

Beard-Gut-Brain Axis, 2021
Kahraman has begun experimenting with painting on flax, another product of bacteria permeating a plant - and what linen is made from. Linen had a strong association with Venice, "the heart of European aesthetics", she says. "I want to dismantle that."

Hayv Kahraman's Entanglements No 1, 2021. Photograph: Fredrik Nilsen Studio/Courtesy of the artist/Pilar Corrias

Entanglements No 1, 2021
The artist typically uses her own body as a model, however she doesn't see her figures as self-portraits. "It's not individualistic; it's more about creating a collective of women," she says.

Hayv Kahraman: Gut Feelings is at the Mosaic Rooms, London, from 25 February *until 29 May.*

ART SY

June 14, 2021
By Osman Can Yerebakan

Women Artists of the Middle East and South Asia Are Reinventing Miniature Painting

As a student at the National College of Arts in 1980s Lahore, Shahzia Sikander was not encouraged to practice miniature painting. She had first encountered images of miniature as a child in books, but access to her nation's traditional practice was scarce due to many Western museums' large holdings of the genre. Studying "the colonial legacy and its orientalist interpretations" through archives helped Sikander grasp miniature's intricate trajectory, but "making sense of this complex history first as a young teenager and to this day as an older artist has been a long journey of several decades," she said.

The New York–based artist is a leading figure in a wave of Middle Eastern and South Asian women artists reclaiming miniature painting to tell their stories of transcendence and corporeality. She and fellow artists like Hayv Kahraman, Arghavan Khosravi, Hamra Abbas, and Hiba Schahbaz defy the tradition's visual and conceptual style through their own technical and narrative complexities. They transfer miniature painting to a variety of media, including video and sculpture, while foregrounding women-centric stories. While centering female autonomy, as well as sexuality, these artists still harness the introspection and transcendence of miniature traditions.

Miniature painting flourished in Persia around the 13th century, despite Islam's strict ban on figuration and creating human likeness. Soon after, the genre emerged in the Ottoman Empire, as well as India, especially during the Mughal Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries. These artworks were small-scale renditions of a broad variety of subjects, such as historical events, everyday court life, or nature, with the occasional addition of calligraphy. Formats varied from a manuscript with numerous pages to a single sheet of paper, but the artists' commitment to a flattened perspective and figures was consistent.

In a world of chaos and injustice, contemporary approaches to miniature traditions promise alternative modes of thinking, according to curators Azra Tüzünoğlu and Gülce Özkara, who recently co-organized the group exhibition "Miniature 2.0: Miniature in Contemporary Art" at Istanbul's Pera Museum. "Women find it productive to engage with traditional miniature aesthetics because the politics of miniature is very similar to the colonialist white male subject's control over the female body," Tüzünoğlu and Özkara noted. "The invisibility of both women artists and miniature aesthetics in Western-centric progressivist art history is the result of similar sociocultural structures which affect contemporary art today."

Hayv Kahrarman, *Back Bend 2,* 2020. Pilar Corrias Gallery.

The female figure in Sikander's universe is an archetype of historical feminine resistance. "They have thoughts, emotions, feelings, and iconographies born out of the intellectual and virtuosic manuscript traditions of Central, South, and East Asia," she explained.

Sikander's seminal thesis project *The Scroll* (1989–90) came out of a search to craft her critical voice against colonial and patriarchal oppression—and her answer was in the miniature tradition. The work is composed of meticulous depictions of female figures over a stretched piece of the traditionally used *wasli* paper. Sikander, an avid poetry reader, describes *The Scroll* as "an epic poem," which unfolds a narrative from left to right about women's internal and social conflicts. Immense labor and contemplation were critical for the work's conception due to the era's strict laws that regulated women's freedom.

"This work marked the beginning of my depicting women as proactive, intelligent, witty protagonists connected to the past in imaginative and abundant ways," Sikander said. The artist's upcoming survey "Extraordinary Realities," at the Morgan Library and Museum, looks at a period following *The Scroll*, which launched the movement later coined as "Neo-miniature." "Transforming its status from a traditional and nostalgic form into a contemporary idiom became my personal goal," Sikander said, referring to the time period that began when she moved to the U.S. and later had solo exhibitions at the Whitney and the Hirshhorn.

For Iraqi American artist Hayv Kahraman, books similarly served as an entryway into understanding her culture's miniature tradition. As a child in Baghdad, she encountered images of the Baghdad school of miniature painting and learned about the tradition's peak during the 12th century. Kahraman is known for her radiant depictions of female perseverance through the impossibly contorted bodies, hazy facial expressions, and a sense of tranquility which she achieves through painting on tan linen. She paints women with bulbous coifs of hair and piercing eyes, populating dreamscapes in which ethereality and resilience coalesce.


Left: Hayv Kahraman, *Chameleons,* 2021. Jack Shainman Gallery. Right: Hayv Kahraman, *IV*, 2021, in "Anti/Body" at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

Kahraman's contemporary approach to miniature traditions nods to the 11th-century manuscripts of Maqamat al Hariri. "The emphasis was placed on the expression of the characters' faces and movements, which is something I tried to adopt in my work," she said. She also connects with tradition on a literary level by writing in vernacular onto the canvas in Iraqi Arabic. Moreover, Maqamat has been an unexpected source of inspiration for portrayals of the body, including "a full frontal view of a woman, her legs wide open, giving birth."

Beyond their dynamic appearances, Kahraman's absorbing depictions of female sexuality deliver sharp remarks on gender liberation, and she feels particularly committed to bridging the contemporary with the past. "Many iterations of the Maqamats were censored and destroyed at the time, but to think that they were part of the collective imaginary and were widely read and discussed in that region is quite emancipatory," she said. The artist's most recent paintings at Jack Shainman Gallery's group exhibition "Anti/Body" convey a tension between tranquility and horror. The women possess a timeless ease inherent to miniature, while visuals of war gear or serpents populate the contemporary chaos.

Iranian artist Arghavan Khosravi learned of miniature traditions through her father, an architect who specialized in traditional Islamic and Persian forms. Yet it wasn't until she started her MFA in illustration at Tehran University that she delved into miniature's legacy in Iran. At school, a large portion of the painting history she learned focused on local miniature tradition, but Khosravi's first real encounter with the masterpieces was at an exhibition at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art about a decade ago. The exhibition catalogue was one of the few books she brought across the Atlantic during her move to the U.S. "Whenever I feel I am running out of inspiration, I browse that book and it never ceases to amaze me," she said.

The New York–based artist's recent exhibition "In Between Places," at Rachel Uffner Gallery, demonstrated her interest in miniature's particular sense of architecture and depth, which she transforms into a language to convey emotion. "Depictions of architecture is one of the aspects of Persian miniature which has always fascinated me," Khosravi explained. Her three-dimensional paintings both embrace and subvert that admiration. She resists the tradition's emphasis on flatness with her stacked perspectives and elimination of the vanishing point. Her introspective mise-en-scènes often refer to politics between her native country and the U.S. "I am interested in appropriating that unreal space with traditional architecture and placing in it realistically rendered figures in contemporary clothing," she said.

Khosravi's figures occasionally seem out of proportion in relation to the architectural elements. Beyond simply tricking the eye, the in-betweenness of perspective helps the artist add a veil of social commentary over her radiant hues and absorbing juxtapositions.

Pakistani artist Hamra Abbas started miniature painting only during art school, "but it never felt unfamiliar, and today, it has a special place in my practice," she said. Abbas's "Every Color" painting series, which was featured in part one of the 2020–21 Asia Society Triennial, captures members of Lahore's transgender community through the resilience of portraiture. Entirely eliminating background and the body, she brings the viewer face-to-face with her subjects. While homogeneity was critical in traditional miniature, Abbas's attention to detail gives distinction and persistence to each individuals' expression. "I rendered the faces with a sense of realism, which connects my painting practice with sculpture that is quite different from the stylization in miniature tradition," she explained.

While making this work in Lahore, Abbas was on her own journey of transformation. "I had just given birth to my son, and the prospect of learning something new in a new place spoke profoundly to my process of postpartum healing and the idea of rebirth," Abbas said about visiting the city after living in Boston for many years. She also felt the need to slow down after observing the difficulties faced by transgender performers on the streets of Lahore. Infusing elements of Chinese *Gongbi* painting into miniature yielded a particular sense of depth and radiance in her subjects. Instead of the typical wasli paper, she used silk and applied paint on both sides of the surface. "The process helped me realize the poetics of this everyday yet marginalized queerness in Pakistan," Abbas said.

Whenever Abbas seeks refuge from the chaos of studio life, miniature offers an escape. "Miniature painting is the one place where I am in a quiet conversation only with myself," she reflected, "which I highly value in the noisy lives we love to live all the time otherwise."

The painter Hiba Schahbaz was drawn to the intricate details of miniature. "When I was formally introduced to painting miniatures at the National College of Arts in Lahore, I immediately fell under its spell," she said. The artist considers the practice a form of meditation and ritual, which includes mixing the colors or preparing the brushes.

"It was like meeting a soul mate," Schahbaz said of her early days of engaging with the genre. Today, at her Bushwick studio, she makes cutouts of women immersed in nature, unburdened by the mundane chaos.

Schahbaz's recent exhibition "In My Heart," displayed in and around Rockefeller Plaza through the Art Production Fund, was a love song for collective healing. "I intentionally focused my energy outward and took into consideration the space and context of Rockefeller Center," she said. The show's centerpiece was a 125-foot-long mural featuring contemplative women, inspired by her own self, in otherworldly habitats. After painting miniature for 15 years, the transition to such a large scale was a new challenge, but her approach largely remained the same. "The soft stylization of figures and landscapes, the dreamlike colors, the topsy-turvy perspective, and areas of intricate details are very much a part of my vocabulary," Schahbaz explained.

Sikander sees her miniature practice as a way to consider the question, "What is our sense of self versus someone else's idea of us?" She, as well as many contemporary artists who narrate stories of transcendence within their physical realities, keeps returning to miniature. The tradition's offerings of mystery and tranquility help them render the mundane with contemplation. Amid chaos, miniature traditions offer a means through which to unveil the resilient self.

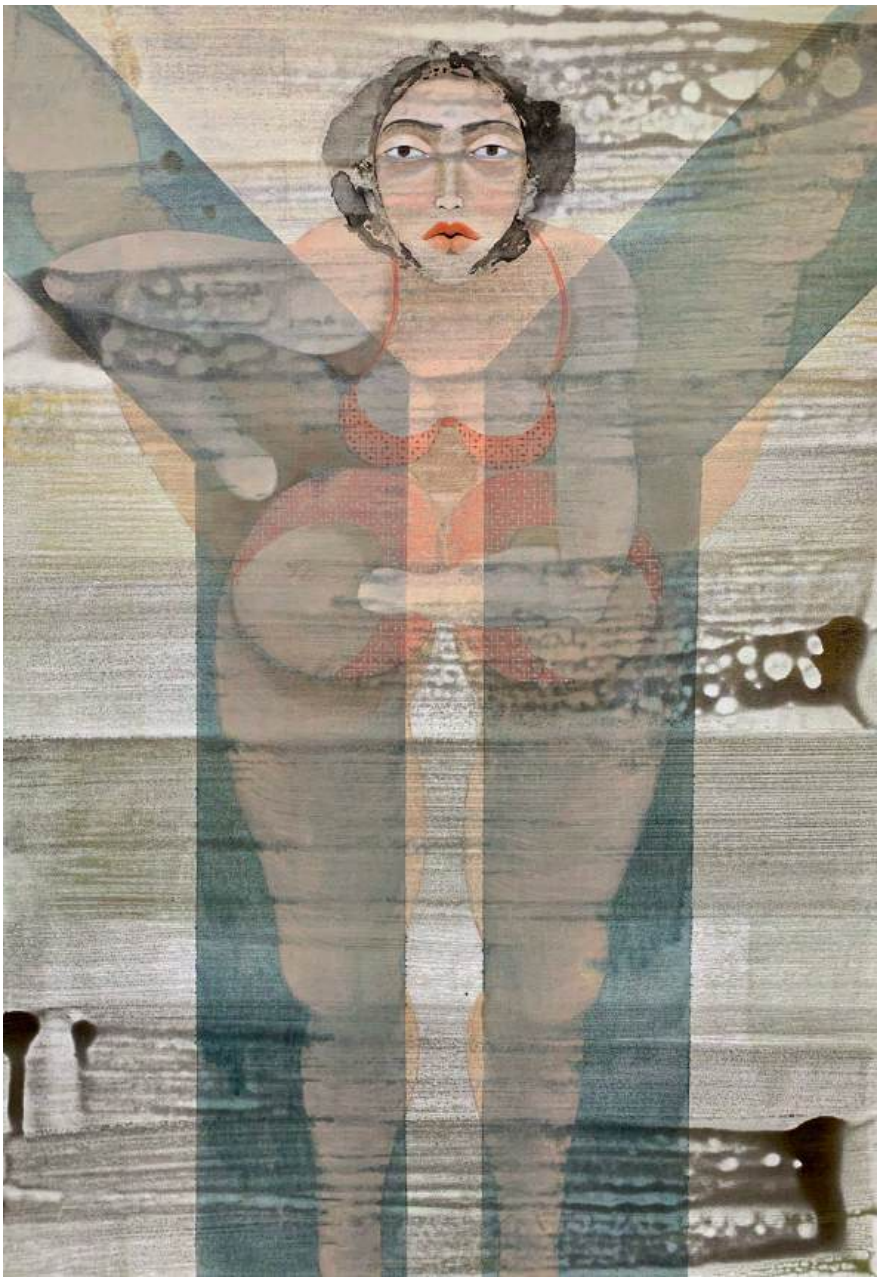
ELEPHANT

24 Sep 2020

CONTEMPORARY CLASSICS

Hayv Kahraman’s Paintings Question the Language of the Pandemic

The artist’s new Anti-Body series offer a multifaceted reading of biology and medical care—and the ways in which they relate to the inner psyche and society at large. Words by Holly Black



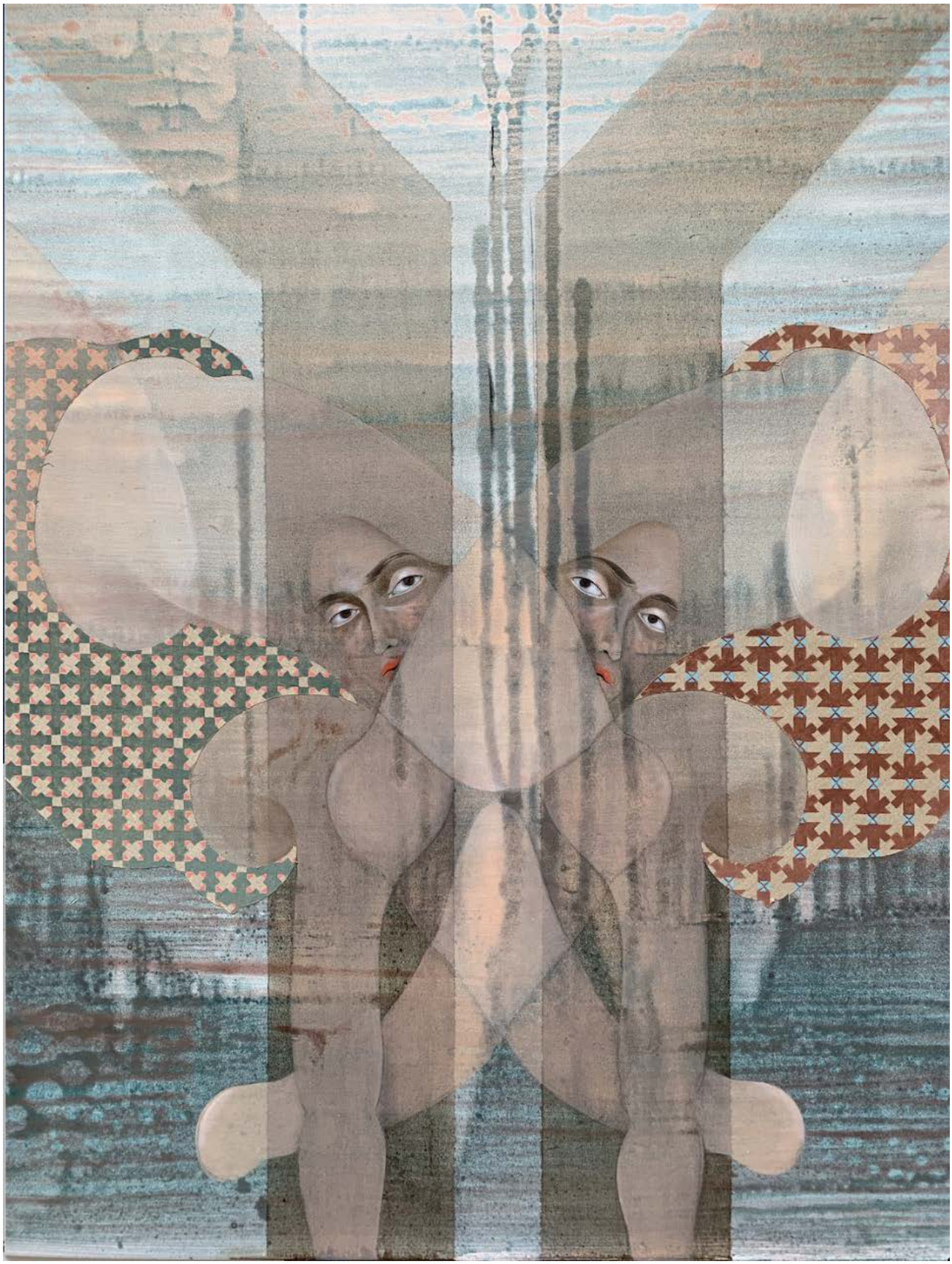
Hayv Kahraman, Anti-Body #2, 2020 © the artist

The language of a pandemic is complex and ever-evolving. From “social distancing” and “PPE” to “flattening the curve” and the “new normal”, there is a whole glossary of terms that have entered common parlance in order to verbalise the havoc that Covid-19 has wreaked across the world. As politicians, the media and the wider public attempt to grapple with this new vocabulary, it can be easy to forget that the way we talk about the virus—as a mysterious, foreign threat—often echoes the paranoid, nationalistic rhetoric that has gained so much traction in recent years.

It is exactly this concern that Hayv Kahraman addresses in her latest Anti-Body series, created this year. Since the pandemic took hold, she has been considering the idea of immunity in biopolitical (as opposed to purely biological) terms. “Personally, I always revert back to my experience as a refugee or as a person of colour and how I’m treated as a foreigner,” she explains. “As a virus. To be expelled. Or to be tamed. To be colonised and ultimately to be eradicated.”

“Kahraman’s pictures offer a multilayered and multifaceted reading of biology and medical care”

While there is no doubt that a universal vaccine against Covid-19 is something we all hope for, Kahraman’s nuanced understanding of the ways in which language can be weaponised and shape public consciousness is powerful. In these new works, her ideas are manifested as contorted and twisted human bodies, fading under washes of colour that could allude to the pernicious, infectious droplets we are constantly warned about, the deep oppressive fog that has consumed many minds during lockdown and beyond, or indeed the dehumanising process by which scores of fatalities have been reduced to mere numbers. An overlaid geometric shape that mimics the physical “Y” structures of antibodies acts as a further reminder that the ways in which we combat and shield ourselves from harm are never simple.



Hayv Kahraman, Anti-Body #1, 2020 © the artist

Throughout this crisis, it has been difficult to give visual shape to the experience, not least because it has affected everyone differently on a local and global level. The constant search for information has led to news feeds, social media and government guidelines flooding our senses with instructional icons on how to keep safe, as well as disturbing imagery of overrun hospitals, police brutality and epic collective sorrow. The stark realities of this existence have often left little room for nuance or subtlety, because it is impossible to look beyond the immediate.

“Throughout this crisis, it has been difficult to give visual shape to the experience”

Yet Kahraman’s pictures offer a multilayered and multifaceted reading of biology and medical care—and the ways they relate to our understanding of the physical body, the inner psyche and society at large. As she further explains, “You develop antibodies after you’re subjected to something foreign to deal with the disease. In a way they are also bridging the foreign and the self.” The artist rightfully interprets the concept of inoculation as the positive introduction of an outside element, in order for a body to survive. In this way, she looks beyond the fear of infection that so many of us have experienced, and turns instead to the power of symbiosis, which will ultimately reframe our existence.

HYPERALLERGIC

September 14, 2020
By Elisa Wouk Almino

Meet LA's Art Community: Hayv Kahraman Is Examining What It Means to Be "Immune"

An interview series spotlighting some of the great work coming out of Los Angeles. Hear directly from artists, curators, and art workers about their current projects and personal quirks.

Hayv Kahraman (2019) (image courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery)

Welcome to the 28th installment of *Meet LA's Art Community*. Check out our past interviews here.

This week I interview the artist Hayv Kahraman. Born in Baghdad, Kahraman reflects on her experiences as a refugee and immigrant through her art. When she was 11 years old, her family fled the first Gulf War and settled in Sweden, where she would begin painting. Her art has been described as a way of processing her sense of "difference." Across her paintings and sculptures, you'll see many figures of women, sometimes shown alone, other times supporting one another, and even at times disembodied and fragmented. Together these women are meant to represent "the collective immigrant experience."

In this interview, Kahraman shares the series she is currently working on, called *Anti-Body*, which explores what it means to be immune. "Is the body a fortress, untouchable, or impenetrable to 'outside' germs and enemies?" she asks. In particular, the artist is interested in how the language of epidemiology is "similar to the us-versus-them rhetoric used in discussing refugees and immigration." The topic has felt particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic. Read more about what Kahraman has been thinking about and reading during these past months in her answers below.

* * *

Hayv Kahraman, “Anti-Body #1” (2020), oil, pigment and linen on panel, 50 x 70 inches (image courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman gallery)

Where were you born?

I was born in Baghdad, Iraq.

How long have you been living in Los Angeles?

I moved down from the Bay Area about five years ago and live in west LA.

What’s your first memory of seeing art?

Before fleeing Iraq in the early ’90s I remember driving by Jawad Saleem’s massive wall-relief monument “Nasb al-Hurriyah” (the freedom monument) in Baghdad and being in awe. It functions so well both when seen from afar (read as a linear historical narrative) as well as up close, in which the detailed nuances get revealed.

Do you like to photograph the art you see? If so, what device do you use to photograph?

I rarely photograph art. I feel that it loses its tactility, especially if I photograph it using my phone. I mostly photograph the title or, if at a museum, the wall text.

What was your favorite exhibition in Los Angeles this year?

Betye Saar: Call and Response at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) was such a comprehensive view of her work and thought process. I loved seeing the sketchbooks and behind-the-scenes progression of the work.

What’s the best book you’ve read recently?

I’m currently juggling two books: *Immunitary Life -A Biopolitics of Immunity* by Nik Brown and *An Apartment on Uranus* by Paul B. Preciado. The latter is just an incredibly inspiring and revolutionary piece of writing that I feel everybody should read. There are so many linguistic gems in this book! And the book on *Immunitray Life* is a comprehensive view of the philosophy of immunology and directly relates to the research I’m doing on my current body of work *Anti-Body*.

Do you prefer to see art alone or with friends?

Alone, but I usually take my six-year-old daughter along which always offers an interesting perspective!

What are you currently working on?

I'm currently working on a new, extended series called *Anti-Body* examining the biopolitical ideas surrounding the notion of immunity — all the more relevant during COVID-19 — and what it means for our bodies to be immune. Is the body a fortress, untouchable, or impenetrable to "outside" germs and enemies? How can we change the militaristic rhetoric in epidemiology, which is based on building imaginary walls between our bodies and the rest of the world? This language is similar to the us-versus-them rhetoric used in discussing refugees and immigration. Through anchoring this series in the distinct Y-shape of antibodies, I hope to propose a radical shift in coexistence where we acknowledge the porosity of our skin and move towards a symbiotic relationship to difference.

What is one accomplishment that you are particularly proud of?

The most gratifying moments are when I receive personal notes that my work has empowered women and given them hope. In 2009, a collector started a women's crafts organization in Afghanistan after seeing my work. The organization enabled women to communally make crafts and sell them in order to sustain a living. These are the things that really matter to me.

Where do you turn to for inspiration for your projects?

It's two fold, I do a lot of academic reading mostly within the field of gender and decolonial studies and I browse random historical imagery on Instagram. I follow a few accounts of craftspeople in Turkey who make these elaborate, traditional Islamic patterns that serve as backgrounds for calligraphic pieces in Arabic. I find it interesting that the calligraphers commission these craftswomen and men to make the backgrounds for their work — that, for me, is more interesting than the actual center piece of calligraphy.

November 27, 2019
By Mandalit Del Barco

Iraqi American Artist Hayv Kahraman Is 'Building An Army Of Fierce Women'

Hayv Kahraman in her Los Angeles studio. *Mandalit del Barco/NPR*

Hayv Kahraman's art was shaped by the many worlds in which she's lived and traumas she's endured.

She was born in Baghdad 38 years ago, the daughter of a university English professor and a librarian for the United Nations. She was a child during the Iran-Iraq War and the first Gulf War.

"I would look out my bedroom window and see a rain of air-raid bombs," she says. "They looked like fireworks." The air-raid sirens terrified her: "They are so loud and when they happen, you know that you might actually die any minute. It shakes you to the core."

When she was 11, Kahraman and her family smuggled themselves out of Iraq with false passports. They became refugees in Sweden. "I was clearly very different from everybody else," she says. "I was the only kid who had black hair in my class. I was the brownest kid in my class. And I was treated differently because of this ... Sweden is a very small country, so it's very insular. And so as a brown person walking around there, you stand out."

Kahraman also spent four years in Florence, Italy, studying graphic design. She met her American now-ex-husband there, and they moved to Arizona — "this weird foreign place where I'd go to Walmart to buy my cheese, which I'm so not used to." After four years in Oakland, Calif., she moved to Los Angeles, where she works out of a warehouse studio space.

She says her artwork is semi-autobiographical: large-scale paintings and sculptures focused on women, migrants and refugees, with references to the Italian Renaissance, Iraqi architectural design and Japanese woodcuts. Most of her work uses repeating images of women.

"I see them as a collective of women," she says. "I feel almost like I'm building an army of fierce women."

Hayv Kahraman's work has been shown in Dubai art galleries, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the American Embassy in Baghdad. This fall, her work is exhibited at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, ICA Boston and the Johnson Museum at Cornell University.

"Migrant 3" (2010). *Hayv Kahraman/Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Velmetter, Los Angeles; The Third Line, Dubai*

Kahraman says she survived a physically abusive relationship, and that informed some of her work.

"If you look at my early work, you'll notice the women are performing these very overtly violent acts," Kahraman says. "I remember I had people come to me and say, 'Why are you painting this violence? What's going on? Are you OK?' And I would say, 'Yeah, of course, I'm fine.' But it was not until years later where I started looking back and finally realizing and admitting to myself that I was in an abusive relationship at the time, and this was an outlet for me to speak out."

"It's very chilling and still very new to me, but it's not something that I can hide," she says. "It's affected [my] work, and it's affected who I am and how I think about things, and this is why I need to create agency for her. This is why she's repeated over and over again, because she needs a voice."

"Three Women Hanging" (2008). *Hayv Kahraman/Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, Velmetter, Los Angeles; The Third Line, Dubai*

Kahraman painted images of women self-immolating or hanging themselves or having been hanged. She says they form a small series titled *Honor Killings*: "Women being killed in the name of honor, either by their brother or their father, because they were raped and got pregnant," she says.

"The way I worked at the time was: I'd put on the news and listen to these various really violent stories and I'd be inspired and feel an affinity," she says. "That would be translated into these paintings. So this was about women in Kurdistan, in the Kurdish region in Northern Iraq, setting themselves on fire because they could not stand their existence."

"Icosahedral Body" (2013). *Hayv Kahraman/Courtesy of the artist; Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, Velmetter, Los Angeles; The Third Line, Dubai*

Kahraman says when she and her ex-husband split, she began to make wooden 3D sculptures of her own body parts. "At the time I was really interested in anatomical dissections of bodies," she says. "I started thinking it's interesting to look at my body from the inside and the outside."

She says one of her neighbors in Oakland, another artist, used to make high-definition 3D scans of inanimate objects in Greece and Egypt. She asked him to scan her entire body. She remembers having to stand very still inside the scanner.

"It's very, very accurate," she says. "Every time the scan would start, a red light would run through from the top of my head to the bottom. ... It was an intensive process of about eight hours of two sessions. But it was interesting in itself, being in a place of submissiveness. But at the end, I had a 3D scan of my body with a 0.3 mm accuracy that I could rotate, cut, dissect, play with in any way I wanted to on the computer."

Using the MRI-type scan and 3D modeling software, she got images of 542 slices of cross sections of her body. She used them as blueprints to make wood cutouts shaped like triangles, pentagons and decahedrons. "It was about dismantling something and a rebirth of sorts," she says.

"Not Quite Human 2" (2019). *Hayv Kahraman/Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery, New York*

Her current work is titled *Not Quite Human*: paintings of women contorting themselves, bending backwards and staring at the viewer.

"It's crazy if you Google 'contortionist' online, the majority of images are women," she says. "And most of them are pornographic as well. They're essentially bending backwards ... it's a very submissive act. It's very violent... but there is a power there. She's returning the gaze. She knows that is what you want her to be. And she's giving it to you. ... There's a subversion there within the gaze."

Kahraman says the women in her paintings are numb to the pain of being placed in the role of the "other." She says they are minorities or refugees, denigrated to second-class citizenship.

"If you're stripped from all of your juridical rights, if you are not allowed any voice to speak, if you're not considered human enough, what do you have left?" she says. "Your body. Your body is the only thing that you have control over, and that could be a site of resistance. Your body can become a voice to speak against these systemic structures of power that hold you down. And I think this is the core of what I'm trying to do here."

For one exhibition of this collection, Kahraman worked with 12 dancers from California Institute for the Arts, who performed around the paintings. She has her own memories of ballet school in Baghdad when she was young.

"We'd have lessons in the morning, and then in the afternoon we'd have three or four hours of rigorous training in ballet choreography form, and it was no joke," she says. "Because of this, I was able and still am able to dislocate my shoulder and my thigh bone. I remember I used to perform this to my friends and family, and they would look away in disgust.

"But I found it really interesting how a deformity became a spectacle, how something becomes othered. So I'm really interested in that moment where you're supposedly normal, but then you become abnormal, or you're not human enough, or you're othered."

DOCUMENT

Fall/Winter 2019

Type: Portfolio Text: Aruna D'Souza

Title: Trickster

Medium: A series of paintings by Hayv Kahraman

The bodies contort in the most amazing ways—a leg pulled up over a tilted-back head; an ass raised up off the floor; legs supported on tiptoes; a back bent so far backward that a head looks out from between feet. In these poses, pudenda are often exposed, the camel toe of sex organs delicately drawn. The figures are single and doubled and otherwise multiplied—mirrored, reflected, interlocked, one becoming more than, the self as collective. They are acrobats, perhaps, but floating on the page, they might also be synchronized swimmers. Wearing leotards or maybe maillots, their limbs and faces occasionally obscured so what remains is that which covers them; an item of clothing is morphed by the extreme movements of the body into an unrecognizable abstraction.

Occasionally, an emphatic pencil mark suggests a nipple, making you wonder if the bodies are naked or dressed. But does it matter? The figures are made to be seen. Their bodies are spectacles.

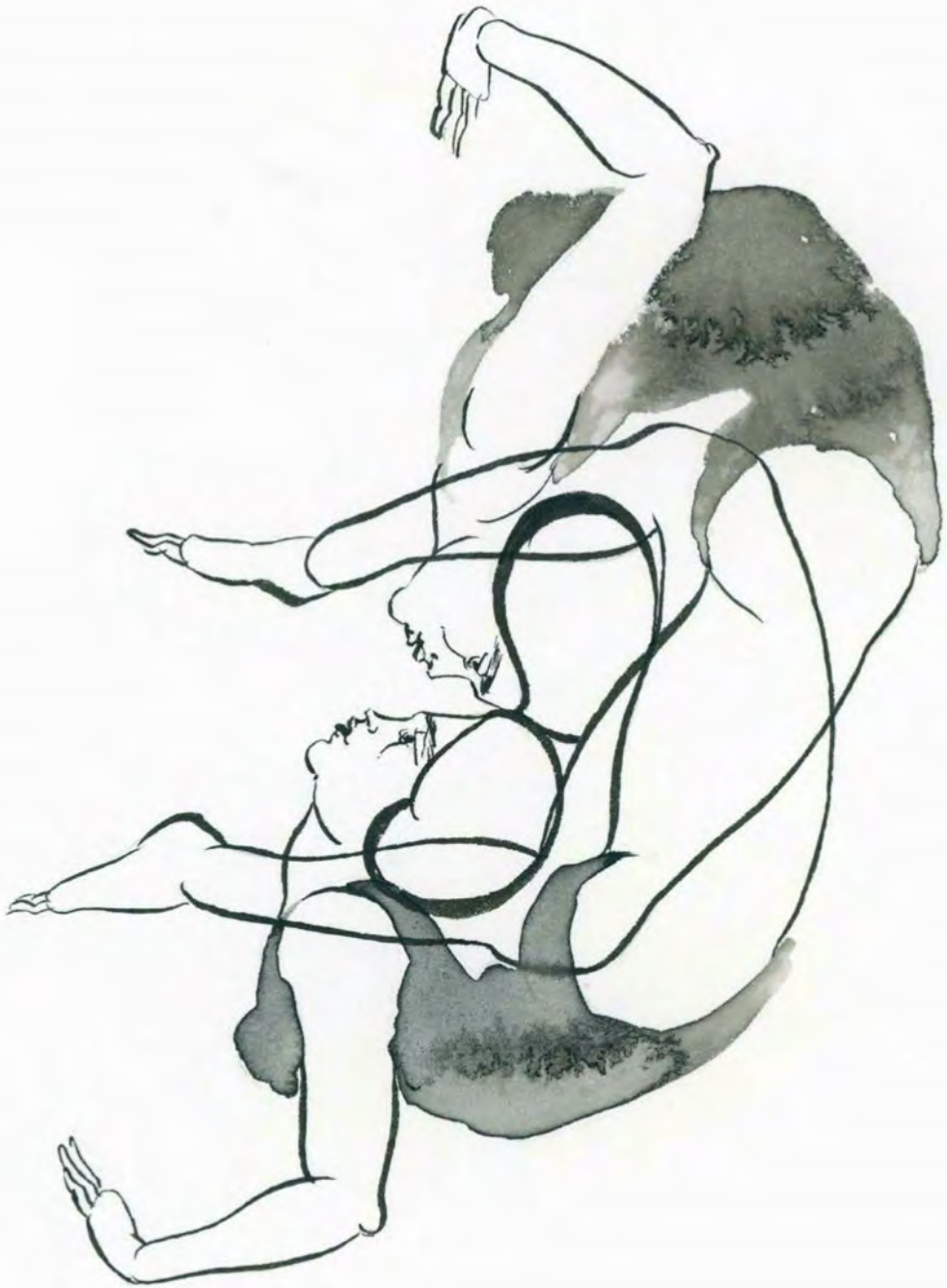
Hayv Kahraman's work has dwelled on her image in multiple ways, imagining her body both in its specificity—as a person of Iraqi-Kurdish origin who fled her home as a preteen refugee, ending up in Sweden, before making her way to the US as an adult—and in its generality. The Los Angeles-based artist's experience of displacement, of existing in the double or triple consciousness that results from finding one's origin in many places at once, echoes throughout her work. Thinking and dreaming in many languages; remembering and forgetting from where one came—this is how so many of us live. The past lives on, not in a simple biographical account of geographical displacement, but in muscle memory, in the way we are forced to fit our bodies into new forms of life, often as a result of the traumas of war, the repressive powers of the state, poverty, and environmental disaster.

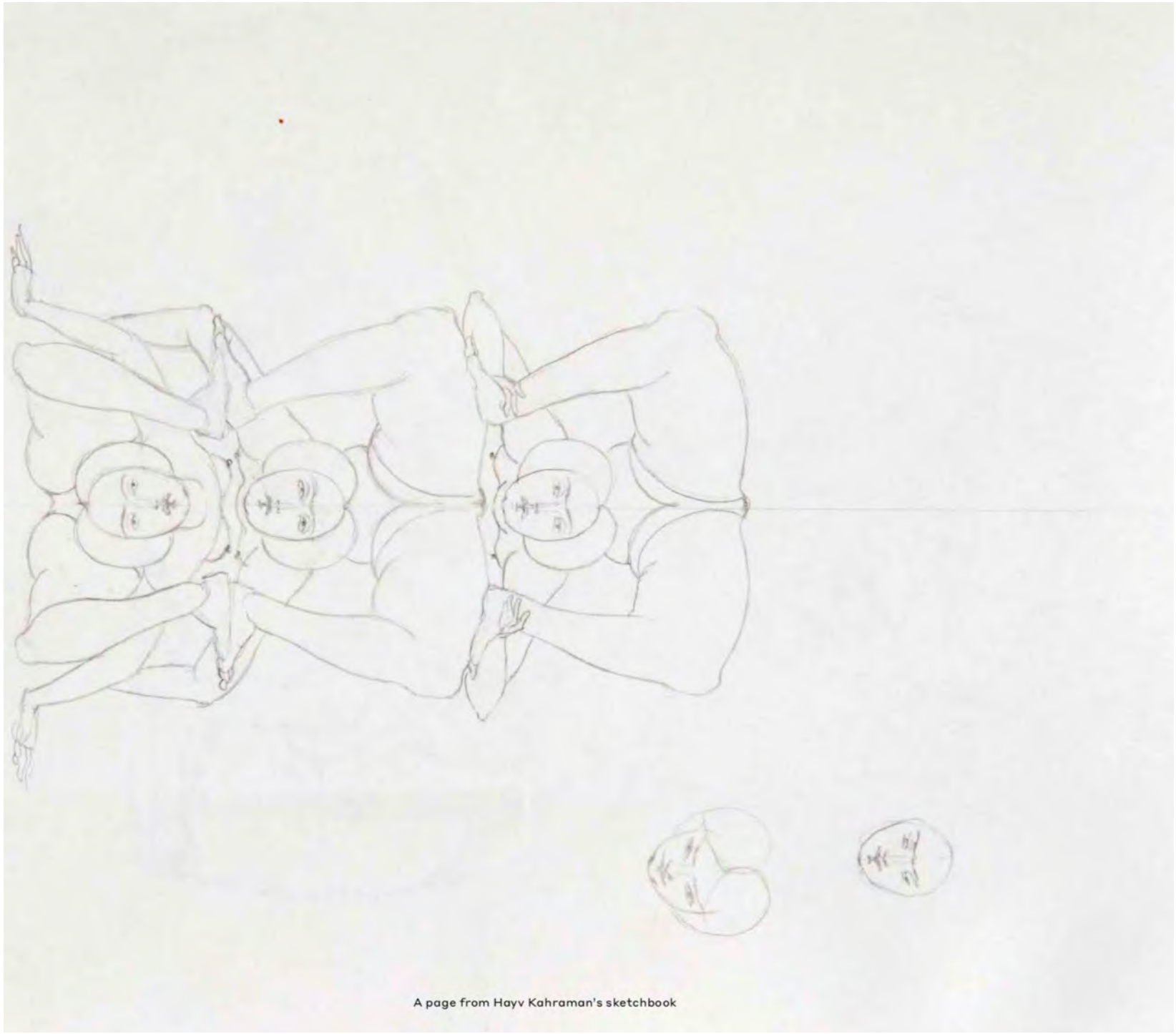
"Hypervisible in my FLESH/Invisible in my HUMANITY," writes Kahraman above a group of contortionists who duplicate one another's poses in what could be an endless tower of bodies. The paradox coalesces, another notation suggests, in part from Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's articulation of "bare life," a condition in which the biological fact of life is privileged over the way it is lived. When we see refugees washed up on a shore, caged in detention camps, sprayed with tear gas, or shot, do we identify with the loss of or threat to breathing bodies? Or do we see the life that is lost—the pleasures, the comforts, the ideas, the work, the play, the love, the creativity, the anger, the pain, the frustrations, and so many other things that will no longer exist in the world with the loss of this body?

The bodies seem implausibly alive under the pressures of abstraction, mirroring the arduous existence led by many people in this world at this very moment.

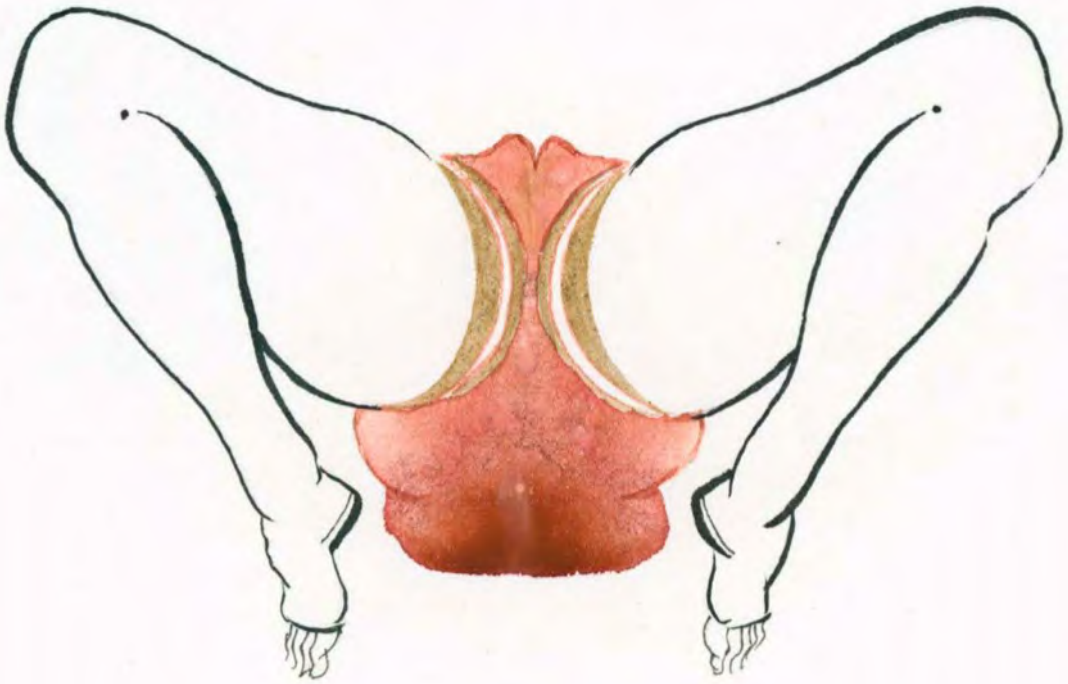
Hayv Kahraman will exhibit Not Quite Human *at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, through October 26, 2019.* ×

Untitled 1





A page from Hayv Kahraman's sketchbook



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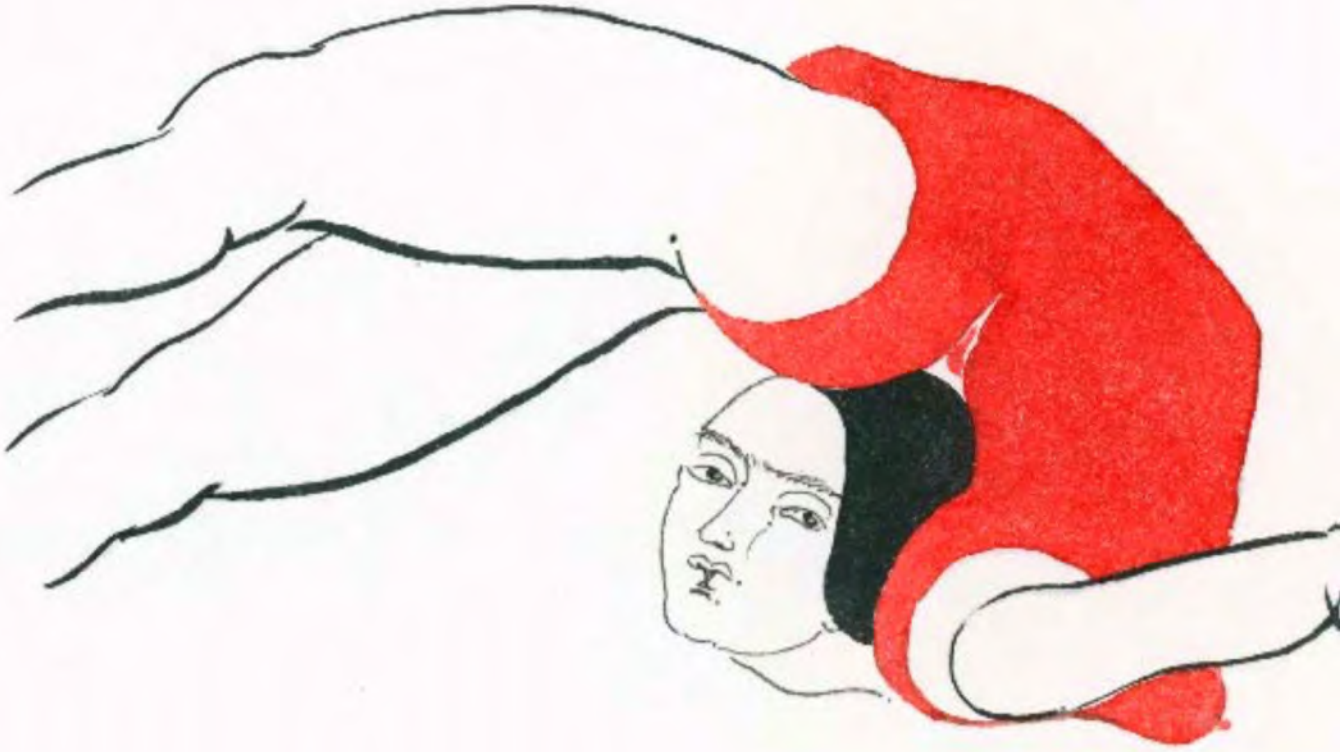
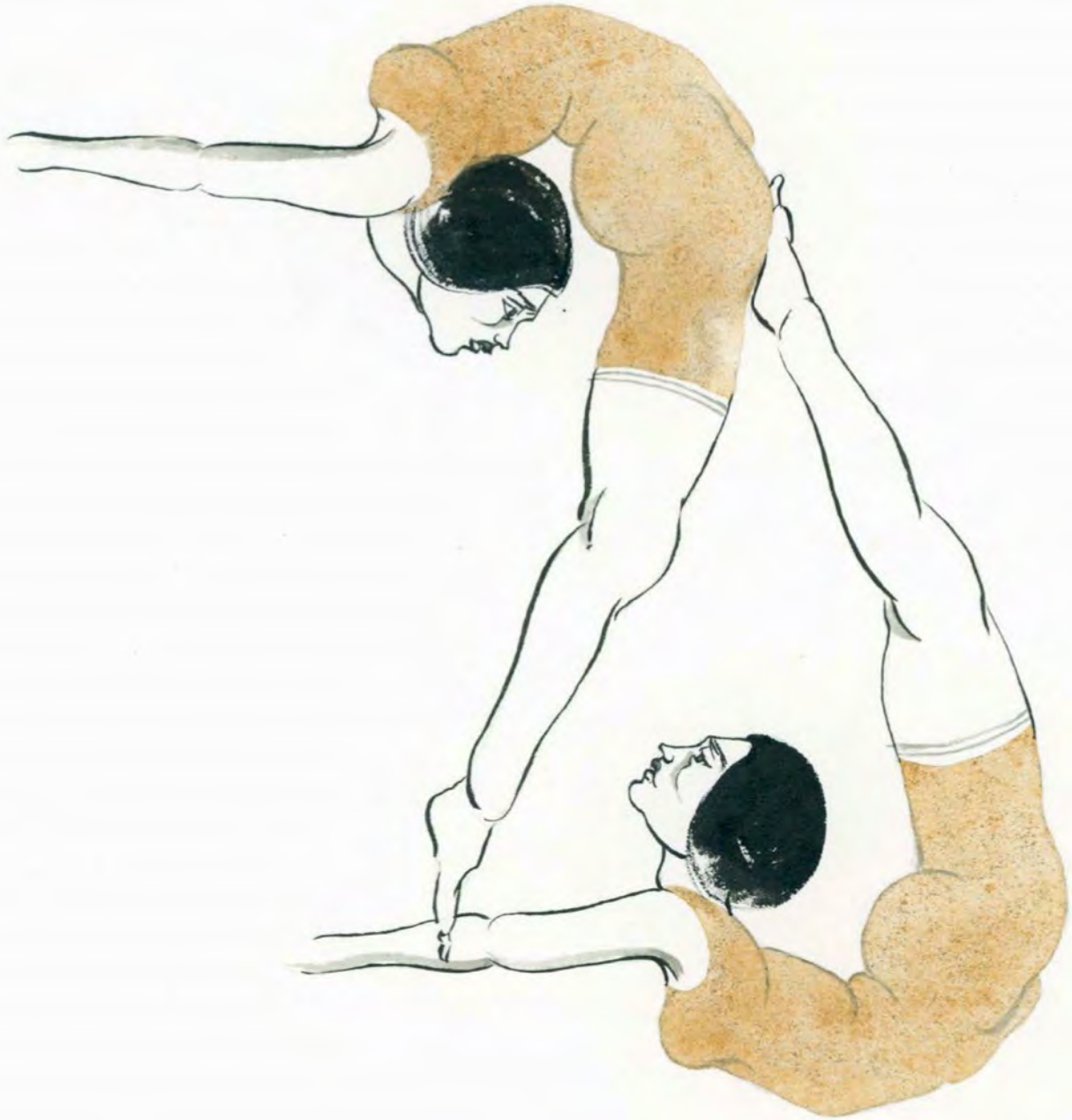


Untitled 3

- Agamben - disposable Life
  dispensable
  Bare life
- Problem people / Du Bois
- Erasure / Hannah Arendt
- Blind Spot?

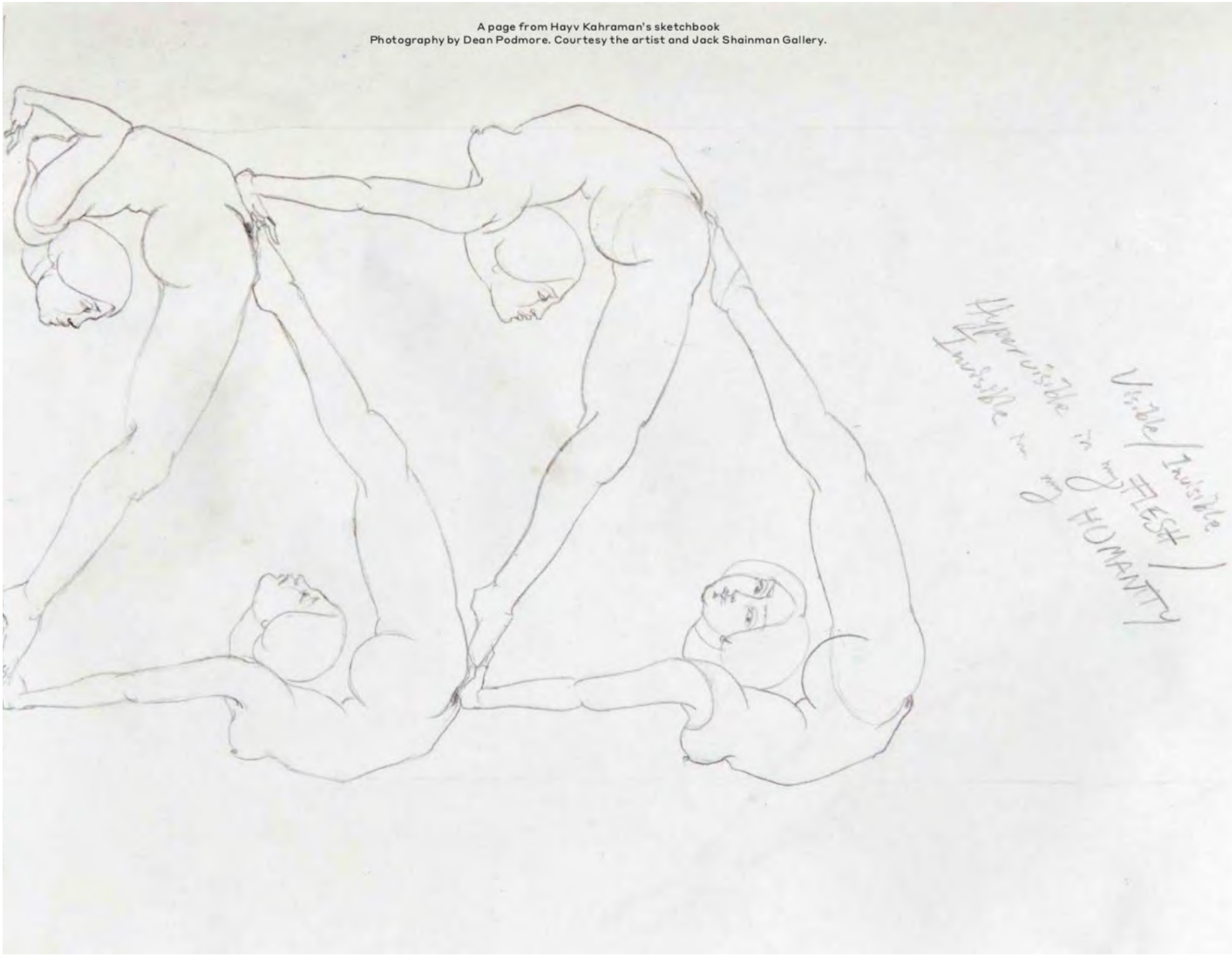
A page from Hayv Kahraman's sketchbook

Untitled 4



Untitled 5

A page from Hayv Kahraman's sketchbook
Photography by Dean Podmore. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.



ARTFORUM
November 2019

Hayv Kahraman

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

"She reminds me of that Mexican artist Frida Kahlo," said a middle-aged man as he scanned new works by Hayv Kahraman depicting her constant subject: a black-haired woman with fair skin, poppy-red lips, and large, heavy-lidded eyes. It may have been this figure's unapologetic unibrow that inspired the comment. But Kahraman, who is from Iraq, also shares the tendency of "that Mexican artist" to weaponize reductive views of her ethnicity and sexuality in paintings as subversive as they are beautiful. She has described her recurring character as an extension of herself: an avatar of her desperation to assimilate as a teenage refugee in Sweden and of her subsequent reconnection with her heritage.

In this exhibition, Kahraman cast her surrogates as contortionists kinked and folded into severe positions. Wearing leotards patterned with the tessellated ten-pointed stars, diamonds, and hexagons found in traditional Islamic art and architecture, they appeared alone, in tangled twos and threes, and in stacks. Five women formed an acrobatic spire in *The Tower* (all works 2019), backs arched, feet on thighs, crab-like legs splayed wide to frame prominent pubic mounds. In *Not Quite Human 8*, two standing women faced away from one another, their spines bent agonizingly as their heads met the backs of their knees. Sharply defined translucent shafts of gold passed over them—spotlights suggesting they were onstage and we their audience. In certain pieces they recalled hinged puppets or dolls, forced into unnatural positions. In others, their coolly composed, determined expressions suggested that the women themselves conceived this choreography and that these poses were of their own design.

Kahraman's contortionists alternately appeared powerful, capable of manipulating the fantasies projected onto them as objects of "exotic" desire, and exhausted by the performance. The differences between the women's features were subtle but striking—the viewer could read defeat in one weary eyelid, triumph in another, and detect a trace of pleasure in a pair of parted lips nearly identical to every other set. In these portraits, Kahraman alerted us to the process of interpreting the

Hayv Kahraman, *Not Quite Human 8*, 2019, oil on panel, 60 × 60".

slightest cues in other people, something we so often do without any conscious thought or self-awareness.

Three sculptures, however, practically gutted the otherwise excellent show. Hot-pink, wormlike metal pipes sprouted from low plinths, terminating in circular paintings. One depicted a woman's face, the other two, vaginas at close range. Coin slots wide enough to receive crayons were slit into each, right where you expected them to be. They were so crass, so brashly unlikable, they *almost* worked—if only for the sheer perversity and obvious relish with which they flouted the elegance of the other, more nuanced works. Their presence, however, felt like the sudden blare of a car commercial in the middle of a ballet.

The more successful risks Kahraman took in this show appeared in paintings that flirt with abstraction. The background of *Hyperinvisible 3*, for instance, is mottled with bleeds, stains, and smoky spots of charcoal and chalky orange. Drips run upward from the bottom of the canvas. These evocative splotches suggest an amorphous architectural space—a low wall or balcony, maybe—only to lapse back into obscurity. The bodies of the two women in this painting, whose overlapping heads form a teardrop near its center, are not filled in with the usual sheer washes of pale pink, but instead are outlined in eloquent black brushstrokes. These lines are alive with Kahraman's own gestures, the twists of her wrist and sweeps of her arm. In an oeuvre distinguished by meticulous exactitude and gorgeous control, it was wonderful to feel the dynamism of the artist at work.

"I think these pictures were designed to turn people off," declared the Kahlo expert as he exited the gallery. Whether he viewed this as a merit or a shortcoming was not immediately clear, but Kahraman might have appreciated that he did not leave "turned on" by the dark eroticism of her paintings. Her work stymies our desires with complex, inscrutable demands. The women who meet our gaze do so with sphinxlike stares that are both challenges and invitations. They appear at once defiant and beseeching, as though to say, "You could never understand," while begging—or daring—us to try.

—Zoë Lescaze

HYPERALLERGIC

INTERVIEWS

Challenging Stereotypes by Contorting the Female Form

Hayv Kahraman's paintings compel viewers to acknowledge the potential pleasure of viewing contorted bodies in a position of pain.

Lizzy Vartanian Collier September 9, 2019

Hayv Kahraman, "Not Quite Human 1" (2019), oil on linen, 60 1/4 x 90 3/8 x 2 1/8 inches (all images courtesy of the artist)

"She" is a nude female figure, the protagonist in Hayv Kahraman's work. In a new body of work exhibited at Jack Shainman Gallery, *Not Quite Human*, "She" takes on the role of a contortionist, someone whose movements are non-normative, who bends her body into a variety of extreme positions. Kahraman's paintings simultaneously convey eroticism, humiliation, and submission, while "She" confronts the viewer with a calm expression, compelling us to acknowledge the potential pleasure of viewing her body in a position of pain.

"She" performs another role as well, one Kahraman frequently explores in her work, that of the non-White, immigrant woman. Born in Baghdad in 1981, at 11 Kahraman fled to Sweden as a refugee with her family. She went on to study art in Italy before settling in the US. "She" is a response to coloniality, to Euro-centric standards of beauty (with her ivory flesh, long limbs, and jet-black hair), and to Kahraman's personal experience of migration. Kahraman spoke with Hyperallergic about her creation of "She," as well as trauma, coloniality, and physical and emotional pain.

Hayv Kahraman, "Untitled" (2019), oil on linen, 104 x 79 inches

Hyperallergic: *Where did "She" come from? How did you create her?*

Hayv Kahraman: She was born in Italy, a space surrounded by a very Euro-centric way of thinking and believing. I spent about four years in Italy and I was completely engulfed by that aesthetic and the whole spiel of the Renaissance. I think of that time as being under the spell of coloniality, of thinking and believing and wanting to become White. I was hanging out with a bunch of people who adored and studied the old techniques of the Renaissance. We would copy the Old Master paintings and we'd roam the museums all over Italy, adoring this particular aesthetic to the point where you would forget other aesthetics. That's where this figure started emerging.

It was also a precarious time in my life. I was in my early 20s — you're figuring out who you are. I was also in a relationship that was abusive; creating this figure gave me strength to have the voice that I did not have at the time. There were a lot of things that were screwed up personally in my life, but also it's the spell of coloniality. [This is] what everybody — not only White kids but also Brown kids — are taught to think. That's where "She" came out. I feel like "She" started evolving more and more as I left Italy and moved to the United States and this was a completely different space.

Hayv Kahraman, "Bend 3" (2019), oil on panel, 50 x 50 x 2 1/2 inches

H: *I remember going to New York and, despite coming from London, being shocked about how multicultural it is.*

HK: Imagine going from London to a small suburban town 30 minutes outside Phoenix, Arizona. It's very extreme coming from Florence. That was a massive shock. But "She" needed to be in that environment, too. "She" needed to flourish. I would turn the news on, specifically from the Middle East. I would listen to the news constantly, and you'd hear these stories of female genital mutilation happening in Northern Iraq or honor killings, and these various women who have been consumed by this extreme violence. I would grab onto these stories and really relate to them on a very personal level.

Hayv Kahraman, "Not Quite Human Drawing 8" (2019), watercolor on paper

That kind of evolved into the work. The early work is almost didactically violent [in its iconography]. I needed to give her that expression from the austerity of being in Arizona, the extremity of being in that environment, and also the personal. "She" started evolving from there, going from this very violent place, and I started reading more on post-coloniality. Slowly I started realizing — particularly through Walter Mignolo's work — that's where "She" came from, and that's why "She" looks the way she does. That white diaphanous flesh comes from a colonized mind. It also drove me into thinking about how I can use this knowledge to [get to] a place where I can resist that coloniality. I started shifting the way I think about things in terms of paintings; I would inject these [Euro-centric] aesthetics we are all accustomed to thinking are beautiful and then subvert that. The idea is to catch the gaze of the audience, using Renaissance tools as decoys.

H: *I'm interested in the physicality of "She." In some of your earlier work she is contorted into tight spaces of a house, and in this new work "She" is in some crazy poses. Can you tell me a little about that?*

HK: It's interesting that you mention the ones in houses because I hadn't necessarily thought of a connection, but to connect those two makes complete sense. I did a performance in LA that involved working with 12 dancers. That made me start thinking about how to bring these figures into reality and how they can move and become alive. I started thinking about how our bodies occupy the space around us and how a twisted body can really trigger various senses in the audience.

Hayv Kahraman, "Not Quite Human 6" (2019), oil on linen, 32 1/8 x 25 3/8 x3 1/8 inches

When I was growing up in Baghdad, I went to a music and ballet school, where after school you'd have rigorous training in ballet. Because of this I was able to dislocate my shoulder and my thighbone, so I used to use this deformity to perform to my friends and family. They would look away in disgust or express a sense of pain, and that's what ignited this whole body of work and how alterity is perceived. Then I started researching contortionism and contortionists and digging deeper into the twisting and bending of the body. Much more than the previous architectural pieces, which deal with domesticity and public spaces in a more literal way, this body of work maybe is even more violent and is very corporeal. What you have is just the body that is violently bending and twisting.

There are many ways that you can read this work, one of which is in terms of sexuality. There's this fetishization when an audience sees a female body bending; if you Google "women contortionists" you'll see a lot of pornography. And with eroticization there's exoticization, so you have this exotic freak female who is dangerous, performing in this circus space. You can delve into that way of looking at the work, but there's also the idea of contorting oneself to fit within some sort of larger system of power and this has more to do with ideas of assimilation and coloniality and [W.E.B.] Du Bois's "double consciousness," where he talks [in *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903] about looking at yourself through the eyes of the other. I love this phrase. In this case the other is the Global North, so looking at yourself through the White patriarchy, if you will. As an immigrant or refugee, I feel extreme affinity with this way of thinking, moving to Sweden, being Brown, and so different from everyone around me. The way I knew how to survive that was to assimilate, it was to become what the Swedes wanted me to become. In order to become that I needed to learn what they wanted me to become, to understand the way that they looked at me.

H: *When I look at the positions that "She" is in within this new body of work, it seems quite painful, but her face appears as though she's not bothered about it. Do you ever think about the idea of pain?*

HK: You're right, there's a sense of numbness there. The numbness comes from the deception of yourself, this kind of erasing or training yourself to not feel. I feel like once you train yourself to become somebody else, you lose who you are or who you

Hayv Kahraman, "Not Quite Human Drawing 4" (2019), watercolor on paper, 11 x 9 1/2 inches

think you are, at least. A coping mechanism is this kind of glazing over things. If you were able to allow yourself to feel pain, it is so extreme and traumatic that you might not be able to survive that pain. My therapist says you need to break in order to heal, and in order to break you need to feel pain.

H: *But a lot of people go through trauma and never speak of it their whole lives.*

HK: Exactly. I feel like the figures have both sides there. There is a sense of numbness but there's also a sense of resistance. The fact that they're returning the gaze is, in itself, very powerful.

Hayv Kahraman, "Five Court Compound" (2013), oil on wood, 121 x 172 inches

H: *Even their positions are very powerful. The fact that they're able to bend so dramatically and can physically lift each other up — their posture is very powerful.*

HK: There's an interesting kind of polarity there, right? Because you have this extreme kind of humiliating, submissive way of contorting your body, but then there's also power in that. I think that power comes from that very sense of otherness, because you're looking at her and you're like, "How does she do this. I can't do this, this is extremely powerful, but, oh my gosh, isn't it painful?"

H: *So it's like they're tricking the viewer but they're also tricking themselves.*

HK: Yes, exactly.

H: *Is there anything else you wanted to talk about?*

HK: I liked how you talked about pain, because when you talk about healing that colonial wound, pain is involved. I think subconsciously that is why I was gravitating towards these images of contortionists, because I would feel that [pain], and ultimately, within all of my work there's this sense of repair and mending, of mending this colonial wound, of being othered [as] a refugee-cum-immigrant, and having to survive those extreme places.

Hayv Kahraman: Not Quite Human *continues at Jack Shainman Gallery (513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through through October 26.*

Hayv Kahraman, “Cyborg 2” (2019), steel, wood and oil on linen, 8 1/8 diameter x 21 inches long

MORE FROM HYPERALLERGIC

Galerie

September 20, 2019
By Paul Laster

5 Must-See New York Shows by Women Artists

From Loie Hollowell at Pace to Amy Sherald at Hauser & Wirth, these exhibitions should be on everyone's list

From Chelsea to midtown, women artists are kicking off the fall season with some of the strongest art exhibitions in town. Ranging from Loie Hollowell's interpretations of motherhood with her abstract canvases at Pace to Sarah Sze's mixed-media installations that encompass the whole space at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, we round up five must-see solo shows to add to your cultural calendar.

Hayv Kahraman, *The Contortionist 1*, 2019. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

Hayv Kahraman: Not Quite Human
Jack Shainman Gallery
Through October 26

An Iraqi refugee who fled her homeland as a child with her family during the first Gulf War, Hayv Kahraman grew up in Sweden and studied art in Italy before finally settling in the U. S. Referencing her wartime trauma and status as an immigrant who could never fully belong to a homogenous society, Kahraman uses the female figure as a metaphor for expressing her pain. Employing elements of calligraphy, Italian Renaissance painting, Japanese printmaking, and illuminated Arab manuscripts, she paints exotic women who are both submissive and fierce.

In her double show at Shainman's two Chelsea locations, the L.A.-based artist uses the repeated figures of performing contortionists in sheer, patterned outfits to represent the dehumanizing aspect of bending over backward in order to be accepted. *The Contortionist 1* presents an exotic seductress with her body jackknifed over her head, while *The Tower* strangely captures five contorted women stacked on top of

one another to create a disturbing centipede-like sculpture. The boundaries between drawing, painting, and sculpture are further blurred in a series of Persian miniatures with intertwined figures and painted metal air ducts, which are both physically frightening and erotically charged.

artnet news

September 3, 2019
By Caroline Goldstein and Sarah Cascone

21 New York Gallery Shows You Won't Want to Miss This Fall, From Amy Sherald at Hauser & Wirth to Joe Zucker at Marlborough

Here's a taste of what's opening this season in the Big Apple.

It's that time of year again… back to school, back to work, and back to the galleries. With so many venues, it can be daunting to try to figure out what's worth your time and Instagram attention. So we've put together a handy list of the shows we're most looking forward to this season. Happy gallery hopping!

"Hayv Kahraman: Not Quite Human" at Jack Shainman Gallery
September 5–October 26

A work by Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery.

For Iraqi-born, Los Angeles-based artist Hayv Kahraman's fourth solo show at Jack Shainman, she turns her attention to the physical and mental contortions demanded of women by internal and external forces. Her work addresses how those designated as "other" engage with the world around them.
Jack Shainman is located at 513 West 20th Street and 524 West 24th Street.

Robb Report

SHELTER / ART & COLLECTIBLES

How This Artist Is Using Female Contortionists to Represent the Plight of Minorities

Hayv Kahraman's paintings of distorted bodies are a metaphor for the "other."

BY JULIE BELCOVE ON AUGUST 4, 2019

Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

In Hayv Kahraman's new paintings of female contortionists, women's heads arch backward to meet their buttocks or thighs; sometimes their bent bodies are piled one on top of another, like a toddler's stacking toy. As intriguing to Kahraman as their feats, however, are viewers' reactions to such flexibility: amazement, yes, but also disgust at the

figures' unnatural elasticity. "Bodies can be seen as not human enough," she says. It's a potent metaphor for the plight of the "other," whether racial minorities or immigrants.

The paintings, which will be on view in a solo exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York opening September 5, evolved from a performance piece Kahraman created last year in LA, her adopted home. Working with a dozen dancers triggered memories of her childhood ballet classes in Baghdad, before she fled Iraq with her family at age 10 in 1992. Kahraman had the ability to dislocate her shoulder and hip. “I used this deformity as spectacle,” she says. “I would show it off and say, ‘Look at me.’ ”

But flaunting physical differences can have the unintended consequence of turning a person into a freak show, a feeling Kahraman experienced as a brown-skinned refugee in Sweden. “The only way I could survive that context and environment was to assimilate—to look at what people want me to be and be that,” she says. “For me, these bending bodies—specifically, backwards—that extreme, almost violent act is reminiscent of contorting yourself and your identity to the majority, to the power.”

Hayv Kahraman’s The Contortionist 1, 2019

Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

The female figures that appear throughout her oeuvre—avatars for the artist—are ghostly transparent in these latest works, save for their thick black hair and bright red lips. Kahraman says she was motivated by her status as an Arab woman and the peculiar, seemingly oxymoronic twin sensations of standing out from a crowd while being certain no one is really seeing her. “I’m interested in how my skin can become super- hyper-visible,” she says. “I feel it every time I land in Sweden—everybody’s looking at me because of my skin, my hair, but I’m completely invisible in terms of who I am.”

While the paintings are large—most are at least five feet tall, some almost nine—Kahraman also plans to include several small-scale drawings of the same motif in the show. The series continues her pursuit of what she calls “archiving memories” to preserve her sense of self. “It’s very urgent for me to recover my biography,” she says, “which I feel is being erased.”

Hayv Kahraman's artwork Untitled, 2019

Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

ART+DESIGN GALLERY

ARABIA Harper's BAZAAR

5 Art Books That Will Immediately Upgrade Your Coffee Table

These tomes from Central Asia to the Middle East are just as beautiful to read as they are to admire

HAYV KAHRAMAN: PROJECT SERIES 52

A visual souvenir that charts the artistic practice of Los Angeles-based Iraqi artist Hayv Kahraman, this book accompanies an eponymous exhibition featuring new works at California's Pomona College Museum of Art, running from September until December. Featuring artworks and performance texts, it gives a fuller sense of the 37-year-old artist and her life as an Iraqi emigrant as she journeyed through Sweden and the US, sometimes feeling like she's "flickering in and out of multiple worlds," as she writes. Her figurative paintings depicting a singular woman with pale skin and black hair, and wall works, are thoughtful meditations on gender identity and being colonised. Her oeuvre ranges from Persian miniatures and Japanese illustrations to Italian Renaissance paintings, with her most recent works incorporating a weaving technique drawn from Iraqi hand-woven fans called mahaffa. It's fascinating to see such riveting images born of the chaos and sense of displacement that consume Kahraman. Out this September, this book with its propulsive style is a definite page-turner.

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Hayv Kahraman on the Kurdish exodus—and the trouble with humanitarian campaigns

The Baghdad-born, Los Angeles-based artist talks about the impetus for her new work at Susanne Vielmetter

JORI FINKEL

21st September 2018 22:03 GMT

In 1991, when the Baghdad-born artist Hayv Kahraman was ten, she was part of the mass exodus of Kurds fleeing Iraq to escape Saddam Hussein's brutal regime. She remembers sitting in a car with her mother and sister, stuck in almost-immobile traffic as they approached Iran from Sulamaniyah. The 50-mile journey took 11 days. They ran out of both gas and food on the voyage, to the point where she sliced a cashew into quarters and pocketed it for safekeeping. Then they discovered the border was closed and the family had to turn around. It would be another year before her mother hired a smuggler, who helped them reach Sweden, where the artist lived as a teenager.

"The main thing I can access from that time is these masses of bodies on the move," said Kahraman, who is Kurdish on her mother's side. "I remember seeing this constant flow of bodies from the car window, knowing that we were lucky just to have a car."

Masses of bodies, somewhere between a pile-up and a huddle, show up in different forms in Silence is Gold at Susanne Vielmetter (until 27 October), the artist's first gallery show in Los Angeles where she is based. Kahraman previously had three shows with Jack Shainman in New York and is also getting museum attention, with a solo show at the Contemporary Art Museum, St Louis last year and a project room now at the Pomona College Museum of Art, through 22 December.

Hayv Kahraman, The Audience (2018) Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles

She has rendered crowds of women and also individual portraits in her recognisably stylised manner: curvy, pale-skinned, dark-haired beauties that look like Botticelli's Venus as seen through the eyes of Japanese ukiyo-e artists. She has also placed a few crumpled-looking carpet cut-outs the size of her own body, rugs handmade in Iran, Afghanistan and Kurdistan, in odd spots of the gallery. Like the paintings, these "oriental" carpets use seductively patterned and colored surfaces to point to an uglier reality: the refugee's loss of identity, individuality and voice.

This exhibition also reflects the artist's research into the exploitative strategies and images of modern humanitarian aid campaigns. Because of her research-based process, she calls her work "semi-autobiographical—I go beyond my own memories." In particular, she became fascinated by a relief concert staged in 1991, The Simple Truth: A Concert for Kurdish Refugees. As she explained, "I found this weird Live Aid campaign, staged in multiple Western cities across the world, where celebrities like Whitney Houston, MC Hammer and Sting performed against this image and video backdrop of impoverished brown Kurdish bodies."

“From that I started questioning: How do we mediate images in these humanitarian campaigns, these images of 'suffering others', in a way that doesn’t strip them of all their dignity and in a way that allows them a voice?” She also started looking into the ways that women’s sexuality has been used as a tool for raising money—“selling your body for charity” as she put it.

Hayv Kahraman, The Appeal 11 and The Appeal 12 (2018) Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles

For one series in the show, a set of 15 new paintings called The Appeal, she has painted women in the sort of sexually suggestive poses she found in an Oxfam print campaign. But instead of waving some marketing brochure or photo, each woman in her paintings holds a mahaffa, a fan woven from palm fronds that is a symbol of Iraq and a recurring image in Kahraman’s work.

Nearby, at the entrance of the show, the 2018 painting on linen Donation Mouth, features the face of a heavy-browed, heavy-lidded, vaguely Middle Eastern-looking woman whose tongue has essentially been cut out—a strip of linen has been removed from where her mouth should be. The show’s title, lifted from the popular saying “speech is silver, but silence is gold,” seems especially pointed in this context, suggesting that refugees gain currency or value for being seen and not heard.

The end of the exhibition makes Kahraman’s idea of sexual-image trafficking in the name of philanthropy even more explicit. Hanging on one wall, in column formation, are seven small paintings showing close-ups of labial folds. Only in place of each vaginal opening, the artist has used an x-acto knife to cut one of her slits.

Hayv Kahraman, Pussy Donation Boxes (2018) Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles

Looking at the paintings, Kahraman said she toyed with the idea of inserting an actual dollar bill into the slots. No need. It is clear that the women in these paintings, or rather the mediated images of fragments of women, are spreading their legs for money. The title is explicit too: Pussy Donation Boxes.

“I’ve shown a lot in the Middle East and there’s still an element of censorship there—they don’t want any nipples or vaginas,” she said. “My work is not just about being shocking, but I love that here I’m free to do anything I want.”

Los Angeles Times

Hayv Kahraman's "The Appeal 1" (2018). (Jeff McLane / Susanne Vielmetter)

Hayv Kahraman's paintings of Kurdish women at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects are exceedingly delicate and subtle — until they're not. Kahraman, herself a Kurdish refugee from Iraq, paints raven-haired, ruby-lipped, ivory-skinned beauties in a flat, graphic style that draws from Persian miniatures and Japanese woodblock prints. But the beauty of these pictures is undercut by the uncanny recognition that all of the women look alike. Various "slots" cut into the surfaces of the paintings further disrupt the illusion.

The women all look the same because they are all avatars of the artist. In some images, such as “Bodies #1,” they appear as migrants, draped in variously patterned shawls and carrying small black boxes. The loss of their homeland doesn’t seem to bother these women; they all have the same placid expression. They might as well be faceless.

In other images, the women appear beneath golden spotlights, as if on stage. In “The Celebrity,” a trio of women stands behind a large brown box. The box has a slot in it that is actually cut out of the surface of the painting. This opening suggests a donation box, and the spotlights refer to the display of refugee images — often disturbing ones — to spur charitable giving. But these lovely, languid women are hardly pitiable.

Hayv Kahraman's "The Celebrity" (2018). (Robert Wedemeyer / Susanne Vielmetter)

In replacing the usual images of suffering refugees with these decorous ladies, Kahraman runs the risk of trivializing refugees' travails, but she also attempts to short-circuit stereotypical images and question the motives behind our charity.

By replacing objects of pity with pretty ladies, she points to the sexual and Orientalist undertones of charity fundraising. The images reveal assumptions behind our role as Western saviors. We "help" these people not only because they are fellow humans in need, but because we find their stories titillating and because it makes us feel better about ourselves.

If this relationship isn't obvious in the group pictures, it becomes exceedingly clear in several images of individual women. In "Boob Gold," a donation slot pierces the canvas between a woman's breasts. Other, smaller paintings provide close-up views of more "donation slots" in a mouth and in between the legs. These images are unambiguous in their indictment of the relationship between fundraising and sexualized exploitation.

In a similar vein, strewn throughout the galleries are Persian carpets cut into lifesize silhouettes of the artist. They lie folded and crumpled, or leaning against a wall as if discarded. Perhaps even more pointed than the paintings, they capture the tangle of bodies, stereotypes and disrespect roiling beneath the surface of past and current debates over refugees and asylum.

ARTSY

22 Artists on the Materials That Inspire and Drive Their Work

Casey Lesser Aug 27, 2018 3:54 pm

Think, for a second, if you could name one essential product or tool that you could not do your job without.

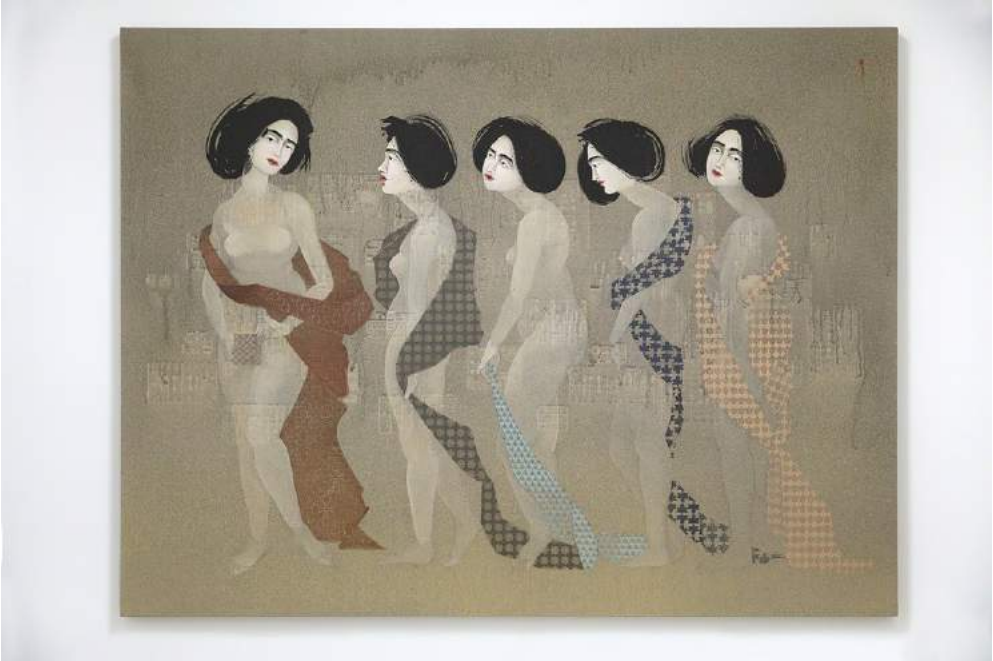
It's a tough question, but it's particularly difficult to answer if your work relies on your creativity and artistic skill. Have you ever thought about what type of oils a famous painter favors, or what kind of plaster works best? Or, perhaps, if sinking money into expensive brushes or paper is even worth it?

Given that prominent artists today are celebrated for their ideas and execution, we're more likely to pick their brains for their motives and meaning behind their work, rather than their preferred brand of oil pastel, or which household item is integral to their practice. We savor the details of artists' inspirations and We asked a smattering of artists—from deft painters and sculptors to new media innovators and conceptual masters—to tell us about their favorite art materials, and how they've propelled (and in some cases, even inspired) their practices. While many have clear preferences, others asserted that their work does not rely on a single item, or mentioned objects that you'd never find in a art supply store. Below, we share their responses, ranging from beloved paint tubes to a homemade concoction inspired by the chemical makeup of the human body.

Hayv Kahraman

Belgian linen, Libeco batch 17

The one constant material in Hayv Kahraman's practice has been linen, the substrate she uses for her elegant paintings of women that are informed by research and her experiences as an Iraqi refugee. It's not just any linen, though —since 2009, she's been sourcing it directly from the Belgian linen wholesaler Libeco. "This linen has a tight weave with very little knots, and that's hard to find," she explained.



She currently uses the textile from batch 17, which corresponds to the year the flax was harvested and manufactured. "The amount of sun and rain the crops get that specific year will determine the hue of the linen," Kahraman explained (for example, more rain causes a bluish tint; more sun, a yellow tint). For many years, she preferred linen with the warmer hue (made of crops from 2004), but as it became more difficult to source, she's had to use a more recent batch.

True to the artist's smart, research-intensive practice, the linen holds conceptual significance, as well. Linen was introduced in 16th-century Venice as an alternative to canvas that was better suited to the climate and easier to roll up and transport. Given its close ties to Western art, Kahraman sees it as "a

surface in which I can dispute European concepts of power," she explained. "So it becomes a material to decolonize. It's also a common and familiar material for our Western eyes to digest that then serves as the perfect decoy for me to speak about brown bodies and subjectivities." Additionally, she chooses to keep much of the linen bare (not gessoed or painted) because it reminds her of "the color of Iraqi sand."

The New York Times

13 Artists On: Immigration

By Zoë Lescaze

June 19, 2018

Hayv Kahraman's "Kurds," 2018.
Portrait courtesy of the artist. Artwork courtesy of the artist, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Jack Shainman and The Third Line.

Hayv Kahraman

Born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1981.

The placid mirage on a strip of the road reminded me of my country. For a moment I felt transported. The image of the desert spoke covertly of my past and future. It was as if temporality was absent. Two distinct spaces that in reality had declared war on one another, and yet here they were in front of me, indistinguishable. I caught myself suddenly and gained composure, reminding myself that I am in a land that was/is currently at war with my homeland.

A warm, flickering beam of sunlight brushes my eye and I squint. The apparition of water conjures up childhood memories of driving from Baghdad to Al Habbaniya, and the time that I asked my dad about mirages. A mirage, he said, is a distant illusion of water created when hot air meets cool air. It's not real. It only exists in your mind. Do we all see mirages? I asked. Yes, we all see them.

This shared perception of water makes me realize that, whether we are in the United States or in Iraq, we are all part of a collective species sharing one global platform where margins are consistently being negotiated and contested. Today I physically find myself on the other side of the line, struggling to keep my memories afloat. You have made it clear that I'm an "Other" but I refuse to be erased. This is my position as an immigrant and refugee yet I still share the same vision of water on the road as anyone else.

HYPERALLERGIC

ART WEEKEND

An Iraqi Artist Bears Witness to the Trauma of Displacement

Hayv Kahraman, a half-Kurdish Iraqi and naturalized Swede living in the US, is no stranger to identity politics.

Sharmistha Ray November 26, 2017

Hayv Kahraman, “Mahaffa 1” (2017), oil on linen, 35 x 25 inches (all Images courtesy of Hayv Kahraman and Jack Shainman Gallery)

A *mahaffa*, I learn, is a handheld fan made by weaving the fronds of palm trees, a ubiquitous household item that is emblematic of Iraq and the Gulf region. It is also one of the few belongings that Hayv Kahraman's family took with them as they fled to Sweden from Iraq, during the first Gulf War.

In *Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions*, Kahraman's third exhibition at Jack Shainman on West 24th Street, in Chelsea, the *mahaffa* forms the central motif in new paintings and collages that combine elegant self-portraits in oil paint with intricate geometric patterns formed by plain weaving techniques. The artist's work embodies an autobiography of mnemonic fragments constructing a narrative of forced exile, displacement and cultural assimilation.

The Kahraman family's *mahaffa*, which now resides in the "Iraqi Corner" of their home in Sweden, serves as a testament to their survival as refugees, and to the war-torn and ravaged country that lives on in an altered, mythical dimension. Kahraman's intimate relationship with it is evidenced in two smaller paintings, "Mahaffa 1" (2017) and "Mahaffa 2" (2017), in which she brandishes the object against her breast while gazing at the viewer. In the first painting she holds it right side up, and in the second she turns it upside down, in the same way we may linger on a precious thing, turning it over, holding it close, to know it deeply.

These are the only two paintings in which we see the actual flag-like form of the *mahaffa*. Everywhere else, the household object is asserted and reasserted through the warp and weft of linen rendered through precise, surgical cuts that have become one of the artist's signature improvisations. In two compelling studies ("Study 1" and "Study 2," both 2017), Kahraman imagines her body as the *mahaffa*. The looser weave pattern is frayed, blistering and falling apart, unravelling the protagonist in the process.

Kahraman assimilates divergent cross-cultural styles and genres, most notably from the Italian Renaissance and Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints. The artist, who trained as a graphic designer, confirmed in an interview that a four-year period spent in Italy exposed her to the idealized representations of womanhood by the likes of Botticelli. Later, however, she tells me, it dawned on her that these depictions were "colonized" by the male, Eurocentric gaze, which led her to critique power-hegemonies.

In two miniature collage works, a painted image of the artist's mouth and tongue are interwoven. If the mouth enables the voice, and the voice is the carrier of personal agency and expressive will, these works invite an allusion to speaking truth to power. The artist first cut into linen as a small act of rebellion against the substrate that has borne centuries of male-gendered perspectives of Western civilization. Immediately, the cut became a reason to repair, to mend.

She took the canvas off the stretcher bars and cut it into strips, which she wove back into the original surface, inventing a palimpsest, an irreversible document of subversively reckoning with the history of art. The implied violence of a sharp cutting-tool making its neat incisions into a material closely synonymous with skin is inescapable, especially when read within the context of the war machine that dispenses with female flesh as easy collateral. The history of art – like the history of war – is the history of power.

In an another recent body of work, *Audible Inaudible* (2016), exhibited for the first time at The Third Line in Dubai, and again at the Joslyn Museum of Art in Omaha last year, Kahraman introduced sonic foam, a dark gray material used for the absorption of sound. After cutting diagonal crosses into meticulously prepared fine linen, she pushed pyramid-shaped foam through the surface, from the back. These "sonic wounds" were intended to retain the sonic memory of air raid sirens from her childhood.

J. Martin Daughtry, an ethnomusicologist and author of *Listening to War, Sound, Music and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (2015), writes in the catalogue essay for The Third Line exhibition that war inscribes itself on the body, and while the invisible wounds inflicted by sonic violence during wartime are less obvious, they are no less traumatic. "Sound," Daughtry writes, "is the most expansive vector through which violence is administered."

Hayv Kahraman, "Study 1" (2017), oil on linen, 32 x 32 inches (painting), 37 5/8 x 38 1/2 x 2 1/4 inches (framed)

Sounds emulating air raid sirens were played on the phones of female actors during a new performance piece created by Kahraman to accompany the gallery exhibition. Five women of multiracial denominations read from scripts, detailing first-person accounts of the artist's life in a powerful invocation of a collective bearing witness to personal trauma. If sound is the most expansive vector for violence, then the voice – the one that bears witness – is the most compelling one for justice.

Each testimonial starts with the phrase “Let me share with you my memories” and recalls episodes of war and trauma that span a quarter century, from huddling with family members by candlelight in a dark basement in northern Iraq to the intrinsic need as an expectant mother to connect with her past, in order to transmit familial genealogies and cultural histories to the next generation. In one of her testimonials, Kahraman talks about the peculiarity of her middle-eastern features among fair-skinned and blonde Swedes. “No matter how hard I tried to erase myself, I would always be the other person who carried her native home on her back,” she writes. “I will always be the refugee.”

How does one make sense of interrupted narratives, trajectory lines broken midcourse and re-directed? How does one reconcile with the loss of imagined communities and cultural belonging?

Hayv Kahraman, “Study 2” (2017), oil on linen, 36 1/2 x 21 1/4 inches (painting), 42 11/16 x 28 1/2 x 2 3/16 inches (framed)

Kahraman, who is ethnically half-Kurdish of Iraqi origin and a naturalized Swede currently domiciled in the US (she lives in Los Angeles), is no stranger to identity politics. Her family was part of one of the largest exoduses of Kurds from Iraq in the 90s; she faced outsider status in Sweden, while learning the language to fit in; and in America, her name and origins undoubtedly make her vulnerable in an escalating environment of hatred and fear of Muslims.

If Fontana's cuts (or "*tagli*") exposed the illusion of the surface in order to touch the spiritual void that lay beneath it, Kahraman's cuts are metaphors of the body's capacity to release psychic pain; and in mending the cuts, she becomes the cartographer of her own catharsis. Elaine Scarry has written extensively about the inexpressibility of physical pain, about the incommunicable nature of internal goings on that "may seem to have the remote character of some deep subterranean fact, belonging to an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth." The same can be said of psychic pain.

Hayv Kahraman, "Mnemonic Artifact 4" (2017), oil on linen, 60 x 60 x 4 inches

I think of the difficulty of locating pain as I view the six large paintings from Kahraman's *Mnemonic Artifact* (all in 2017) series at Shainman. The weave appears as delicate longitudinal and latitudinal lines placed along the axes of diaphanous bodies, mostly nude, gathered in crowds, organized in single file or intertwined, as if dancing. The cultural signifiers denoting Kahraman's ethnic heritage are sparse, and few – a colorful shawl with decorative motif patterns, ostensibly from pre-modern Iraq, and thick, jet black tresses and eyebrows set against pallid skin. While such features can arguably be attributed to her roots, the artist's affiliation to multiple geographies allows her to traverse cultural anomalies with ease.

Rupture, slippage and assimilation are foundational to Kahraman's methods and means. Her work imparts visual pleasure, but internalizes the migrant's struggles for autonomy and freedom.

Kahraman's mysterious creatures may reside behind a resolute mask, their idealized bodies offset by an adolescent brooding that keeps them safely tucked away (or are they trapped?) in a world we cannot access. But, like her, they refuse to be neatly trundled into fixed positions within the Orient and the Occident. The artist's implicit resistance to the neat binaries of racial and gendered stereotypes lies at the core of her identity politics, and is indeed, its strength.

Hayv Kahraman: Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions *continues at Jack Shainman Gallery (524 West 24th Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through December 20.*

ARTFORUM

New York

Hayv Kahraman

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY | WEST 24TH STREET
524 West 24th Street
October 26, 2017–December 20, 2017

For more than a decade, the Baghdad-born, Los Angeles–based artist Hayv Kahraman has been making paintings in a style that is unmistakably her own, mixing elements of Persian miniature and Renaissance portraiture with a vaguely Japanese aesthetic. She works on raw linen and leaves ample space untouched. She paints women with ghostly white skin, red lips, strong brows, and calligraphic shocks of black hair. The figures in painting after painting always appear to be the same person, with subtle variations. Kahraman has arranged them into sacrificial scenes; cast them as evil marionettes; as one waxing the mustache of another. Her levels of humor and pathos go up and down. But one may reasonably wonder to what extent Kahraman is repeating herself, getting stuck in her subject.

Hayv Kahraman, *Mahaffa 1*, 2017, oil on linen, 35 x 25". From the series "Mahaffa," 2017.

She offers a striking answer—and a way forward—in this show. Risking the total destruction of her work, Kahraman has lately taken to delivering her paintings to a facility in the garment district of Los Angeles, where they are systematically shredded and returned to her in strips (*Strip 1*, for example, all works 2017). She has cut the linen of one painting and woven it into another (in the series "Mahaffa" and "Mnemonic Artifact"), emulating the pattern of a braided palm-frond fan, which was one of the only sentimental objects her family packed into a single suitcase when they fled Iraq in 1992, traveling through Africa and the Middle East on false passports before settling as refugees in Sweden. Her furthest departure yet is a pair of near abstractions, *T25* and *T26*, made from pamphlets that were distributed to US soldiers in Iraq, ostensibly guiding them, via pictograms, to understand a few phrases of Arabic and Kurdish for a hearts-and-minds campaign—or, more accurately, teach them the vocabulary of war.

— Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

REVIEW - 06 DEC 2017

Hayv Kahraman

Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, USA

BY MURTAZA VALI

Hayv Kahraman has honed a signature style by repeatedly painting the same figure: a fleshy female body with pale, almost translucent skin, whose face – framed by a mass of black hair often executed with a single, swooping calligraphic gesture – displays an expression of sullen indifference, despite dramatic, bright red lips and thick black eyebrows. An uncanny synthesis of figurative tropes derived from Persian miniatures, Japanese illustrations and Renaissance painting, amongst others, this body declares its otherness while remaining geographically and culturally ambiguous. A proxy for the artist, in past work this figure has appeared alone or repeated in groups, with slight variations and in varying degrees of undress, haunting the floor plans of traditional Baghdadi houses or mimicking intimate vignettes of everyday life derived from 12th-century Arabic illuminated manuscripts. In each series, it serves as a foil for new subject matter or conceptual gambits through which Kahraman can address the tragic recent history of her native Iraq, and the pain of exile and crisis of belonging it has precipitated.

Hayv Kahraman, *Mnemonic Artifact 4*, 2017, oil on linen, 152 x 152 x 10 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

EXPLORE MORE

HAYV KAHRAMAN

JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

NEW YORK

REVIEW

MURTAZA VALI

For her third exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery, Kahraman draws inspiration from the *mahaffa*, a hand-held fan woven out of strips of dried palm fronds commonly found across Iraq and the Persian Gulf. The modest household object was one of the few possessions Kahraman's family took with them when they fled Baghdad during the first Gulf War; distance and time has transformed it into a poignant relic of a lost homeland, a receptacle for traumatic memories and nostalgic desires. In her latest works, Kahraman transposes the characteristic zigzag of the *mahaffa* onto the canvas itself, carefully weaving thin strips of shredded paintings into the surgically excised surfaces of others, subtly disrupting both the painted image and its material support.

Mahaffa 1 and *2* (all works 2017) shows the familiar female figure, naked and from the waist up, displaying the fan while defiantly returning the viewer's gaze. The woven section of both canvases corresponds exactly to the object's outline, producing an amusing *trompe l'oeil* effect. However, in *Mnemonic Artifact 4*, the woven section repeats as a regular array across the centre of the frame, adding another pattern to a composition already rich with ornament, in which each figure bears a wrap featuring a distinct Islamic geometric pattern. In other work from this series, the weave extends into thin vertical or horizontal lines that stretch across and between painted bodies and heads like neat sutures, symbolizing the interminable but necessary task of the migrant, who must weave together fragmented memories of a lost homeland to temper the trauma of displacement. Weaving, however, is reparative but never restorative; though wounds may heal, they always leave visible scars. In *Study 1* and *2*, the interlacing strips metastasize, expanding to overwhelm not just the body's contours but even the painting's frame, emphasizing the ways in which trauma gets imprinted onto the body like a disease.

Hayv Kahraman, *Mahaffa 2*, 2017, oil on linen, 89 x 66 x 10 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

The surfaces of some paintings also feature cryptic, rectangular seal-like impressions, suggesting traces of one of the many ancient cultures that emerged from Mesopotamia, the so-called 'cradle of civilization'. Imprinted on the canvas like hazy watermarks, they are made using plastic model kit sheets of American soldiers as stencils. These marks register the lingering effects of decades of US military intervention in Iraq by branding the neutral ground of each painting with an abstracted representation of soldiers' bodies. Juxtaposed with the painted female figures and the carefully woven lines, these inscriptions demonstrate how war impacts bodies differently based on gender and cultural origin. While one group violently inscribes itself onto the land, the other, displaced from that land, must bear the signs of that violence upon the surface of their skin.

Main image: Hayv Kahraman, Targets, *2017, (detail), oil on linen, 1.9 x 2.4 m. Courtesy: the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York*

MURTAZA VALI

Murtaza Vali is a critic and curator based in New York and Sharjah.

artasiapacific

Installation view of **HAYV KAHRAMAN**'s "Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions" at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery.

RE-WEAVING MIGRANT INSCRIPTIONS
HAYV KAHRAMAN

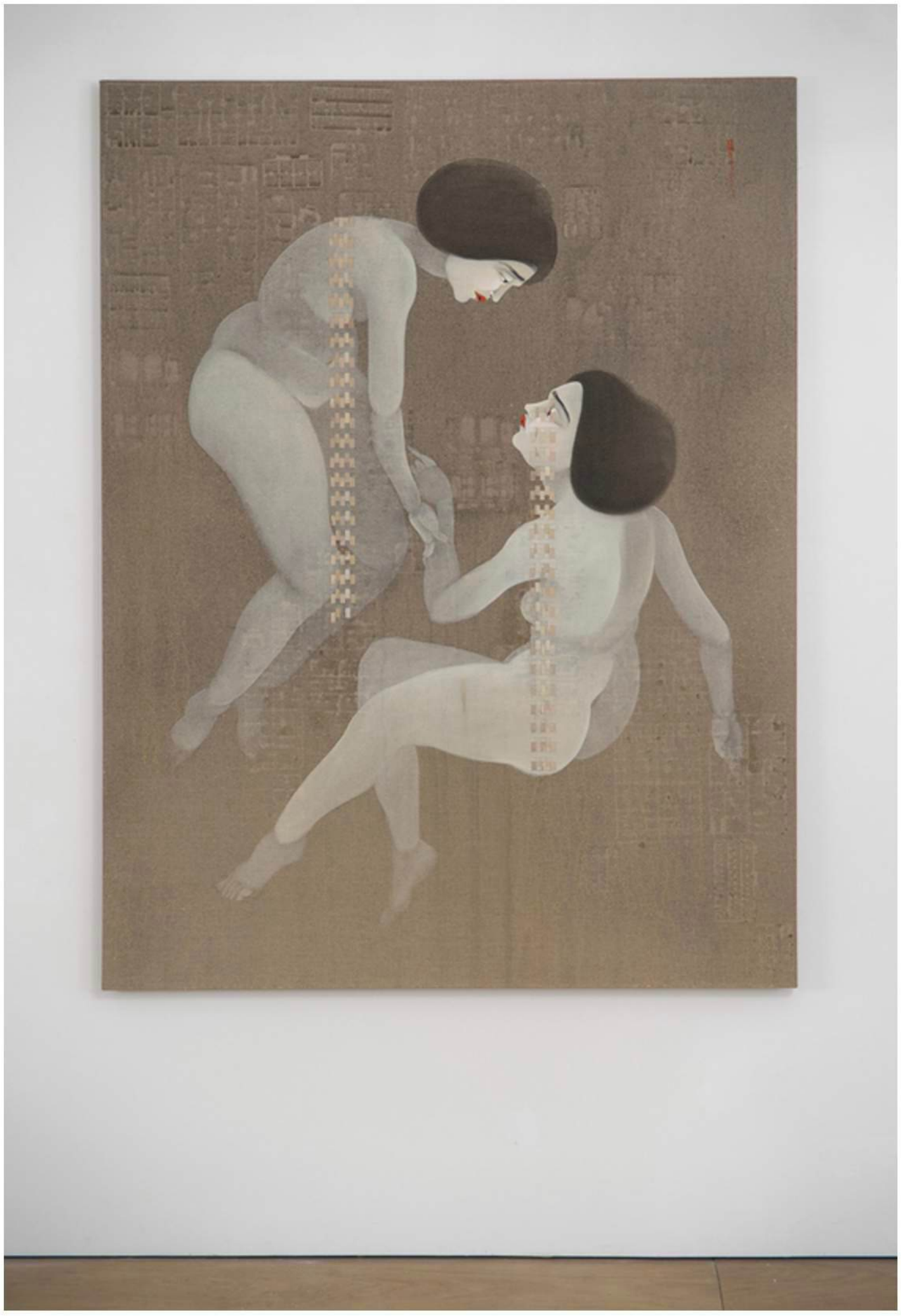
BANSIE VASVANI
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

IRAQ USA

On a crisp Saturday afternoon at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, a piercing siren roused five women in skin-colored camisoles from their sleep on the floor before they congregated around a rectangular platform to tell a tale of war, escape, fear, refuge, anxiety and subservience. Woven into their anguished narratives were inscriptions and codes that accentuated the paintings in the gallery by Iraqi-born Hayv Kahraman, who is the author and protagonist of the women's stories.

At age 11, Kahraman fled Iraq to take refuge in Sweden, when life in Iraq was permanently disrupted by the American-led Desert Storm military campaign in 1990. Years later, the artist would develop her distinct visual language; she is known for depictions of alabaster-complexioned dolls and marionettes with coiffed black hair and slanting eyes. But in her solo exhibition "Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions," Kahraman's bevy of naked, Rubenesque figures, hitherto encrypted with signs of rebellion, begin to transform. Their once seductive poses and subservient condition as refugees are fractured by woven surfaces.

The traumatic birth of these mannequins was amplified through the poignant performances of the actors. "She," or Kahraman's complex alter ego, was born once her maker had internalized what it meant to be the fetishized other. The novel female embodiment with sumptuous curves of Renaissance figures and vapid doll-like features resembled what the artist was taught to believe—that assimilation came only with the absorption of European ideals and forms. Kahraman's brown skin and wavy black hair that completely differentiated her from the Europeans in her new hometown disappeared. Instead, her new self metamorphosed into a convoluted amalgamation of East and West. She emerged with a jet-black bouffant, thick dark eyebrows, and pale skin that represented what Kahraman refers to as the "colonized" body. Her painful need to adapt and blend in was evidenced by the scripts in which she wrote, "I wanted to shed my skin and toss it in the trash and never look back again in the hopes that a new skin would eventually grow."



HAYV KAHRAMAN, *Mnemonic Artifact 1*, 2017, oil on linen, 177.8 × 137.2 cm. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

The early stages of a new skin's development are exactly what one sees in a series of works in the exhibition. In *Mnemonic Artifact 1* (all works 2017), there is an unmistakable, palpable sisterhood between the two female characters. Yet despite their bond, and the underlying aggression visible from their body language, Kahraman's ripped surface that cuts through the flesh of both women in the image is emblematic of a dramatic shift in their portrayal. Embedded in this destructive gesture is the stifling need to break away from feeling what the actors described as "engulfed and consumed by Eurocentric aesthetics." The artist then mends the lacerations by weaving strips of linen taken from previously shredded paintings into the women's "flesh."

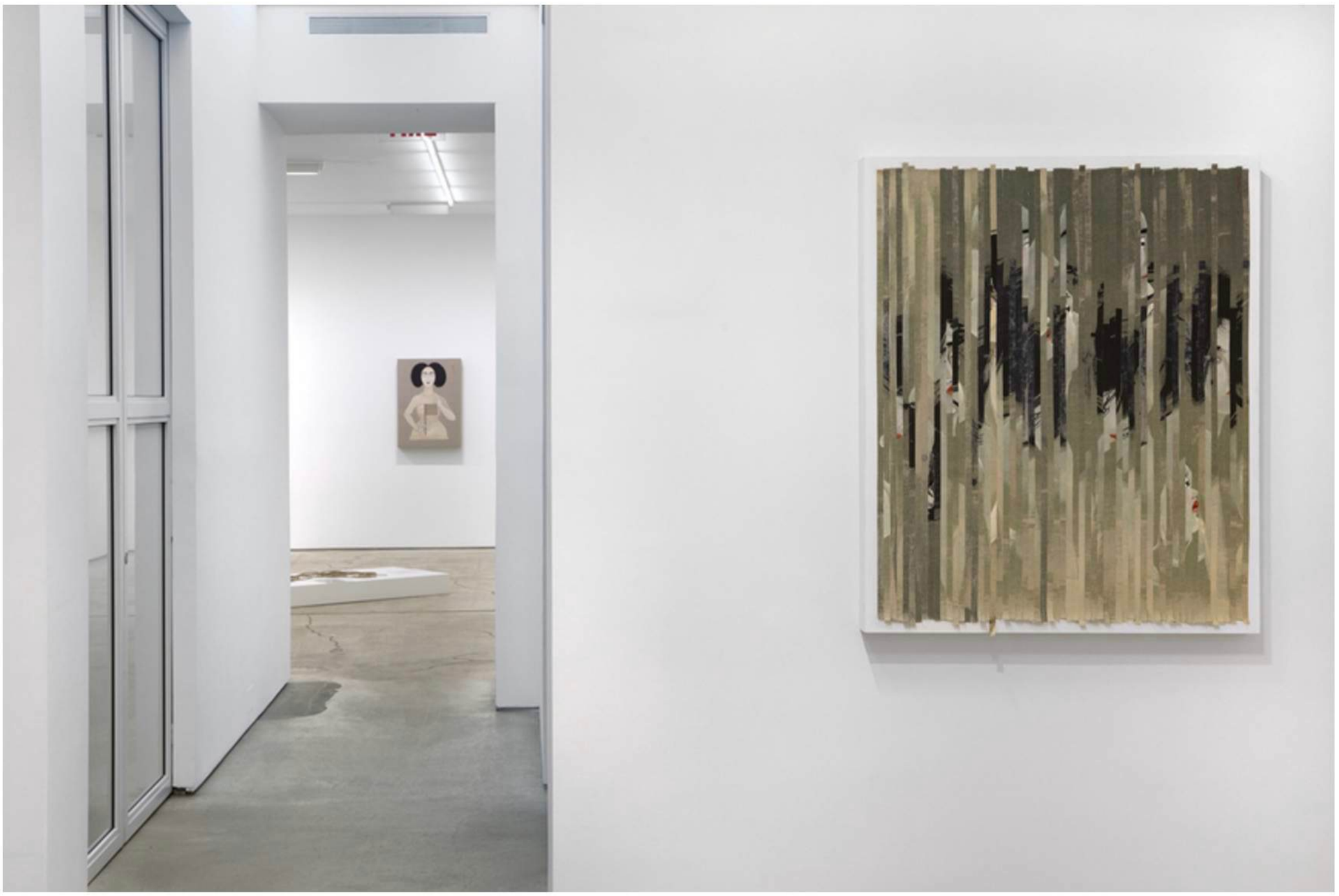
HAYV KAHRAMAN, *Study 1*, 2017, oil on linen, 81.3 × 81.3 cm. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

This cathartic operation of slashing and mending the canvases is heightened in *Study 1* and *2*, where Kahraman's figures are fragmented and altered. We lose easy accessibility to their well-defined forms, and we must grapple with their entirely woven surfaces made up of strips of what the artist calls "lost paintings." Yards of shredded works lay in rolls on the wooden platform that the actors unspooled to reveal traces of deformed figures and damaged skin. They related to a journey in which conjoined bodies formed by numerous strips would "transform" each painting.

HAYV KAHRAMAN, *Study 2*, 2017, oil on linen, 92.7 × 54 cm. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

HAYV KAHRAMAN, (left) *T26* and (right) *T25*, both 2017, oil on velum and linen, 61 × 45.7 cm each. Courtest the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

The notion of "transversed bodies," as referred to by the performers, came to complete fruition in *T25* and *T26*. In Kahraman's smallest works yet, the canvases—about 60 cm in height and 45 cm across—resemble abstract woven paintings which suggest the shape of an open mouth, bringing together years of scars touchingly dramatized as an act of "mourning trauma," but also as a "form of repair." The ultimate indication that Kahraman's images were moving toward complete obliteration before rebirth could be seen in *Strip 1*. Thin strips from earlier paintings are assembled, with mere traces of formerly "colonized" bodies. Their migrant inscriptions had almost disappeared. As the performers dispersed, one hoped that by enabling these skeletal forms to "breathe," Kahraman's unshackled alter ego might find an utterly new and exalted avatar.



HAYV KAHRAMAN, (background) *Mahaffa 1*, 2017, oil on linen, 88.9 × 63.5 cm; (foreground) *Strip 1*, 2017, oil on linen, 99.1 × 81.3 cm. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Hayv Kahraman's "Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions" is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, until December 20, 2017.

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Contemporary Art Magazine

Jack Shainman Gallery, 524 West 24th Street, New York, NY 10011

Hayv Kahraman: Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions

Title : Hayv Kahraman: Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions installation view 2017
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Credit : Courtesy Jack Shainman Gallery

Hayv Kahraman: Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions

Jack Shainman Gallery

26 October - 20 December 2017

Review by Torey Akers

Throughout the 19th century, European painters (the male, moneyed ones, at least) were encouraged to embark on ‘grand tours’ of the Middle East, a supremacist-flavored tradition that spawned Orientalism, the lush, highly fetishized genre oft-championed by Western art historians. Certain tropes reigned, real-life cultural customs notwithstanding – the bustling marketplace, the sultan in repose, and, of course, the harem, typified by languid configurations of naked, nubile beauties lounging in bathhouses. So insatiable proved the imperialist appetite for these images that authenticity became something of a non-starter; Ingres famously completed his most renowned Orientalist work, Une Odalisque, in the comfort of his Naples studio. These tandem colonialist legacies of violence and reductive misrepresentation persist today; Westerners routinely romanticize the other, but punish any perceived “immutable cultural essences”, to borrow Said’s parlance, that might upset our worldview. Counter-narratives continue to be necessary, and Baghdad-born artist Hayv Kahraman’s body of work confronts the Eurocentric gaze with its own thwarted desires, addressing long-entrenched geopolitics through bait-and-switch seduction and personal anecdote.

Kahraman’s excellent solo exhibition at Jack Shainman, entitled Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions, centres on the Iraqi mahaffa, a hand-held fan woven from palm leaves, one of the few non-essential objects her family brought along on their journey as refugees to Sweden. At once a cultural touchstone and emotional reliquary, this tactile symbol of home in all its kaleidoscopic meaning haunts her subjects - wraith-like women rendered in the style of Persian miniatures. Her material treatment of these characters is important – pale, nude bodies and homogeneous features contextualize them in the annals of visual history, but while their faces look opaque, their bodies, suspended in the negative space of raw linen, feel ghostly, merely outlining the promise of a form. As such, the front room of the gallery greets the viewer with a bang.

‘Mnemonic Artifact 2’ (2017), a large painting depicting thirteen women in portrait proportions, serves as the show’s thematic heartbeat. Each figure boasts the same design, but all remain eerily distinct from one another in a move towards fragile, unexpected subjectivity. Our fantasies of the exotic other, the salacious harem, seem to shatter all at once. Kahraman has woven three horizontal tracts of palm across her subjects’ faces, simultaneously erasing and underscoring their identities. This emphasis on thing-ness, on element, posits the artist’s weaving as a disruption rather than a cumulative act of making. Painter and pillager, oppressor and oppressed, Kahraman seems to court the dichotomous echoes of her practice with relish, lulling her audience into a comfortable drone before hard truths take hold.

‘Strip 1’ (2017), a smaller painting on a perpendicular wall, features the shredded remnants of Kahraman’s signature female icon. This intervention results in a literal abstraction of violence, reducing the image to caricatured memory. Is that her version of the Western gaze? Maybe, but she’s not letting us off that easily. In the next room, the show’s crown jewel, a large piece tellingly entitled ‘Targets’ (2017), depicts five women walking in single file, all peering pensively in different directions. Their patterned shawls barely hide their uniform, nude bodies. An aimless sense of melancholy permeates. Kahraman expertly employs references to Japanese woodcuts of geishas and mythological paintings from the Italian Renaissance, but these stock familiarities only bolster the work’s inescapable weirdness. Even Kahraman’s antiquity-inspired autograph looks more like a smear of fresh blood as it hovers in the painting’s upper right-hand corner. As in every other piece in this collection, Kahraman’s women float, suspended in a timeless vacuum only trauma can beget. They might be silent and decoratively sutured, but their stories scream forth from the canvas. They won’t be mired. Still, something has been lost, and visitors to this exhibition are indirectly implicated in that seizure. It’s heavy stuff, but Kahraman’s elegant hand ushers us tactfully to empathy, subverting Orientalist wonder through a new architecture of awe.

Triumphs like the alarmingly frontal solo portrait ‘Mahaffa I’ (2017) and the dream-like ‘Mnemonic Artifact 2’ (2017) balance out more extraneous additions – two heavily remixed close-ups of lips woven in vellum feel a bit disparate, and a large horizontal pedestal sporting four sheets of the artist’s writing alongside an unraveled mahaffa fall just shy of visual coherence. Regardless, Kahraman’s work is gorgeous and brave, provided a much-needed artistic voice that is far too often tokenized or ignored.

Published on 10 November 2017

Wall Street International
ART

Hayv Kahraman

26 Oct — 20 Dec 2017 at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, United States

7 NOVEMBER 2017

Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

Jack Shainman Gallery is pleased to announce Hayv Kahraman's third solo exhibition at our 24th Street space, Re-weaving Migrant Inscriptions. In this new body of work, Kahraman focuses on the mahaffa as an object of mnemonic value. The mahaffa is a hand-held fan made by weaving the fronds of palm trees that dates from the Sumerian and Abbasid eras and is still made in the exact same way in Iraq today. Most importantly, it was one of the few objects Kahraman's family took as they fled Baghdad during the first Gulf War. Here, she describes the object and the process of weaving her canvas: I remember my mom walking into the room and placing a medium sized suitcase on the floor and saying "it's time." We could only bring one suitcase. We packed the necessities for survival. But we also packed a mahaffa. It traveled with us through the Middle East, Africa and Europe until we finally reached our destination in Stockholm. It now decorates our home in Sweden, assuming qualities of a shrine or a memorial as it carries past imaginations of "home", both idealized and contested.

There's a sense of betrayal and resolution as I weave the strips of one shredded figurative painting into another's torn surface. The process is palimpsestic in nature, yet you can still see and feel the painting's original layer. It is not restored to its original state. It is transformed. The final work is a synthesis of transversed materials and bodies each carrying their own mnemonic itineraries. There's a catharsis that happens during the act of weaving as I surgically cut the substrate and then attempt to repair it. The body, Her body, is a sight where trauma resides and in that violence, there is rebirth. Perhaps this comes with the territory of being a refugee, an endless activity of collecting fragments and repetitively weaving them into our memories, both as a form of mourning trauma but also as a drive to circumvent erasure.

For me however, the questions remain: How do these objects function within the psyche of a refugee? What does it mean to suture fragments in the effort to archive them, and why is this so important? Kahraman will also be conducting a performance titled Gendering Memories of Iraq where her female subjects will come alive through the narration of a script that is at once personal and part of a collective memory.

The following is an excerpt from a text written by poet and scholar Sinan Antoon on the occasion of this exhibition:Iraq has been the site of harrowing violence in the last four decades. From dictatorship to bombing campaigns, economic sanctions, military invasions and occupations, it is a space of ongoing mutilation and destruction. This mutilation and the wounds and remains it has left extend from the bodies and psyches of Iraqis to their geography and collective memory.

An Iraqi artist living and working in the United States (the “co-author” of Iraq’s destruction) in the age of permanent war confronts yet another added layer of contradictions. Her gendered and racialized body and being mark her as a multiple other. She is at once fetishized and feared and her works are subjected to an often reductive and patronizing Euro-centric gaze.

Hayv Kahraman’s works sail through these dangerous straits and arrive before us safely and elegantly, delivering haunting questions interwoven with visceral beauty. Like a refugee, this “body” of works arrives bearing visible and invisible scars and carrying the weight of history and its injuries and traumas, but also memories.

The few cherished objects refugees and displaced persons choose (if and when they can) to carry across dangerous international borders are invested with immense symbolic and emotional value. The displaced object becomes a synecdoche for an actual and an emotional place that was “home.” A fragment, and a relic that assumes and performs a range of potential mnemonic and aesthetic functions. This is the status of the mahaffa deployed by Kahraman in these works.

At times the mahaffa is whole and intact, held by the familiar figure. But in a number of the works, such as Mnemonic Artifact 1 and Study 1, it takes on a more complicated and tangible function; at once disquieting and powerfully evocative. The interwoven strands and the distinctive pattern they form on the surface of the mahaffa are translocated (another dis-placement) onto the surface of the works themselves. This motif invests the surface (and each work) with material and tangible depth and expands the range of potential meanings, let alone the palpable aesthetic pleasure it induces.

Like geometric wounds, they gently interrupt the larger material/textural context, and gesture to both the migrant itinerary of the mahaffa as well as its material and metaphorical logic. The body of works and the bodies in them come from elsewhere and arrive bearing scars. Antithetical material and concept are interwoven: strands of temporal and special zones: the past and the present, the here and the there, the imaginary and the real, and what is lost and (never) found. The self is interwoven with its others and its surroundings. In some instances, the entire surface of the body becomes that of the mahaffa. The refugee/exiled/diasporic body is far outside the frame of its original home/land. Like the mahaffa, it is a fragment, a relic, and a vessel of meaning.

In an increasingly militarized cultural space, the civilian victims of the war, who are the primary targets of military might, disappear (that is if they ever appeared in the first place) and the soldiers become the war’s victims, rather than its perpetrators. The war and its logic haunt Kahraman’s work and she engages with them in a courageous and compelling way. This is crystallized in how she deploys the fragmented bodies of male soldiers (miniatures used in games) as a backdrop in the works. A reversal of gender and racial power dynamics and configurations is enacted here, but not in a triumphalist manner. The fragmented soldiers are permanently lodged into the body of these works and the bodies in them, like shrapnel, disfiguring them. The “material” genealogy of the works in this collection is obviously crucial. The disfigured body is re-membered and it is incumbent upon us to try to retrace or imagine its painful journey.

Hayv Kahraman, born in Baghdad, Iraq, currently lives and works in Los Angeles. Her exhibition, Hayv Kahraman: Acts of Reparation is currently on view at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, Missouri through December 31, 2017. Other recent solo exhibitions include Hayv Kahraman at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska.Hhd She has participated in exhibitions including Piece by Piece: Building a Collection, Selections from the Christy & Bill Gautreaux Collection, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City; The Jameel Prize 2011 – Shortlist Exhibition, Victoria and Albert Museum, London which traveled to venues including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Cantor Center, Stanford University; and Fertile Crescent, Paul Robeson Center for the Arts, Princeton. Her work is included in several public collections like the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; American Embassy, Baghdad; The Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; and MATHAF Museum of Modern Art, Doha.

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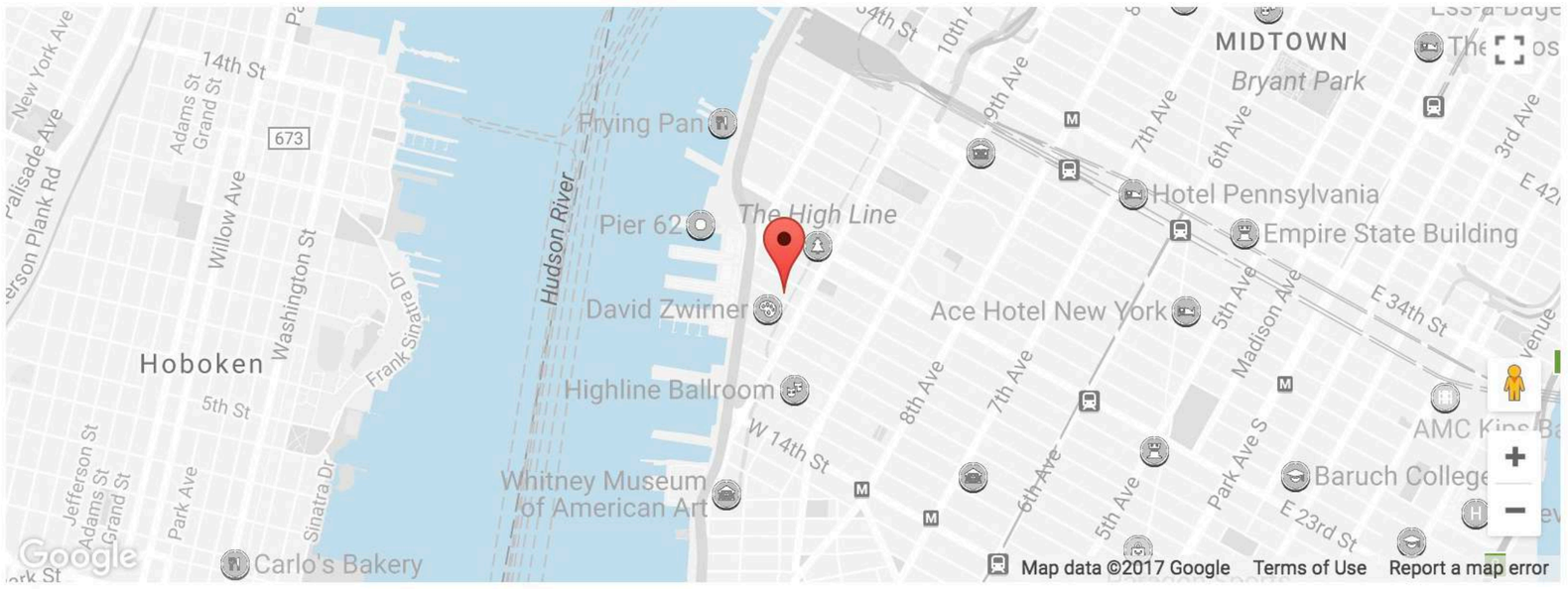
Opening hours

Tuesday to Saturday

From 10am to 6pm



Captions

1. Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery
2. Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery
3. Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery

The New York Times

13 Artists On: Immigration

By Zoë Lescaze

June 19, 2018

Hayv Kahraman's "Kurds," 2018.
Portrait courtesy of the artist. Artwork courtesy of the artist, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Jack Shainman and The Third Line.

Hayv Kahraman

Born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1981.

The placid mirage on a strip of the road reminded me of my country. For a moment I felt transported. The image of the desert spoke covertly of my past and future. It was as if temporality was absent. Two distinct spaces that in reality had declared war on one another, and yet here they were in front of me, indistinguishable. I caught myself suddenly and gained composure, reminding myself that I am in a land that was/is currently at war with my homeland.

A warm, flickering beam of sunlight brushes my eye and I squint. The apparition of water conjures up childhood memories of driving from Baghdad to Al Habbaniya, and the time that I asked my dad about mirages. A mirage, he said, is a distant illusion of water created when hot air meets cool air. It's not real. It only exists in your mind. Do we all see mirages? I asked. Yes, we all see them.

This shared perception of water makes me realize that, whether we are in the United States or in Iraq, we are all part of a collective species sharing one global platform where margins are consistently being negotiated and contested. Today I physically find myself on the other side of the line, struggling to keep my memories afloat. You have made it clear that I'm an "Other" but I refuse to be erased. This is my position as an immigrant and refugee yet I still share the same vision of water on the road as anyone else.

The New York Times Style Magazine

ARTS & LETTERS

Some of the Most Provocative Political Art is Made With Fibers

"Kachakchi" (2017), a hand-woven wool rug designed by the Iraqi artist Hayv Kahraman, recently on view at San Francisco's Fort Mason Chapel.

Commissioned by the FOR-SITE Foundation; courtesy the artist, photo: Robert Divers Herrick

The ART *of* REMEMBRANCE

New exhibitions at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery and the Contemporary Art Museum (CAM) St. Louis has **Hayv Kahraman** *showcasing her delicate work and incredible story to new audiences, writes Paul Laster*

With gallery representation in Dubai, New York and Los Angeles, group exhibitions worldwide and an expanding list of institutional and private collectors, Iraqi-born artist Hayv Kahraman should be the envy of her peers, but the road she has traveled to reach these heights has not been an easy one. A refugee of the first Gulf War, Kahraman fled Baghdad with her family in 1992 when she was just 11 years old. "When we landed in Sweden and I was stamped as a refugee, my life was forever ruptured," Kahraman told me from her studio in Los Angeles. "My work now is about how memory functions in a diasporic context, where memory is a lifeline to not only your past but your present and your future life."

Kahraman's practice is currently the subject of two important exhibitions in the US—a survey featuring painting, sculpture and performance art from the past five years at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and a show of new paintings at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. The St. Louis exhibition, titled *Acts of Reparation*, is the artist's first museum solo exhibition in the US. Organised by CAM's chief curator Wassan Al Khudairi, a former director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, the overview highlights the evolution of Kahraman's work. Using her body as the protagonist in her highly refined art, she photographs herself in a variety of classical poses and then transforms the imagery into dramatic visualisations of loss and longing. She also incorporates elements from calligraphy, Italian Renaissance painting, Japanese prints and illuminated Arab manuscripts into her deeply intricate *oeuvre*. "Hayv has developed a language to explore what she calls migrant consciousness," Al Khudairi shared. "At this moment of increased awareness of refugees and shared experiences of displaced people, her work is even more poignant."

"WHEN WE LANDED IN SWEDEN AND I WAS STAMPED AS A REFUGEE, MY LIFE WAS FOREVER RUPTURED"

Kahraman created the central character of her art as a colonised version of herself when she was studying in Italy. Her white diaphanous flesh reveals the assimilated woman Kahraman had become—someone who was taught to believe that European art was the ultimate ideal. Her large painting *Bab El Sheikh* (2013) shows one her ghost-like figures haunting a traditional Iraqi home, while three big canvases from her series *How Iraqi Are You?* (2014-16) draw inspiration from Maqamat al Hariri, the 12th-century Arabic illuminated manuscript, to intriguingly recount her own migratory tale.

The artist's sculptural piece *Icosahedral Body* (2015) is based on a three-dimensional rendering of Kahraman's own body scan that's been cut into wood like a *mashrabiya* window to represent the ways in which an immigrant's life is broken and divided, while her massive, new painting *Read me from right to left* (2017) portrays a group of women lined up across three adjoining canvases. It was motivated by fear of not being able to visit with family due to Trump's initial travel ban, as her Swedish passport clearly lists Baghdad as her place of birth.

Several of the "She" characters in the triptych have been woven with strips of cut canvas from what the artist calls "The Lost Paintings." Representing things that have been lost through migration, parts from the shredded paintings are entwined with the bodies of her nude figures. The pattern created is based on the *mahaffa*, a traditional Iraqi handheld fan and one of the few personal items that her mother took with her when the family was forced to flee their homeland. "My mother hired a smuggler to get us out of Iraq and he said that we could bring only one suitcase," said Kahraman. "We packed the necessities for survival, but we also took a little *mahaffa*, which still has a place of remembrance in the Iraqi corner of my parent's Swedish home."

An entirely new series of these woven canvases, which Kahraman has titled *Mnemonic Artifact*, are on display at Jack Shainman Gallery. After painting the figures, the artist cuts the linen and weaves her shredded paintings into the composition, which also traces the outline of miniature soldiers sold as toys for grown men who want to recreate Operation Desert Storm—a thought that horrifies Kahraman, as well as many other Iraqi refugees.

Proceeding with her investigation into American imperialism, the artist recently acquired visual language translator cards used by the US. Military in Iraq and turned the illustrations into subjects for her paintings. *Targets* (2017), which shows a group of women waiting on a line for bread at a bakery, warns one of visiting the marketplace, while *Pain Scale* and *Location of Attacker* (exhibited at CAM) provide a visual language in which to communicate with doctors and the police.

Not content to simply repeat herself, which she could easily do, considering the demand for her work—Kahraman continues to push her aesthetic and her social concerns to embrace new ideas and a broader audience. And it is through intricate work such as hers, rendered through Kahraman's haunting and deeply personal artistry, that new histories of Iraq are told. ■

Hayv Kahraman at Jack Shainman Gallery runs until 20 December 2017; Hayv Kahraman: Acts of Reparation runs at CAM St. Louis until 31 December 2017

Facing page: *Mahaffa 1*. 2017. Oil on linen. 88.9x63.5cm. Above: *Strip I*. 2017. Oil on linen. 99.06x81.28cm.

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Biswas, Allison. "Ladies in Waiting: Glass meets seminal Iraqi artist Hayv Kahraman." *Glass Magazine*. Issue 28. Winter 2016: pp. 122-127, illustrated.

Ladies in Waiting

Glass meets seminal Iraqi artist Hayv Kahraman

The female figure is an arresting and pronounced feature in the paintings of Hayv Kahraman. Often positioned in pairs or groups, young women sit together conspiring, in conversation, or lending each other a hand of sorts. They are in it together, that much is certain. With their matching black bouffant hairstyles, richly patterned gowns and nearly identical flat features, they are at once of our time and historic; both completely natural and highly stylized.

Kahraman, who was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1981, and now resides in Los Angeles, has described these figures as continuations of herself, and their contrasting physical qualities – which make reference to the female characters in such diverse art forms as Persian miniatures, Renaissance paintings and Japanese woodblock prints – could be seen as grappling with the differences between Middle Eastern and Western cultures – a subject the artist has been exploring in her work over the past decade. Perhaps Kahraman's greatest feat so far has been to formulate such a convincing personal iconography from a myriad of sources.

In 2014 Kahraman was presented with the Excellence in Cultural Creativity prize at the Global Thinkers Forum Awards (a platform which champions women's empowerment), and her paintings can be found in notable collections around the world including the Saatchi Gallery, London; the Rubell Family Collection, Miami; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; and the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE.

Kahraman currently has a solo show at the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, and in 2017 will present new work at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

When did you start to become interested in art? Do you have memories of an art culture at home, or in the wider sphere of Baghdad, where you grew up?

Shield 2, 2016, oil on linen and acoustic foam, 35 × 35 inches

I remember being attracted to art-making as far back as my memories can take me. I grew up in a secular Baghdad where my parents would hold soirees, gathering musicians and artists. I would sit in the adjacent room with my paper and paintbrush making quick strokes of colour, and every now and then one of those artists would come into the room, give me a mini critique and shower me with praise. I also remember my playroom in our house in Baghdad, where I used all four walls as my canvas and filled them with characters, narratives, concerns, jokes, and discoveries. Those are my memories of Baghdad.

You were forced to move to Sweden at the age of twelve due to the Gulf War. How did your art education develop in this new context?

It flourished. I had an art teacher during middle school who acted as my mentor. He was this crazy artist (and farmer!) who pushed me to think big and believe in myself. During my early teenage years, and in a context where I was clearly the "other" as literally everyone around me was tall and blonde, it was of tremendous value to feel that I was good at something. And it was more acceptable to be "different" if you were an artist.

Your work to date has in many ways focused on the disconnect between Western and Middle Eastern

Nabog, 2014, oil on linen, 115 × 55 × 2 inches (each panel)

Decagram No. 2, 2013, oil on panels, 46 × 46 × 2 inches

> I believe that this necessity of archiving my *memories* is getting more and more urgent in my work. Perhaps this is because the gap relating to what I considered to be my "home" is getting bigger.

culture, from your own personal perspective as a person who has experiences of these. When did you become aware of "back home" once you had settled in Sweden?

I think I was aware of this as soon as I landed in Arlanda, Stockholm. We were ushered to a detention room quickly after revealing that we didn't have passports, and from that moment onwards the concept of being a refugee or foreigner was created. It was as if I had got stamped with that fixed identity, and with it came a multitude of problematic assumptions.

The female figure has been your vessel for transmitting your narratives and memories of Iraq. How did you come to this symbol, if it can be called that?

My figures are extensions of my own body, which are blended with the aesthetics of the Renaissance. "She" actually emerged when I was in Florence, Italy. I went to every single museum. I made copies of Old Master

Bab el Sheikh, 2013, oil on modular panel, 103 × 176 inches

paintings and was engulfed by the technique of that era. "Her" emergence – namely her white diaphanous flesh, her contrapposto – was an embodiment of someone who was colonized; someone who was taught to believe that European art history was the ultimate ideal. She became an expression of whom I had become as an assimilated woman. I'm now working to give her agency and a voice, and, as I obsessively repaint her again and again, she becomes part of a collective. I am concerned with the multitude, not the self. This is not only my story. It can be the story of more than five million people within the Iraqi diaspora or any diaspora.

What about the form of this figure? What does her (stylistic) consistency represent? And what was your process for creating her aesthetic – the curved black hair, the strong eyebrows, and so on? Also, her clothes – where are these fabrics sourced from?

I think "her" formal emergence was instinctual. It was a synthesis of the art that I was surrounded by at that time – artists such as Raphael, Michelangelo and Caravaggio. In other words, it came from what I was taught was "fine art", but also it came from my own body, the hairy Arab – big black hair and thick eyebrows. I was also studying graphic design in Italy at the time, so simplicity, solid filled colours and focus on line quality were key elements of whatever I was fabricating. The pattern and tessellated geometry in the fabrics are accents that I add after everything is set in the painting. For me, they form a way to balance the work and create more of a systematic order, but they also bring me back to what I'm familiar with: the aesthetics of the Middle East.

Your first major show in New York – *Let the Guest Be the Master* – in 2013 incorporated these female characters within wood panel structures that were based on floor plans of houses in Baghdad. How did you choose the houses, and was architecture a literal way of referring to "home"?

The houses were chosen after conversations I had with a few Iraqi architects, as well as further research I had carried out on vernacular Iraqi homes with courtyards. What ignited these works was the selling of our family home in Baghdad; the home that housed that very playroom I mentioned earlier, and the only tangible space I felt that I could physically go back to in order to recover my lost memories. Using the floor plans of various domestic homes – some that were still standing, and some not – enabled me to archive them.

Your next show from 2015, *How Iraqi Are You?*, was a more direct investigation of your experiences of exile. The show not only presented the question of how identity is judged and defined, but was also your way of preserving your memories of Iraq. What role does remembrance play for you?

I believe that this necessity of archiving my memories is getting more and more urgent in my work. Perhaps this is because the gap relating to what I considered to be my "home" is getting bigger. I live in the United States now, far away from anything I was born into, and the only way to connect to that home is to go back in time. I do think that this is common for refugees, perhaps more so with Iraqi refugees as we have that sense of the glorious Mesopotamian past

Swedish Class, 2014, oil on linen, 79 × 104 inches

LRAD.1, 2016, oil on linen and acoustic foam, 64 × 64 inches

> My mother decided to hire a smuggler for us to flee Baghdad and go to Sweden, we were told to only bring one suitcase; to leave *everything* else behind and to never return again.

ingrained in our skin. And when you work so hard to shed that brown skin and black hair in order to fit into a Western context, eventually you grow tired. So where do you go after that? You go back to the past.

What is coming up for you? How do you feel that your new work will develop next?

I am very excited about what I am doing right now in the studio. In the previous works, I experimented with altering the linen in different ways (which is the base of the painting) and that has led me to understand the material on a deeper level. I am detaching it, altering it and manipulating it in a way where I am creating something similar to a weave. In short, I would say that I am re-weaving the linen into itself. The idea also came from an object – the "Mahaffa". This is a traditional Iraqi handheld fan made out of palm tree fronds. This connects to something previously: as my mother decided to hire a smuggler for us to flee Baghdad and go

All images courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery

Concealed Weapon, 2016, oil on linen and acoustic foam, 79 × 46 inches

to Sweden, we were told to only bring one suitcase; to leave everything else behind and to never return again. One of the few objects we decided to bring with us was a small Mahaffa. This object travelled with us and our falsified passports through the Middle East, Africa and finally Europe, where we landed in Stockholm. The Mahaffa has become something of a relic for me, carrying a host of problematic stimuli. It is an object that carries memories of a lost past that is both idealized and imaginary. It carries remnants of a connection to something that was interrupted. Perhaps I am re-weaving the linen in order to re-weave my experiences.

– By Allie Biswas

Icosahedral Body, 2013, wood and aluminium, 69¾ × 85 × 85 inches (dimensions variable)

Iraqi Kit, 2016, oil on panel, 74 × 48 inches

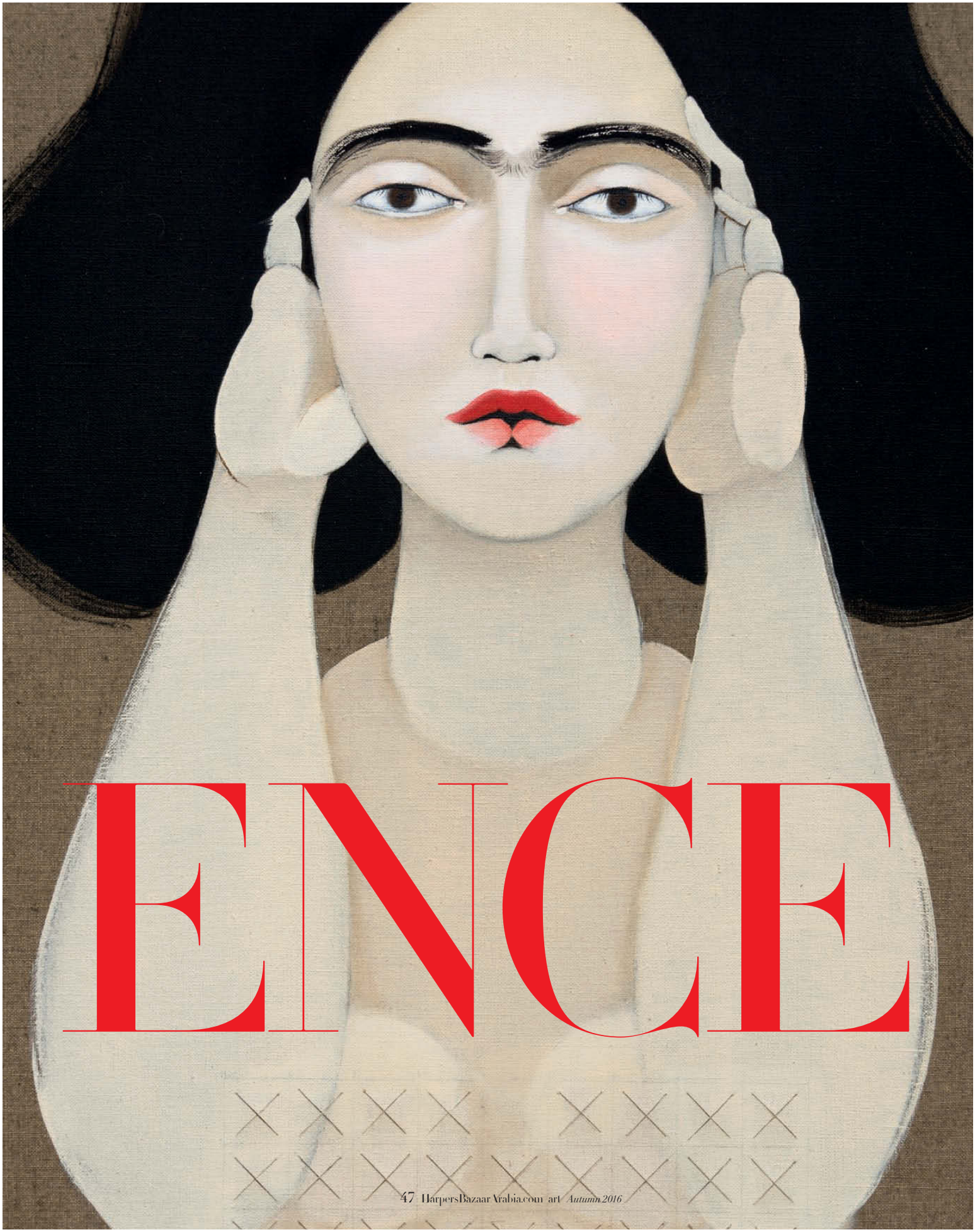
> I grew up in a secular Baghdad where my parents would hold *soirees*, gathering musicians and artists.


Harper's
BAZAAR
ARABIA
ART
ISSUE 24
PENETRATING THE
SILENCE
HAYV KAHRAMAN
THE NEW
TATE MODERN
A conversation with
FRANCES
MORRIS
BLACK FRIDAY
MALL CULTURE with
SOPHIA AL MARIA
COMPLIMENTARY COPY

(Detail) *Search (Five Steps)*. 2016. Oil on linen. 223.5 x 101.6 cm. Right: (Detail) Untitled (1). 2016. Oil on linen. 81.3 x 81.3 cm.

PENETRATING THE SILENCE

Hayv Kahraman's *latest body of work offers an acute and eloquent portrayal of the violence of sound. Brooke Lynn McGowan visits the artist at her studio and learns how trauma can ignite music, painting and reconciliation*



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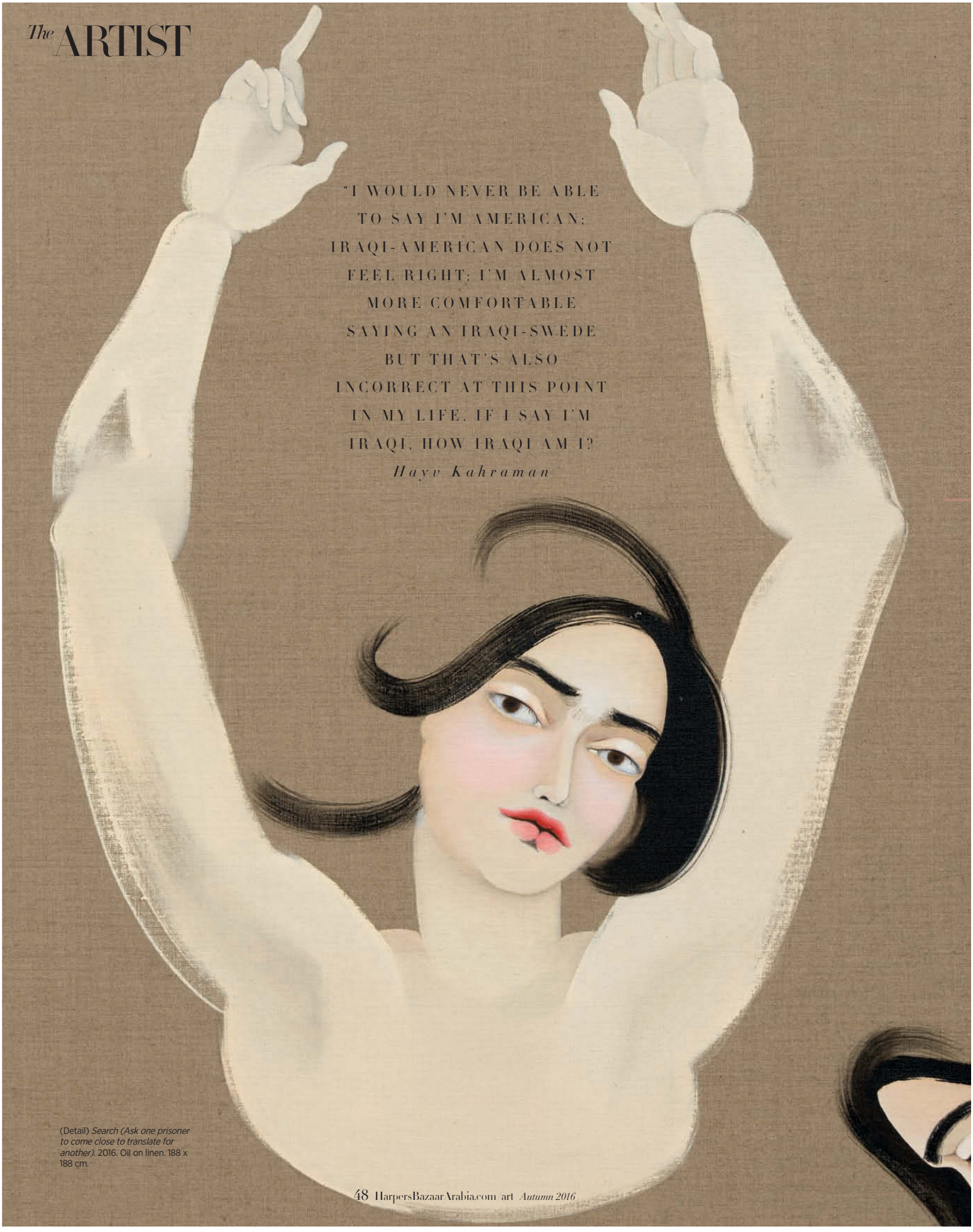


"I WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO SAY I'M AMERICAN; IRAQI-AMERICAN DOES NOT FEEL RIGHT; I'M ALMOST MORE COMFORTABLE SAYING AN IRAQI-SWEDE BUT THAT'S ALSO INCORRECT AT THIS POINT IN MY LIFE. IF I SAY I'M IRAQI, HOW IRAQI AM I?

Hayv Kahraman

(Detail) *Search (Ask one prisoner to come close to translate for another).* 2016. Oil on linen. 188 x 188 cm.

All leaving contains a betrayal. None more so than that of the refugee, whose exilic longing, a pleasure and a pain, contains the doubling of nostalgia and trauma, wounds where at once place, past and present are all foreign lands.

Glendale, California: a suburb merged at the Northeastern edge of Los Angeles' landscape of disappointed promises. Palm trees, strip malls, and gritty sunshine give way to ranch style single family homes, Spanish-tiled roofs, and then, suddenly, on the left, an indistinct office park: a small labyrinth of low-level, black-fronted, mirrored, sharp-edge structures sat upon the asphalt expanse of a nearly deserted parking lot. Here, like the covert operations headquarters of a military clandestine service, can be found the unmarked studio of the young Iraqi-cum-American artist, Hayv Kahraman, evident only through a single open door.

Writing in 1932, Antonin Artaud, the surrealist provocateur and author of the 'Theater of Cruelty', penned a letter to his friend André Rolland de Renéville, stating: "Herewith a … drawing in which what is called the subjectile betrayed me." The subjectile, that support—whether canvas, linen, paper, or none of the above—Jacques Derrida notes, takes "the place of the subject or of the object being neither one nor the other." For Artaud, this betrayal of the substrate demands punishment, as he continues, elsewhere, "The figures on the page said nothing under my hand. They offered themselves to me … that I could probe … shred, tear up, without the subjectile ever complaining through my father and mother."

Piercing the page, stabbing or defiling it: Artaud's violation of the figures on his deceptive substrate, so often understood as succubi—dangerous and deceitful feminine shapes—recalls the punished forms of Kahraman's own female figures, in a series of canvases prepared for her upcoming solo show at The Third Line, Dubai, entitled *Audible Inaudible*. They too are probed, pierced, stabbed, and violated. Pale, demure forms, they too are uncomplaining. But if they betray, it is in the portrayal of the psychic trauma of the exilic, exotic feminine subject which marks all of Kahraman's *oeuvre*, evolving, in this most recent body work, to the presentation of vicious, open, sonic wounds—wounds that cannot heal. "I want them to be seductive," the artist says, as we stand in her studio, surrounded on all sides by a reiterated bevy of images of a dark-haired sumptuous female, clad in flat areas of patterned textiles recalling Islamic geometries. Each carefully prepared Belgian linen surface adopts a different pose or persona, each body interrupted by a regular series of angular cuts, slits, violations, and indices of a trauma.

Drawing at turns upon the lavish forms and faint gestures of Italian Renaissance painting, the flat spaces and graphic outlines of Japanese woodblocks, and the delicate narratives of Arabic illuminated manuscripts, Kahraman's *tableaux* often challenge the viewer with deeply personal and profoundly traumatic mis-en-scene. While gaining attention in 2006 for a Sumi ink-on-paper series, including *Honour Killing*, with huab-clad figures hung from the barren branches of a tree, or the split bodies of women, merged at the torso, lynched, each holding the other's noose, Kahraman's *oeuvre* brandishes either condemning displays of terrifying violence—from the horrors of war to female genital mutilation—or, alternately, viscerally charged vignettes of mundane, quotidian proportions that have aptly been classified by curator Bassam El Baroni as gestures of 'micro-feminism': the resistance to domination of the colloquial, the lived, and the everyday. Like the 2010 *Pins and Needles* series, these works betray as they portray a contemporary hieroglyphic lexicon of postures of pain, which contemporary society would prefer to cover over rather than admit. And like the artist's *Marionette* series, oil on linen from 2008, the feminine is, pointing back towards Artaud's masochistic Surrealism just as much as Hans Bellmer's decomposed dolls, always enacting the subject position of the mutilated, disjointed, and torn apart. The female, again hung, this time by slender puppet strings, then becomes not as much passive as unable to complain, because denied all but the fiction of agency. A refugee as well as the survivor of an abusive marriage, Kahraman comments, "The dismemberment is very personal." The psychic trauma of the surreal screams her name.

Or a name she calls her own; over the past decade the *oeuvre* of this shipwrecked denizen of the Western sunset has gained considerable subtly, while losing none of its potency nor visceral socio-political address. However, even as the artist's work advances, drawing ever more upon advanced intellectual references, she herself, and her work, remains oft confined between the rock and hard place of the discourses of identity politics and voyeuristic pleasure. She has been presented—or pigeonholed—that is, in dozens of gallery and museum exhibitions the world over as an exemplar of the divulged, rent body of the Arabic woman—that flesh so rarely revealed and thus such a coveted object of Western obsession. Thereby does she—and do her figures—take "the place of the subject or of the object being neither one nor the other?"

Yet, such Orientalist gaze, persisting in the libidinal subconscious of even the most learned and liberal eye or beholder, acts as the very crux of the stated seductive will of her current body of work. For although the artist does in fact use photographs of herself in order to compose the exaggerated lines of her tortured feminine forms, Kahraman's bodies rest in the uncanny space of the exotic replicant, whose pale limpid limbs, passive in their aggressive gestures, both are and are not the products of self-portraiture. For her own part, the artist understands the compulsively repeated figure presented in her work as not a reflection, but rather a counterpart with whom she is in unceasing dialogue—an invented other as both fantasy and nightmare—playing out corporal possibilities which both spare and spectacularly reveal. As she noted when speaking to Nina Siegal of *The New York Times* in 2013, "Having these women violently detaching their limbs, for me, is very reminiscent of the psyche of a refugee... and that sense of detachment you have from your land that you've had to leave behind. That's the idea of the diasporic women, who are fragmented, or cyborgs." The cyborg: the mechanistic scion of contemporary Western feminism, but also the subject, turned object, ripped limb from limb.

"I would never be able to say I'm an American; Iraqi-American does not feel right; I'm almost more comfortable saying an Iraqi-Swede but that's also incorrect at this point in my life. If I say I'm Iraqi, how Iraqi am I?" Confessing an overtly problematic relationship to the politics of place, perception, and personhood—Arabic, female, refugee, or otherwise—Kahraman's identity is compromised under a quite literal sign of misapprehension: Hayv, in fact, is not even her real name. "My actual name is Hayf, in Arabic," she comments, as we discuss her memories of dislocation. Born in 1981 in Bagdad, Kahraman was a tender pre-teen, ten years later, when she with her father and mother, both heavily persecuted under Saddam's Ba'athist regime, fled for their lives, ricocheting from Yemen to Ethopia through Germany, and finally arriving in a small bathroom outside of Swedish passport control in Arlanda. "My mom flushed our fake passports down the toilet," she recalls. Taken with her sister into a separate room as her mother was questioned, the artist relates "I remember looking out that one window and it was pitch black outside—which was very strange because it was only 3pm!" The girls were given an interpreter fluent only in Kurdish, a language without the letter 'f'. ➤

"Hayv means 'the moon' in Kurdish so he just assumed…" Kahraman recounts, dressed now in West coast cool of blue jeans and black T-shirt. "After that day, I've been Hayv."

Such personal parables of misidentification have informed the breadth of the aritst's practice, interrogating the impossible gap of displacement, distancing, and doubling which has marked her experience of coming of age in Sweden, before being educated in Italy, and eventually emigrating to California. In a recent exhibition for Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, Hayf-cum-Hayv sought to mine her memory for tales of the slippage that is cross-cultural misapprehension. Taking on the formal composition of a 13th century Arabic manuscript illumination, writ-large, *Wattania*, for example, portrays an incident from her childhood, and a lesson for the viewer in state education. The subtitle explains, in Arabic, and then translated in English, *In Wattania class in fourth grade the teacher handed out the test and one of the questions read: Underline the correct answer; is Iraq a democracy or a dictatorship?* "I didn't understand the words," the artist confesses to me, over two decades later, "so I circled dictatorship. Only after having been severely punished did I understand what it meant." Meanwhile, in the same series appears *Person nummer*, portraying one woman sitting astride, as the other, seductively, lifts her skirt. The title is a reference to the Swedish personal identification code, that, as 'person' was pronounced 'peshoon', revealing a semantic gap: the homophonically identical word in Iraqi dialect means 'vagina.' And finally, the idiomatic *Sammot la Moot* (Silence = no Death) presents to the spectator a circle of seated female figures under the moniker of a Bagdadi form of local wisdom, enforcing the necessity of bowing to authority, translating roughly to an edict of submission: only the silent survive.

The present exhibition, *Audible Inaudible*, finds its inspiration (and its title) in the work of New York University musicologist and audio-anthropologist J Martin Daughtry, in his *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq*, whilst also drawing upon the graphic military iconography employed in US Army issued cultural 'Smart Cards'—contemporary and culturally risible guides for dominant-submissive interactions between soldier and citizen as provided to US service personnel in Iraq, currently in use. In the former case, Daughtry describes the 'belliphonic' soundscape of war, marked by a state of auditory dissonance, so constant and pervasive that the listener no longer hears it: "Distant gunfire became part of what I suggest we call the audible inaudible: a conceptual space that housed sounds so … ubiquitous that they ceased to draw the attention of the experienced auditor," states Daughtry. "To locate a sound in the audible inaudible is to say that it was no longer fully 'there.'" Survivors on the field of battle must necessarily enact a 'redistribution of the sensible', where the cacophony of violence is no longer listened to, but subconsciously naturalised: peace becomes a state of exception.

For Daughtry as for Kahraman, what remains within realm of hearing in a state of constant war is both silence and the scream. As a child reared on listening to the violent din of the first Gulf War offensive, for the artist, it is the air raid siren which retains the masochistic force of the psychic, sonic wound, as well as providing the cathartic impetuous for Kahraman's regular and ritualised penetrations, violations of her own canvases, traversing the absent presence of her female figures. "When you google 'sound' and 'violence'" she says, placing a corrugated sheet of grey foam on her studio table, "this is the first thing you find: soundproofing insulation." Attempting at first to present her images with a literal background texture of these tamping sheets, the artist later resolved to push the foam forms through representative cuts in the surface, support, or subjectile, of the image itself. No longer inert, the paintings become capable of altering the soundscape of the spaces they inhabit.

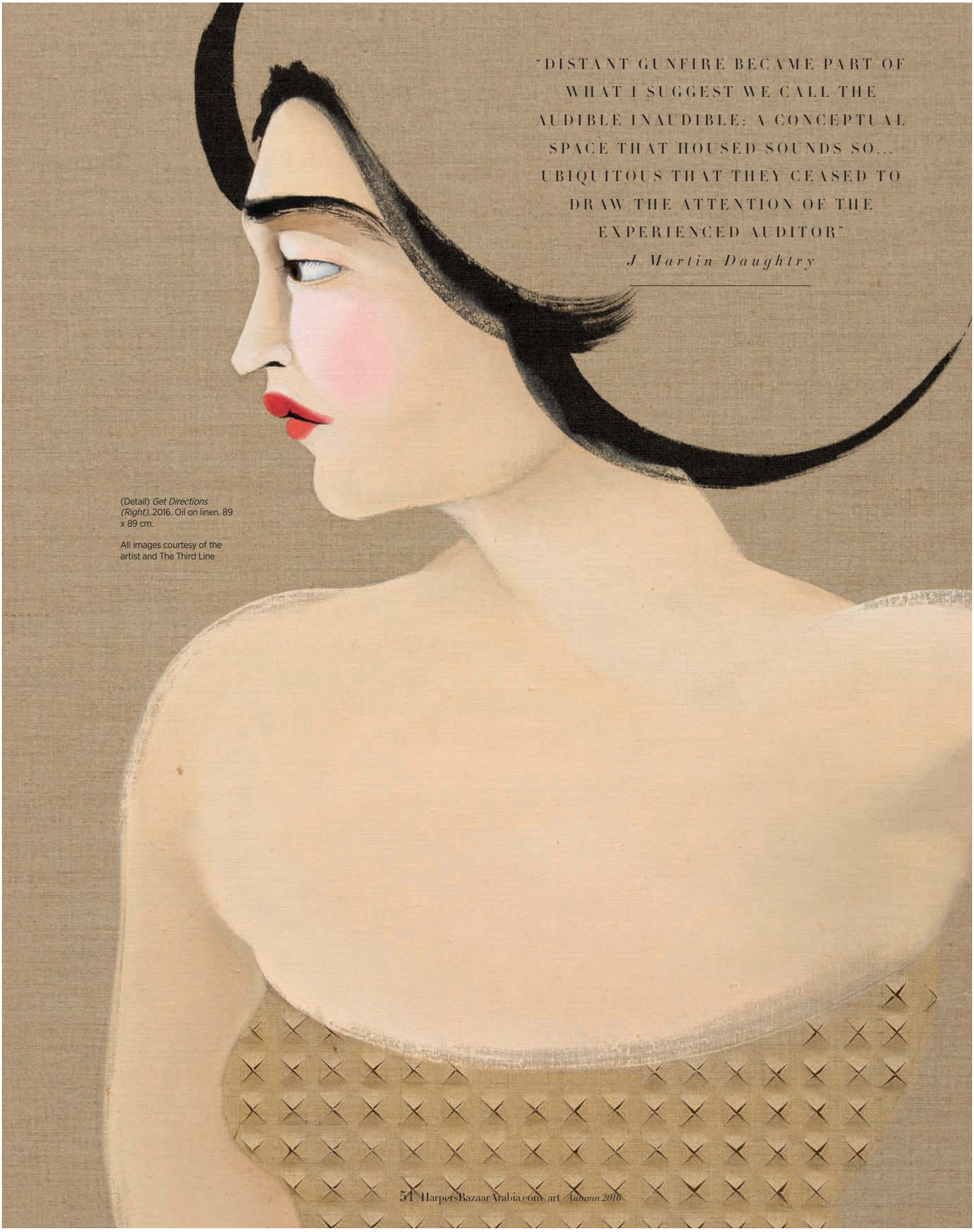
The idea is one of protection as much as penetration. "She was attracted a particular passage," suggested Daughtry, in the cloistered confines of a Soho café, over crepes, avocados and worn floorboards, as we discussed the connections between Kahraman's work and his own. "It is the story of an old woman, who upon watching the terror of the children in Iraq who heard the air sirens, wrapped her arms arms about the kids, in order to shield them from the psychic and physical sounds of the war," the professor intoned. And softly: "The paintings are meant to be her arms, Hayv's arms." Shielding. Safeguarding. Yet these feminine forms, clothed in sound, are at once protected from and subjected to overwhelming sonic violence; for the ceremonial slits, ritually cut into Kahraman's canvases are arranged in a distinctive pattern. At first glance, this design seems to only be a simple square, but in upon examination, is revealed to trace the flowering form of the recognisable outline of the scandalous L-RAD. This literal sound weapon, possibility the most reprehensible object in the US arsenal, is capable of extraordinary destruction upon the civilian and combatant population alike, not limited, if employed, to deafness, brain damage, and death.

The betrayal remains on the level of both art and artist. Commenting on her ever conflicted relationship with her country of residence and move to the US, Kahraman says, "It was difficult to be in a place at war with my own country… There were feelings of guilt, of betraying my people." This is the betrayal of the exile, profoundly and perversely complicated by the war-mongering mentality of her new home. However, the nostalgic trauma for Kahraman is doubled by an artistically, if not intellectually, or philosophically necessary seduction. This second level of deceit presents itself on that of the image, as the longed for Oriental and Orientalised body contorts itself into alluring forms, which are revealed, upon closer inspection, to be not more than the interrogation positions pictured on these US Army cultural 'Smart Cards'—images of Iraqi submission, search, and seizure: the gentle poses of terror. One recalls the words of fellow artist Helen Marten, writing for a recent group exhibition, including on Kahraman's work: "Some forms offer postures of pain as a set of encrypted butchering instructions… the ghostly effluvium of limbs and larynxes which flower all around have gone pale all over." Arms raised, or held behind her back, lain prostrate on the ground, or in the guise of the perpetrator, holding the behind of the adjacent figure: each female portrait presents another seduction of sublimated violence as a visual exchange, the serial sonic wounds of the canvas immuring, assaulting the very victims—caught from all sides, and at every turn—that it might have hoped to defend. If victim is also the self and also the other.

"The question is," Daughtry enlivens, "what can the medium of painting and the plastic arts tell us about the psychic devastation of the sounds of war?" As it turns out, he says in his own indictment, at least in the case of Kahraman's evocative *oeuvre*, "more than music ever has." ■

Identification (Hair Colour). 2016. Oil on linen. 63.5 x 218.4 cm.

Audible Inaudible opens on 18 September at The Third Line in Alserkal Avenue. thethirdline.com



"DISTANT GUNFIRE BECAME PART OF WHAT I SUGGEST WE CALL THE AUDIBLE INAUDIBLE: A CONCEPTUAL SPACE THAT HOUSED SOUNDS SO... UBIQUITOUS THAT THEY CEASED TO DRAW THE ATTENTION OF THE EXPERIENCED AUDITOR"

J Martin Daughtry

(Detail) *Get Directions (Right)*, 2016. Oil on linen. 89 x 89 cm.

All images courtesy of the artist and The Third Line

Lowry, Vicky. "Art of War: Iraqi-born artist Hayv Kahraman captures the effects of conflict in her hauntingly beautiful paintings." *Architectural Digest.* November 2016: p. 92, illustrated.

AD
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST
ART + AUCTIONS

Hayv Kahraman's Paintings Capture the Effects of Conflict

The Iraqi-born, L.A.-based artist lived through two wars before fleeing Iraq with her family

TEXT BY VICKY LOWRY

Hayv Kahraman in her Los Angeles studio. Photo: Douglas Friedman

With their coiffed black hair, almond-shaped eyes, and scarlet lips, the women in Hayv Kahraman's paintings are all beautiful. Yet the exquisitely detailed works are as devastating as they are seductive. Detached limbs float in space. Punctures made in the canvas recall knife wounds. As for those eyes, they are heartbreakingly sad.

By the time she was just 11, the Baghdad-born (now Los Angeles–based) artist had lived through two wars before fleeing Iraq with her family. After a chaotic migration they settled in a small town in Sweden. "I was the only kid with black hair in my class," she remembers. "Because I had to assimilate, I lost who I thought I was. So I identify with the pain of other women who have been affected by war."

A scholarship led her to Florence, Italy, where Kahraman would eventually study graphic design. In her free time she'd steal away to museums to gaze at Renaissance masterpieces, absorbing the gestures of contrapposto. Marriage and a move to Arizona in 2006 coincided with the height of sectarian violence in Iraq. That's when she traded illustrating for painting, and she's been on a tear ever since.

At Art Basel in June, a striking painting of entangled nude women, titled LRAD No. 2 (after long-range acoustic devices like the air-raid sirens that terrified her as a child), was quickly snapped up by a collector. This October, following an exhibition of her paintings and sculptures at the School, Jack Shainman Gallery's outpost in Kinderhook, New York, she debuts her latest creations in a solo show at Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum. "When I first saw her work, I felt my breath leave me," says Karin Campbell, the exhibition's curator. "It's not only the bodies that draw you in but also her complex patterns. I can imagine Hayv using a teeny-tiny brush, working through these lush patterns."

Executing those decorative elements proves therapeutic for an artist whose life suffered such disruption. "For me, that pattern, that order, is a necessity," Kahraman says. "The motifs are mostly Islamic, taken from books, but also from everyday things. They remind me of my heritage."

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Hayv Kahraman: ‘How Iraqi Are You?’

MARCH 26, 2015

Art Review By Roberta Smith

by Hayv Kahraman. Credit Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Reviving once great artistic styles can be a fraught pursuit, whether or not they are part of an artist’s cultural heritage. Such styles must be transformed into something personal and contemporary that ideally also survives comparison with its inspiration. In her second solo show at this gallery, subtitled “How Iraqi Are You?” Hayv Kahraman largely pulls off this difficult feat, building on the refined figuration of Persian miniatures that are part of her Iraqi background. In Ms. Kahraman’s hands the delicacy and stylization of the source are writ large and on raw linen — evoking the pages of a Persian album — and complicated with allusions to other times, places and styles. The paintings depict pairs and groups of nearly identical women who may or may not be in a harem. Shown in conversation or listening to one of their number, these women have pale skin, gestures and becalmed features that recall both the female subjects of Renaissance painting and the powdered geisha of Japanese woodblocks. Their articulated hands seem puppetlike. Their largely strapless gowns and black bouffants seem of recent American vintage even as the fabric patterns of their gowns elaborate a veritable lexicon of Arabic geometric decoration. Ms. Kahraman has devised several stylizations of her own, especially in the ways the fabrics drape and overlap while remaining flat, and in details like eyebrows and those dark bouffants (which, for viewers of a certain age may recall Lady Bird Johnson’s hairdos).

As explained in Arabic captions beneath the images, the scenes are from Ms. Kahraman’s childhood, in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and later in Sweden, to which her family relocated when she was young and where the necessity of learning Swedish caused amusing linguistic misunderstandings. Punch lines go rogue in red ink along the borders. The gallery provides English translations of the captions and they are revealing, but it is foremost the sense of a style being reborn and the ambience of female empowerment and intimacy that keep you involved.

Jack Shainman Gallery
513 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through April 4

THE NEW YORKER

Mar 23, 2015

ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"Björk." Through June 7.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
"On Kawara—Silence." Through May 3.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
"Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic." Through May 24.

FRICK COLLECTION
"Coypel's Don Quixote Tapestries." Through May 17.

JEWISH MUSEUM
"Repetition and Difference." Through Aug. 9.

NEW MUSEUM
"Surround Audience: 2015 Triennial." Through May 15.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum
"The Plains Indians: Artists of Earth and Sky"
The zenith of the cultures that are celebrated in this wondrous show of some hundred and fifty artifacts lasted barely two hundred years. It started in 1680, when Pueblo Indians seized the steeds of Spanish settlers whom they had driven out of what is now New Mexico, and ended with the killing of more than two hundred Lakota men, women, and children by federal troops at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890. Just about everything in the exactingly selected and elegantly installed show—war clubs, shields, garments, headdresses, many pipes, bags, a saddle, a bear-claw necklace, dolls, cradleboards—impresses as a peak artistic achievement. For example, "Robe with Mythic Bird" (1700-40), from an unknown tribe of the Eastern Plains: a tanned buffalo hide pigmented with a spiky abstraction, probably of a thunderbird, in red and black, which rivals the most exciting modern art. Through May 10.

Museum of Biblical Art
"Sculpture in the Age of Donatello"
In 1425, after years of carving lifelike but stern figures for the façade of Florence's Duomo, Donatello crafted an almost unbearably forceful statue of a prophet (perhaps Habakkuk), whose bald head, scored mustache, and flayed cheeks give him the mien of a burn victim. The sculpture was meant to be seen from seventy feet below; viewed in the gallery, Donatello's foreshortening resolves into an ominous emaciation, as if one of Giacometti's tortured figures had been teleported five hundred years back in time. The other works here—including four wooden models for Brunelleschi's dome and three copies of panels from Ghiberti's baptistery doors—offer a pleasant reminder of the Duomo's significance to the early Renaissance. Although the show's arguments may not have much more heft than your average European package tour, the chance to see such glories outside Italy is rare. Through June 14.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Eliot Elisofon
The American photojournalist, who died in 1973, is best known for his work for *Life* in the nineteen-forties and fifties. Some of those pictures crop up in this shrewd survey, notably a group of portraits taken in 1942 in a French-Moroccan concentration camp. But the show's over-all focus is broader, including New York street-scapes from the thirties, as evocative as anything by Berenice Abbott, and charming images of children at play that would pair nicely with those by Helen Levitt. Still-lifes shot in the sculptor David Smith's factory-like studio dig into the down-and-dirty side of the creative process. Through April 18. (Gitterman, 41 E. 57th St. 212-734-0868.)

"Aldus Manutius: A Legacy More Lasting Than Bronze"
At the end of the fifteenth century, fifty years after Gutenberg invented movable type, Greek literature was still being kept alive in handwritten manuscript. As this fascinating exhibition reveals, we owe the preservation of the classics in large part to Aldo Manuzio—his Latinized name was Aldus Manutius—who emigrated from the Papal States to Venice to set up shop as a printmaker. Along with the complete works of Aristotle (one of whose volumes features an exquisite drop-cap delta entangled in vines), Aldus published Virgil, in slanting letters of his own design. He called the format Aldine; we call it italic. One of the leading humanists in the booming Serene Republic, Aldus had connections both to the Venetian Senate and to the Pope; a volume of Cicero's letters on view here threatens plagiarists with excommunication. Even that risk was not enough to stop dozens of wannabe Alduses,

When she was eleven, in 1992, the Arab-Kurdish artist Hayv Kahraman fled with her family from Baghdad to Stockholm in the wake of the first Gulf War. She went on to study graphic design in Florence and now lives in the Bay Area. Kahraman's tautly lyrical paintings on linen (including the ten-foot-wide "Samoot la Moot," which was completed this year) reflect this enlacing of cultural influences. At the Jack Shainman gallery through April 4.

COURTESY HAYV KAHRAMAN/JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

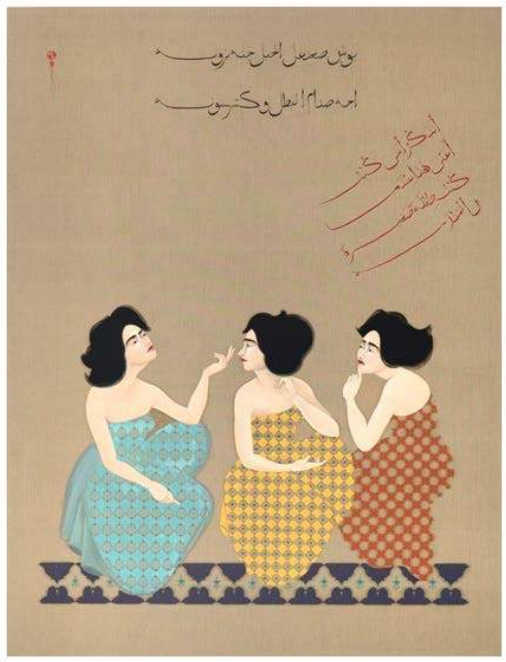
GUERNICA / a magazine of art & politics

Inside / Outside

Alex Zafiris interviews Hayv Kahraman

March 16, 2015

The artist on refugee trauma, female oppression, and her new show, How Iraqi Are You?



Hayv Kahraman, *Broken Teeth,* 2014. Oil on linen, 96 x 73 x 2 in.

Iraqi artist Hayv Kahraman was ten years old when her family fled Baghdad during the Gulf War. They ended up in Sweden, where she spent her teenage years. Subsequently, she moved to Italy to study graphic design at the Accademia d'Arte e Design in Florence, and is now based in San Francisco. Her work has consistently dealt with female suffering in the Middle East, depicting delicate, beautiful women in moments of death, war, suicide, and depression.

Her latest project, *How Iraqi Are You?*, currently showing at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, offers a shift in perspective. Eight large canvases, each approximately 100 by 80 inches, present seemingly harmless scenes: women sitting in a garden, or talking together.

Black and red Arabic script underlays and winds about the images. Kahraman is directly referencing the *Maqamat al Hariri*, a twelfth-century illuminated text that focused on the everyday life of Iraqis. But even when one cannot understand the writing, the paintings exude sadness, distance, and disconnect. By the entrance, the gallery has a translation guide for visitors. In "Broken Teeth," the black script reads: "Bush climbed up a mountain like a pussycat up came Saddam the hero and broke his teeth." The red script reads: "I remember that I used to sing this when I was a child in school." In "Person Nummer," in which two women are lifting their skirts, one offering a small piece of paper to the other, the black script reads: "When you arrive to Sweden you are given a personal identity number 'person nummer.' That is pronounced 'peshoon nummer.' In the Iraqi dialect peshoon means vagina."

Hayv Kahraman, *Person nummer,* 2015. Oil on linen, 96 x 73 x 2 in.
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman gallery.

Distant memories, misunderstandings, and confusion present another kind of violence: one of childhood alienation and trauma. While Kahraman's art is always intensely personal, her previous characters and their predicaments were universally and instantly recognizable. These new paintings reveal the invisible and psychological confines of fear, belonging, and culture; the limits of memory and time; and how forced displacement, while harrowing, can also create a strong and vivid inner self.

Kahraman's work has been exhibited internationally—including at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Paul

Robeson Center for the Arts in Princeton—and belongs to several public collections, such as the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha and The Rubell Family Collection in Miami. I spoke with the artist via Skype and email, while she was visiting Florence with her seven-month-old daughter. She was ebullient and direct.

—*Alex Zafiris for* Guernica

Portrait of Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman gallery.

Guernica: These works feel to me as though you are explaining something, or teaching.

Hayv Kahraman: Yes, that's exactly what it is. Archiving my history. My daughter was born in the States—what kind of connection will she have to her Iraqi side? Much of it is personal memories that I want to pass on to her. My work is very research-based, and oftentimes when I delve into a subject, I randomly come across something else that I feel meshes perfectly. In this case, I was researching the *Maqamat al Hariri*, and someone posted a funny link on social media, "Test your Iraqiness." A few weeks later, another person posted my work on a "Baghdad" Facebook page that has over half a million followers. The post described me as an Iraqi artist. The interesting part was the comments. Many said that I'm not "Iraqi enough" to represent Iraq, because I had left. My work has always raised questions of identity, especially since I fled when I was very young. I never developed a full sense of my own culture in the same way that my parents did. Wherever I lived after that, I was defined as the "other." These works are personal narratives, but they are also a way for me to transcribe and archive a history that I feel I am forgetting.

When you are in an abusive situation, you don't necessarily realize it, you don't want to admit things to yourself. I was oblivious, not connecting my personal life to the work that was coming out.

Guernica: There is an inherent conflict in your body of work: about losing this connection, but also a strong distaste for the way women are treated in Iraq.

Hayv Kahraman: That would be somewhat correct. It's not necessarily what I consciously focused on. It's a subconscious thing. The work comes out, without thinking. My family was pretty open. I personally didn't necessarily experience gender discrimination in that sense, but of course around me I would see things happening, and then I would relate. I was also in an abusive relationship a couple of years back. I didn't know it at the time. I would see [violence against women] in the news, and I would feel immense empathy. My mom would ask me, "Hey, why all of a sudden this fascination with women?" When you are in an abusive situation, you don't necessarily realize it, you don't want to admit things to yourself. I was oblivious, not connecting my personal life to the work that was coming out. When the relationship ended, I started putting the puzzle together. At that time I was pushing the personal away. The gender issues, the feminine aspect of the work started then, when I was going through all these things. It was really cathartic and eye-opening for me, realizing, holy moly… It's as if you've been sleeping, and you have just woken up.

Hayv Kahraman, *Naboog,* 2014. Oil on linen, 115 x 110 inches (two panels, 115 x 55 inches each). ©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman gallery.

Guernica: Given your heritage, and how it is often narrowly perceived in the West, your work has come to be labeled as activism. But was there a conscious drive toward that, at the same time?

Hayv Kahraman: Absolutely. Whether I wanted to admit the fact that I was very close to these women or not at the time, I was still consciously addressing these issues head on. I've always been an advocate for gender issues. My grandmother was actually one of the lead figures of the first women's organization in Kurdistan, so the concept of equal rights was passed down to my mother, and then myself. What made the work go even further was my personal experience in an abusive situation that enhanced my response to gender discrimination I was hearing about from the media and my family in Kurdistan.

Guernica: These new works definitely appear to deal with trauma.

Hayv Kahraman: On many levels. The manuscripts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—among them *Maqamat al Hariri*—were created by the Baghdad school of miniature painting. These are beautiful illustrations, very different from the Moghul or Persian miniature paintings, as the emphasis was laid on the expression of the figures rather than a detailed background. Another amazing thing was that sexuality was prominent in these illustrations: we see examples of the main character showing his penis, as well as a full frontal view of a woman giving birth! Remember, this is at the height of the Islamic period. However, this quickly growing art form came to an abrupt end when the Mongols laid siege to Baghdad and destroyed countless historical documents and books. They say the waters of the Tigris turned black from the amount of ink seeping out of books flung into the river.

The commonality in these histories—contemporary Baghdad and thirteenth-century Baghdad—seems to be this overwhelming loss or trauma, and then the rebuilding of something new. For me, and many others in the diaspora at this point in time, it's a rebuilding that stems from the margins, from a migrant consciousness of sorts. In thinking about depicting a scene from the ordinary life of an Iraqi, I needed to focus on the experience of an Iraqi immigrant or refugee, since this is my reality, but also [that of] 20 percent of the Iraqi population.

Guernica: I read that when you first moved to the States, you went through a depression, because it was the country that had hurt yours so much. You felt tremendous guilt, particularly as a free individual, compared to the women suffering oppression in Iraq. What kind of reading and research did you pursue during this time?

Hayv Kahraman, *In Line,* 2007. Sumi on paper, 23 x 60 in.

Hayv Kahraman: My main source of reference was the news. I would put it on and sit and listen for hours. I would then start researching a particular subject that I had heard about and start painting. So throughout the work it was constant news about what was going on in Iraq. This I think was a way for me to justify my existence in the West. The work served as an avenue to address concerns and actively do something about it. The works I did during that time were pieces on paper, like "In Line," based on the self-immolation that was happening in Kurdistan, where women would pour gasoline on themselves and light themselves on fire because they couldn't stand their domestic existence.

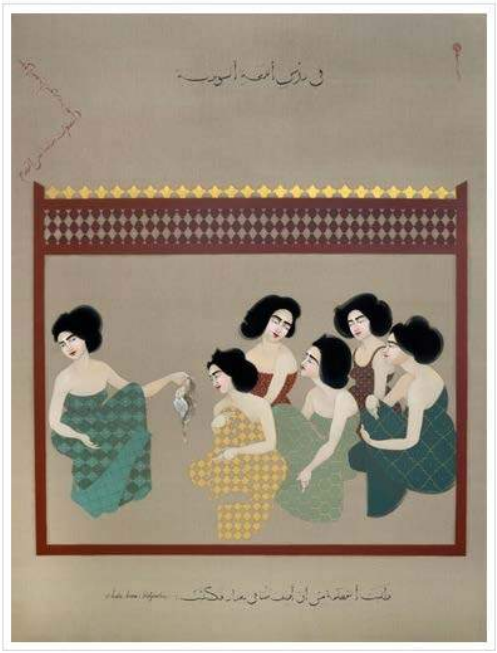
I can now see these Arabic letters from the perspective of an American or a Swede, and that terrifies me.

Guernica: Can you talk more about your use of the *Maqamat al Hariri*?

Hayv Kahraman: The process of writing the text into the works became somewhat performative, very much part of the work itself, since I was actively relearning how to write [in Arabic]. I didn't want to copy blindly. I took my time to examine the original text, each letter, the thickness of the stroke, the shape, the angle. But I was determined not to force anything. I wanted it to be as natural as possible. I was relearning how to write, read, and speak my mother tongue. The tongue that I have forgotten, and don't use anymore. The tongue I regret to have not continued to learn. I look at these Arabic letters with estranged eyes now. I was exported, and so was my language. But it's also my fault for not having kept it alive. I was too busy learning the Western language and training my eyes to adapt to English letters. I can now see these Arabic letters from the perspective of an American or a

Swede, and that terrifies me. It makes me want to reiterate them, paint them, write them, relearn them, and re-memorize them—recover them. I am trying to recapture my amputated mother tongue. At age thirty-three, I am searching for my nine-year-old self that spoke and wrote fluent Arabic.

The text in the manuscripts was written in the calligraphic "*Naskh*"—that is derived from "*Naskha*," which means to transcribe or copy—and is a more fluid and fast script, often used to comment and transcribe the Quran. It was written in black ink with all the vowels and marks. The red text was added later as commentary often made during soirées in which the elite gathered to read the book and decipher the meaning. I wanted to implement some of the formal qualities of the old *Maqamat*, such as color schemes, structures, and composition. The frames engulfing the figures in some of the works are meant to represent certain architectural structures, like a house or a public building, or a school. Compositionally, the folios were divided with the text, either in the bottom or the top, with the image in between. These are all things that I've tried to implement in the works.



Hayv Kahraman, *Swedish Class,* 2015. Oil on linen, 96 x 73 x 2 in.

Guernica: Despite the subject matter, the images contain a very distinct feeling of clarity and control. There is structural and symmetrical logic. I know that you studied graphic design in Italy. Form and function seem to have a new resonance here—of containing and moving past these conflicts.

Hayv Kahraman: Yes! My process is very calculated and thought out. I know exactly what I'm going to paint before I even stretch my canvases. In these works I've used raw linen, which has a very specific tone. Interestingly, the tone and hue of the linen changes depending on the season, on the amount of sun and rain the crops receive. I've chosen a warmer hue for these works, and I have them shipped to me from Belgium. I then stretch my canvases and coat them with rabbit-skin glue. This seals the linen and creates a sheen. It's important to spend time on this process, since the exposed linen is essential. Most of my works lack backgrounds because I don't like to define contexts. I want the figures to be in constant flux; neither here nor there. I then do a lot of sketching and planning in terms of composition and color schemes before I start. Once I lay my first stroke, I know exactly what I want. There is some room for error, which I love, but also dread as I lose control! But the majority is predetermined. The only thing that is spontaneous is the pattern. This is somewhat intuitive, and I feel this is needed in the work. Perhaps because it reminds me of my home, and I feel that it creates a geometric order in the work. Living as a refugee I have found that I need to seek out placidity and order to survive.

Hayv Kahraman: How Iraqi Are You? runs through April 4, 2015, at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York.

ROOMS

Wednesday 06.17.15

Posted by Amadeus Redha

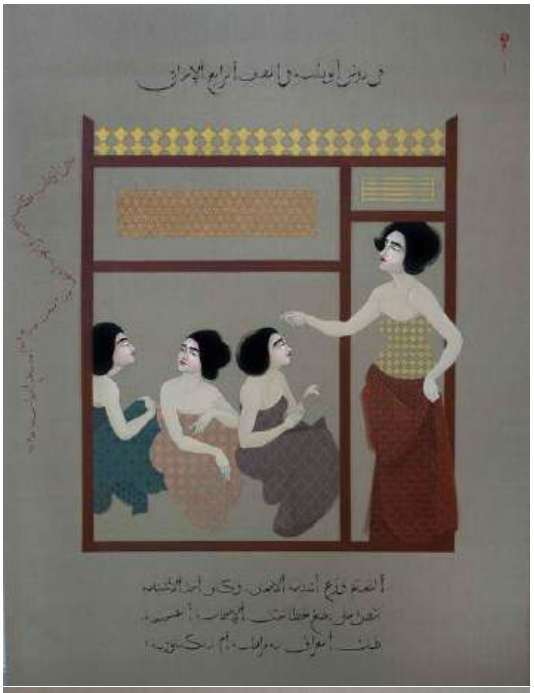
An interview with artist Hayv Kahraman

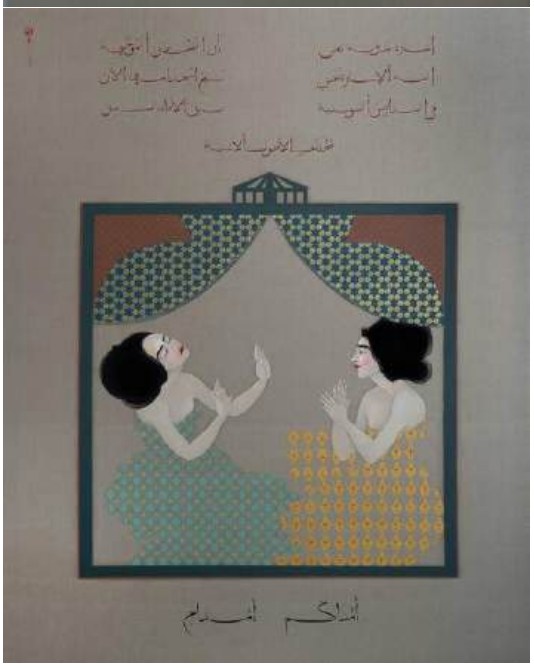
Iraqi-born artist Hayv Kahraman has blown away the world with her refined and virtuosic ability to tell a story. But what about her own story?

In a previous interview, you've said 'I will always be a tourist wherever I go.' That was six years ago – how has that changed now? Do you believe that the older you get, the stronger your affinity for Iraq grows?

That hasn't changed much and I think that feeling applies to Iraq as well. My relationship with Iraq, "*my homeland*" is problematic since I left at a young age

and so I wasn't able to establish a strong link to the culture and life at large. My parents on the other hand, have decades of memories to replay and that is something I have always wanted to have. Perhaps the yearning to create a stronger affinity with Iraq is more relevant in my life right now since I am a new mother. My daughter was born in the United States and having her learn her heritage is important to me.





What have been the reactions from Middle-Eastern women to your work? And what have been the reactions from Iraqi people to your work?

It was interesting seeing the different impressions people had during the opening of *How Iraqi are you?* Many Iraqi's braved the NY cold to come see the show. They expressed an intimate relationship with the works as we shared the same memories – a collective memory, of war in a distant country that was once our home. They wanted me to add more paintings to the collection as they told me stories and idioms they remembered using back in the day. And there was a glimpse of pride in their voices as they saw their colloquial Arabic written on a canvas in a New York gallery. In terms of feedback from Middle Eastern women, so far they have been positive and many identify with the works.

Being of an Iraqi Kurdish background,

you and/or your family must have experienced persecution from the Ba'ath party. In what way has that influenced your work?

Yes that's correct. My parents were persecuted in many ways. My mom was interrogated once and my father was pressured to teach a certain way (he was a university professor). I only experienced this once in school during our "Wattania" class. This is a class introduced into Iraqi schools in 1978 by Saddam and the Ba'ath party. It taught the politics of Iraq and the region from the perspective of the Ba'ath party. One day the teacher handed out a test. One of the questions read: "*circle the correct word; is Iraq a democracy or a dictatorship?"* I was 9 or 10 years old then and didn't know the difference between the words. Ironically I circled *dictatorship* and was called in after class, given an extensive lecture by the teacher on how I even dared to say that and of course hit with a ruler. I now understand that it wasn't the teacher's fault as she was pressured to do/act this way by the government. This memory has manifested into a work part of the series "How Iraqi are you". (See attached image "Wattania Class")

I myself have had a similar story to yours. Having fled Baghdad (as a result of Ba'ath persecution) with my family in 1997, I moved to London. Now I'm beginning to learn how to read and write Arabic. For your most recent exhibition, *How Iraqi are you?* You also had to relearn how to write Arabic yourself. Could you tell us about that?

The texts in the works of *How Iraqi are you?* are personal memories from growing up in Baghdad as well as tongue twisters, aphorisms, and stories of existing as a refugee in Sweden all in which are written in colloquial Arabic (Iraqi). The works are based on the 13th century Baghdadi illuminated manuscripts or more specifically "Maqamat al Hariri" that narrated the everyday life of an Iraqi at the

time. I wanted to use that idea and think of it from the perspective of todays Iraqi immigrant. The process of writing the text in the works became somewhat performative for me and very much part of the work itself since I was actively relearning how to write. The calligraphy in the Maqamat is that of the "Naskh" which is a slightly looser type often written while being narrated and in the Koran. As I drew inspiration from that, I still didn't want to copy blindly. I took my time to examine the original text in the manuscripts, each letter, the thickness of the stroke, the shape and the angle. I was re-learning how to write my language as well as read and speak my mother tongue. The tongue that I had/have grown to forget and not use anymore. The tongue I regret not have continued to learn. I look at these Arabic letters with estranged eyes now. I was exported and so was my language. But it's also my fault for not having kept it alive. I was too busy learning the western language and training my eyes to adapt to English letters. I can now see these Arabic letters from the perspective of an American or a Swede and that terrifies me. It makes me want to reiterate them, paint them, write them, re-learn them and re-memorize them: recover them. I am on the search for recapturing my amputated mother tongue. At age 34 I am searching for my 9 year old self that spoke and wrote fluent Arabic.

I've shown *How Iraqi Are You?* to some of my family members who are also living in London. They found it really interesting how you managed to capture some very specific Baghdadi colloquialisms and sayings. Do you remember these sayings from your childhood or did you have to research them?

I'm glad you showed them to your family! I'm always in search for aphorisms and collective memories. This series has become somewhat of an archiving process for me so if you think of anything do share!

Back to your question, yes they are personal. I remember singing them, saying them and living them. Words like "Ummodach" (that translates to a swear word and is accompanied by a hand gesture) that is now appropriated in Swedish schools among kids of diverse ethnicities; this of course due to

Sweden. Or political sayings that we used to sing as kids in school

Are there any future projects from you that we can look forward to?

At this point I am still working on this series, collecting aphorisms and stories. I will be showing more works in Dubai in the fall and look forward to engaging with that side of the world.

All images obtained at the courtesy of the artist

Hayv Kahraman

Columbus, Ohio • Oct 07, 2015 • 67° Clear
The Columbus Dispatch

EXHIBIT

Pizzuti Collection exhibit shows people on the periphery

Kawliya 2 by Hayv Kahraman

"Us Is Them" continues through April 2 at the Pizzuti Collection, 632 N. Park St. Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays.

Call 614-280-4004, or visit www.pizzuticollection.org

By Melissa Starker

For The Columbus Dispatch • Sunday October 4, 2015 5:00 AM

Differences of race, gender, religion, culture and economic status continue to be a source of violent societal rifts worldwide.

Inside the Pizzuti Collection, however, all galleries are currently devoted to an exhibition that's about viewing these divides from a new perspective.

"Us Is Them" presents the work of more than 40 international artists. Each makes those differences an essential part of his or her practice.

In a healthy mix of mediums, with viewpoints that can be observational or deeply personal, the group creates a powerful representation of many of society's marginalized elements.

Argentina-born artist Judi Werthein captures two views of a performance by a band of musicians forced to flee war in Colombia in her two-channel video installation, *La Tierra de Los Libres* — one of several time-based works in the show.

The group, whose members now perform in a California restaurant, are projected from opposing angles as they reinterpret *The Star-Spangled Banner* as a vibrant, danceable Spanish-language anthem.

The homeless population of Israel takes center stage in the large, clean C-prints of Adi Nes' "Biblical Stories" series. His image of *Noah* involves a man lying naked in the street in front of a grimy DVD rental kiosk, while *Abraham and Isaac* takes the form of an older man and a boy he's toting around in a shopping cart filled with cans and bottles.

Diane Wah, a Haitian-American artist, conjures the plight of survivors of Haiti's 2010 earthquake with *Nes Me Quitte Pas* (*Don't Leave Me*), a photographic diptych of nude black bodies lying in piles of rubble, surrounded by handwritten French text.

Looming even larger than Wah's large-format pieces is the series of nine massive self-portraits that make up *Family Tree* by Chinese artist Zhang Huan. They document a performance in which he turned his face into a canvas for calligraphy about the ancient Chinese practice of determining personality traits from facial features.

Ultimately, the dense, inky words overtake and obscure his actual visage.

Another Chinese artist, Chang Xugong, offers a colorful yet critical view of modern Chinese society with *Embroidered Portrait Series #13*.

The beautifully bright work, featuring two figures reveling in the trappings of materialism, is both a celebration of the country's history of producing exquisite embroidery as well as an acid-dipped commentary on its growing fascination with accumulating things.

Works of jaw-dropping power arise frequently as one explores the three floors of this exhibition. They range from the shimmering beauty of Iraqi-born artist Hayv Kahraman's large-scale, pattern-infused feminist portrait *Kawliya 2* to American Hank Willis Thomas' *Strange Fruit*, which connects the lure of a pro basketball career for young African-American men with the lynchings of an earlier, darker age.

But of all the viewing areas in the Pizzuti Collection, the small upstairs gallery devoted to the work of African-American female artists stands out for sheer, gut-level effect.

This is due in large part to the contrast of Mickalene Thomas' joyous, rhinestone-embellished testaments to the strength and beauty of black women with the unflinching, sexually explicit work of Kara Walker, which illuminates the historic enslavement and subjugation of women of color.

TUPELO QUARTERLY

WE HOLD THE GATE OPEN

June 23, 2015

Hayv Kahraman

TO NEGOTIATE OTHERNESS INTO THE WORK: A Micro-Interview with Hayv Kahraman

by Elaine Sexton

ES: The theme of this issue is of pilgrimage, voyage & return. The elegant and evident mix of influences in your work from Japanese calligraphy, Italian Renaissance painting, a illuminated Arab manuscripts of everyday life suggests a voyage & return in the art making itself. You have modeled this new body of work on miniature Iraqi manuscripts, retai gesture of Arabic text, but in large scale. For observers who don't read Arabic, one feels we are missing something. Is this "missing" what you want us to experience? And, is w are missing important to fully appreciate the work?

HK: That's a very good question. Let me start with saying that my process, more so with these works, is rather intimate and solitary at times. So days can go by where I'm in m painting without even seeing anyone. This body of work was also very much about the personal and connecting or rather re-connecting with my 10-year-old self who read and fluent Arabic; remembering my childhood and narrating it to myself so I wouldn't forget. The Arabic text for me was not only about re-learning how to write but also archiving tha

of learning as the paintings progressed. Sort of like my own private performance. I hadn't really given much thought to how it would be perceived until I had a studio visit with so who didn't read Arabic. My first visitor felt uncomfortable with the fact that he couldn't access the work like I could. At first this made me worried but eventually I realized that is e how I felt when I fled Baghdad to Sweden and encountered "Swedish" for the first time. I was in a foreign land trying to penetrate the fabric of life.

It was interesting seeing the different impressions people had during the opening as well. Many Iraqi's braved the New York cold to come see the show. They expressed an inti relationship with the works as we shared the same memories. A collective memory of war in a distant country that was once our home. They wanted me to add more paintings collection as they told me stories and idioms they remembered using back in the day. And there was a glimpse of pride in their voices as they saw their colloquial Arabic written canvas in a New York gallery.

ES: It's been said that a "migrant consciousness" feeds your visual and verbal imagery, the early childhood experience of migrating from Bagdad to Sweden to America, that yo the borders. Would you share with our readers something of how that consciousness informs this new work (shown here) from your recent exhibit, "How Iraqi Are You?"

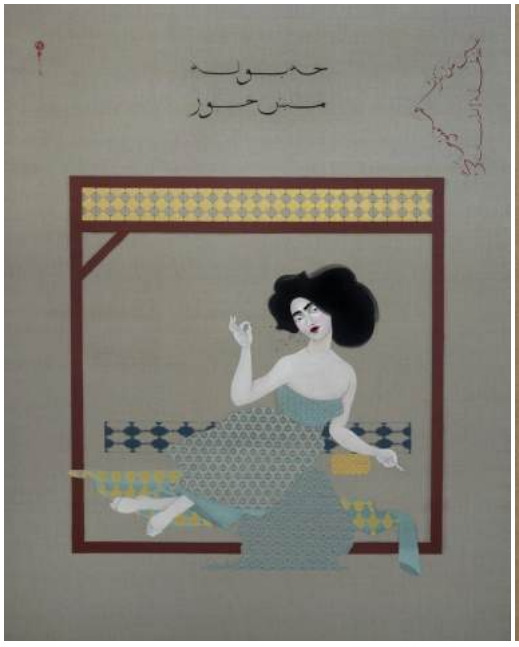
HK: My experiences have been nomadic. I think being an immigrant or refugee the yearning to "belong" somewhere is important especially for those who left because of war. T in constant search to solidify their identity in any means possible as that is the only thing that they can have as their own. It makes me think of the many Iraqi refugees in Swed dearly hold on to memorabilia from their homelands or the teenagers who back in Iraq never wore a hijab yet now wear one in Sweden as a way to assert their identities. For m idea of identity is problematic. A part of me seeks to go back to a history that was once my heritage. Another part understands that this is a utopian idea and futile in its endeav for some, this polemic happens when you "dwell within borders."

The works in "How Iraqi are you?" are based on the 13th century Baghdadi illuminated manuscripts "Maqamat al Hariri" that narrated the everyday life of an Iraqi at the time. I use that idea and think of it from the perspective of todays Iraqi immigrant. The texts in the works of "How Iraqi are you?" are personal memories from growing up in Baghdad a tongue twisters, aphorisms, and stories of existing as a refugee in Sweden all of which are written in colloquial Arabic. The process of writing the text in the works became som performative and very much part of the work itself since I was actively relearning how to write. I didn't want to copy blindly. I took my time to examine the original text in the mar each letter, the thickness of the stroke, the shape and the angle. But I was determined not to force anything. I wanted it to be as natural as possible. I was re-learning how to w language as well as read and speak my mother tongue. The tongue that I had/have grown to forget and not use anymore. The tongue I regret not to have continued to learn. I these Arabic letters with estranged eyes now. I was exported and so was my language. But it's also my fault for not having kept it alive. I was too busy learning the western lang training my eyes to adapt to English letters. I can now see these Arabic letters from the perspective of an American or a Swede and that terrifies me. It makes me want to reiter paint them, write them, re-learn them and re-memorize them; Recover them. I am on the search for recapturing my amputated mother tongue. At age 34 I am searching for my old self that spoke and wrote fluent Arabic.

ES: You have said diasporic women have to give up part of themselves. This may be seen in how you have "whitened" the skin of your women. This tension, somewhere betwe of them "passing" as one of the dominant culture she lives in yet retaining the past, her history, in the climate of the settings, the attire, the text. How did you come to making th of choices, choosing what to keep and what to let go?

HK: The quick answer to that is instinctually. I spent four years in Italy surrounded by people who studied realism from the old masters. I went to every single museum and gall was engulfed by western renaissance painting. It grew on me. I started copying the old masters and found the figures to be so beautiful. I never "read" the paintings beyond the technique. The experience was purely visual and perhaps I subconsciously chose to not "see" the themes because I knew it would derail from my observation of what I thought absolute "beauty." As my work progressed and I started talking and thinking about decoloniality, I realized that the choices I had made in the work were coming from someone colonized. Someone who was taught to think that everything white is better and that is what she should aspire to be. One of them; not an "other."

As you mention the "attire, the setting and text," these are ways for me to negotiate my otherness into the works.



Hayv Kahraman immigrated with her family to Sweden at age eleven and started painting by age twelve. She studied art in Italy at the Accademia di arte e design di Firenze in studied web design in Sweden in 2006.

Her work is included in exhibitions including Echoes: Islamic Art and Contemporary Artists, Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City; The Jameel Prize 2011–Shortlist Exhibition, Vi Albert Museum, London which traveled to venues including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Cantor Center, Stanford University; Fertile Crescent, Paul Robeson Cen Arts, Princeton; Newtopia: The State of Human Rights, Kazerne Dossin Museum, Mechelen, Belgium. Her public collections include the American Embassy, Baghdad; The Barj Foundation, Sharjah; MATHAF Museum of Modern Art, Doha; and The Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

The work featured here is from "How Iraqi Are You?" shown at **Jack Shainman Gallery** in New York (February 27-April 4, 2015), her second exhibit there. For more informatio n hayvkahraman.com.

ART+AUCTION

March 2015

THE IRAQI DIASPORA

NADA M. SHABOUT is a professor of art history and director of the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Initiative at the University of North Texas, editor of the online Mathaf Encyclopedia of Modern Art and the Arab World, *and curator of "For the Love of Beauty," an exhibition set to open next year at the Crow Collection of Asian Art in Dallas. All of her selected artists here hail from Iraq but have since relocated to other countries.*

Born in Baghdad in 1981, **Hayv Kahraman** is a graduate of the Academy of Art and Design in Florence, Italy, and the University of Umeå, Sweden, and currently lives near San Francisco. Through female allegorical figures that often refer back to antiquity, she confronts current social and political issues as well as the mundane domestic sphere. Stylistically, her work embodies her nomadic life through a synthesis of her visual experiences, engaging with Islamic art, ancient Greek art, Renaissance paintings, Japanese art, the Vienna Secession, and Art Nouveau collectively.

Kareem Risan trained and matured as an artist in Baghdad and studied with one of Iraq's main modernist painters, Shakir Hassan Al Said. He was also present in Baghdad during the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and witnessed the destruction of the city and its heritage, which affects his work to this day. His previous interpretations of Mesopotamian iconography have recently been transformed into contemporary pictorial spaces as he has sought to express his own memories of war and ruin. Though he now lives in Toronto, Risan's colors record the immediacy of his home country's feelings of pain, anguish, and shame.

In his latest multimedia works, **Mahmoud Obaidi**, who works in both Toronto and Doha, Qatar, seems wholly at ease with his diasporic designation even as his work articulates the horrors of life in Iraq. Whether creating propagandalike images or sculptures forged from knives and swords, Obaidi invokes the theatrical as a means of exploring the psychic effects of acts of violence and the duality of his life as a global artist and an Iraqi.

Nazar Yahya migrated with his family from Baghdad to Jordan in the 1990s and contributed greatly to the development of the contemporary art scene in Amman. He is currently based in Houston. His work, particularly in printmaking, navigates his life experiences with materials and subjects, as well as his relationship to art-historical traditions. This includes a number of *dafatir*, or artists' books, that are highly informed by ideas associated with Islamic manuscripts.

From top: Mahmoud Obaidi's *Untitled 2 (The Replacement Propaganda)*, 2014, *Rose Book*, 2013, is part of a series of sculptures and works on paper by Nazar Yahya, whose work updates the Islamic tradition of artistic treatments of the Koran and other texts. Hayv Kahraman's oil on linen *Nabooq*, 2014, appears in her show "How Iraqi Are You?" at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York through April 4.

Nada M. Shabout

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: WASSEM MARZOUKI; WADE WILSON ART, SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO; HAYV KAHRAMAN AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK; SUERAYA SHAHEEN

Your Guide to Armory Week's 33 Best Exhibitions

ARTSY EDITORIAL

MAR 7TH, 2015 1:08 AM

Let's face it, there's only so much time you can spend walking The Armory Show's aisles. But, New York's most jampacked week of art doesn't stop at 12th Ave. To help guide you through the best of Armory's collateral exhibitions—and some worthy ones outside the official programming too—Artsy deployed its staff on a mission this week: see and review as many shows as possible (listed alphabetically by gallery name) in only one sentence. You're welcome.

"Hayv Kahraman: How Iraqi Are You?" at Jack Shainman Gallery

Installation view of "Hayv Kahraman: How Iraqi Are You?" at Jack Shainman Gallery. Courtesy of Jack Shainman Gallery and the artist.

Taking 12th-century Iraqi manuscripts as an aesthetic jumping-off point (as well as influences of Renaissance paintings and Japanese illustrations), Iraqi-American painter Hayv Kahraman's large-scale paintings are an ode to the sensuous, sometimes "saucy" female—vignettes that display scenes of camaraderie and demure playfulness, which counter a feeling of otherness and repression. —M.C.

An Exile From Iraq Paints Herself Into Ancient Manuscripts

The Huffington Post | By Mallika Rao (/mallika-rao/) (/users/login/)

Posted: 03/06/2015 9:05 am EST Updated: 03/06/2015 11:59 am EST

Hayv Kahraman (http://hayvkahraman.com/) was in her fourth grade history class in Baghdad when the question was asked: Is Iraq a democracy or a dictatorship? Not knowing what either word meant, she guessed "dictatorship." This proved to be the wrong choice, no matter how right the answer was: the next day she was punished with a ruler in front of the other students.

Wattania, by Hayv Kahraman. cCurtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

In her new series, "How Iraqi Are You?," the Iraqi-born painter explores the title question by mining past experiences like the story above. Modeled after Arabic illuminated manuscripts, the series draws specific inspiration from Maqamat al Hariri, a canonical 12th century text describing the everyday life of Iraqis of the time.

Wattania. This image recreates a scene from Kahraman's childhood Wattania, or History, class. Photo courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Using photographs of herself as the models for all the subjects depicted, Kahraman illustrates vignettes from her actual life, captioned with explanations. This story includes her time in Sweden, where her family eventually fled after leaving Iraq. Here she was given a personnummer, the Swedish identification number assigned to every citizen. This exchange provides the basis for one of Kahraman's more slapstick images, capitalizing on a bit of accidental wordplay linking the Swedish institution with an Iraqi word for female genitalia.

Hayv Kahraman

"When you arrive to Sweden you are given a personal identity number 'person nummer.' That is pronounced “peshoon nummer.” In the Iraqi dialect peshoon means vagina." Caption and photo courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

The vignettes aren’t wholly funny or sad, serious or casual. They are in a state of limbo, like the immigrant herself.

"'In Swedish class.' The teacher asked me to describe my home in Baghdad so I wrote 'vihade horor I trädgården.' Horor means prostitutes in the Swedish language while hönor means chickens." Caption and photo courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

In the exhibit literature the curator Octavio Zaya finds meaning in the porcelain skin of Kahraman's figures, which recall Renaissance paintings and Japanese portraiture. Kahraman paints her characters "without background or specific context, amid a flux of meanings and words, neither here nor there," Zaya writes. In this way she captures the blurring of self that redefines immigrants. Her women are losing and gaining knowledge, "as if," Zaya continues:

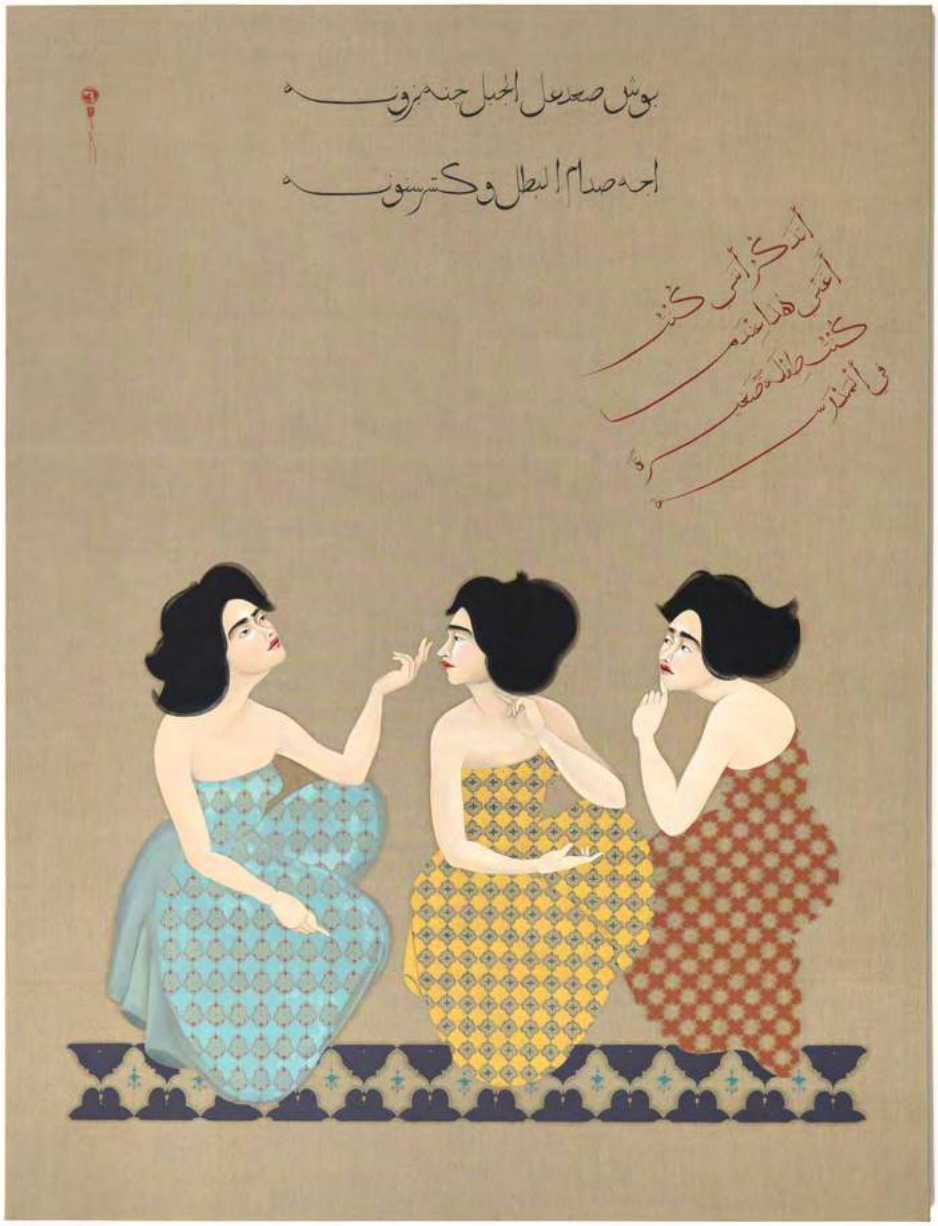
"in the diaspora, these figures would have reached a moment where they viewed themselves as non-different, as the passersby who do not stand out, who only retain from the past the little, unassuming, perfectly safe secrets and mysteries of the mother tongue, its games and pleasures."

Hayv Kahraman's work is currently on view at the Armory Show 2015 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/05/armory-show-week_n_6796844.html?utm_hp_ref=arts). "How Iraqi Are You?" can be seen at the Jack Shainman Gallery in Manhattan through April 4. For more on the exhibit, visit the gallery's website (http://www.jackshainman.com/).

- Ummo-doch

Is a hand gesture indicating whomever its aimed to as ignorant, now commonly used in Swedish schools among children of all ethnicities. Photo and caption courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

- Broken Teeth



Bush climbed up a mountain like a pussycat up came Saddam the hero and broke his teeth. Writes Kahraman: "I remember that I used to sing this when I was a child in school." Photo and caption courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

- Kachakchi

The word 'Kachakchi' in the Iraqi dialect means smuggler and is used in terms of smuggling goods and people, as for example smuggling them illegally outside their country. Caption reads: They made us fake passports and took us in a group to Sweden. Photo and caption courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

- I have a Nabog fruit, you have a Nabog fruit. I give you from my Nabog fruit, you give me from your Nabog fruit. If my Nabog fruit is tastier, I give you from my Nabog fruit. If your Nabog fruit is tastier, you give me from your Nabog fruit. Writes Kahraman: "I remember singing this when I was a child in school and we had this Nabog tree in our garden in Baghdad." Photo and caption courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
- Samoot Lamoot

Samoot “silence” Lamoot “no death;” whoever utters a word will die. Writes Kahraman: "Samoot Lamoot is a Baghdadi figure of speech about the necessity of keeping silent and not standing up to the ruling authority. The expression has its origin in the tradition of the Grandma Stories. When it was time for the Grandma to begin narrating her fairy tale to the children around her, she would first utter this expression to stop their clamor and noiseand bring them into silence. On hearing this utterance, every child would subside into silence, calmness and a state of attentiveness in order to listen to the Grandma." Photo and caption courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

- Barboug / Barabeeg

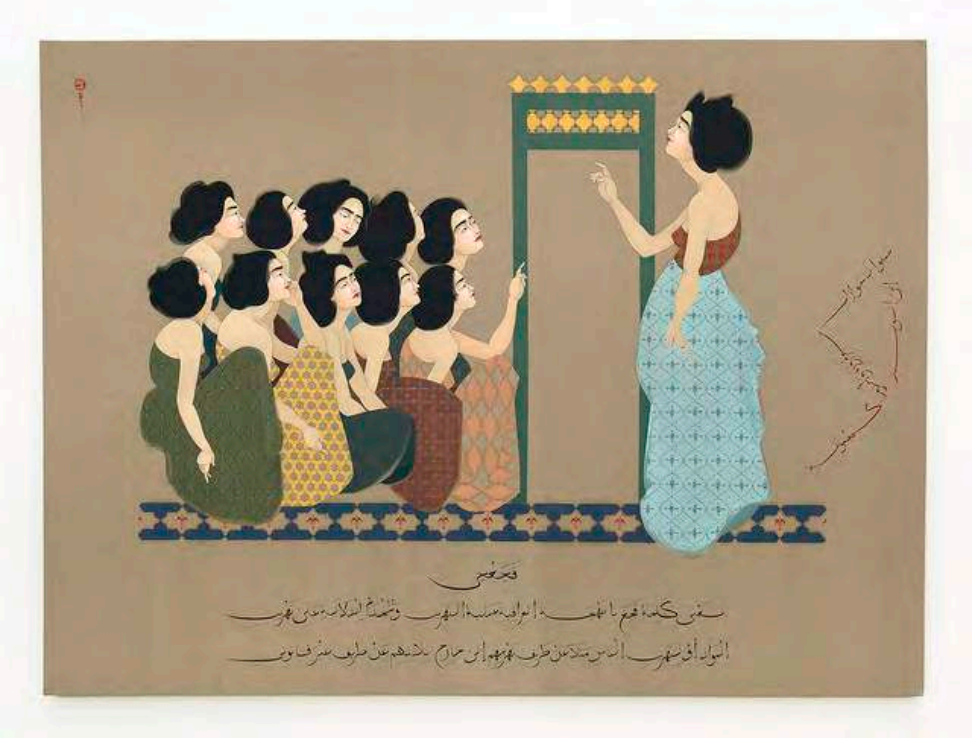
Barboug “a broken earthenware jar” that never sinks. This is one of the witty aphorisms in the middle and southern parts of Iraq. Barboug is used metaphorically in the collective consciousness as a term to denigrate women. The thirteenth century poet Al-Bahaa Zuhair refers to the word in his line: “No wonder he escaped unharmed as barbougs typically stay afloat.” It generally refers to the woman who is saucy and sharp-tongued or the one who is defiant and stirs up trouble. Photo and caption courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

MORE: Hayv Kahraman, Hayv Kahraman How Iraqi Are You, How Iraqi Are You, Iraqi Artists, Muslim Artists

Suggest a correction

On View: Hayv Kahraman's "How Iraqi Are You?" at Jack Shainman Gallery

by Nastia VoynovskayaPosted on March 3, 2015



Hayv Kahraman, *Kachakchi*, 2015, oil on linen, 79 x 108 inches

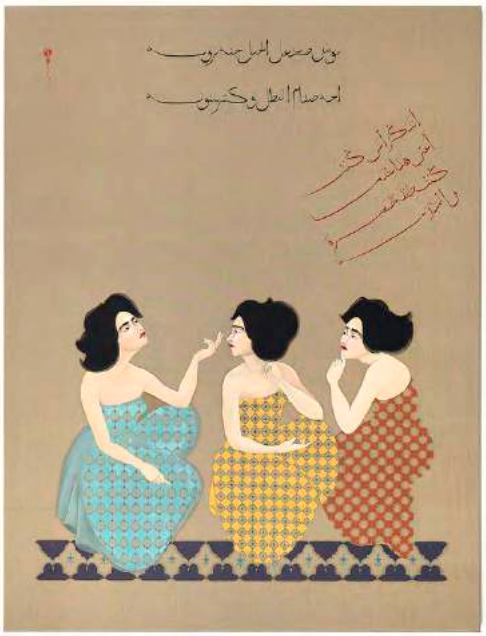
"Expatriation and exile fracture forever any sense of belonging and any hope of ever being complete," wrote curator Octavio Zaya in his statement for Hayv Kahraman's solo show at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, "How Iraqi Are You?" Kahraman's autobiographical paintings on linen ruminate on her early childhood in Iraq, her upbringing as a refugee in Sweden, and her struggle of navigating two disparate cultural identities.

With their compositions mimicking 12th-century illuminated manuscripts, the pieces feature identical female figures sharing activities that define young womanhood. Though Kahraman modeled them all after her likeness, some figures appear have a master-disciple relationship while others look like peers, trading gossip and even exploring with each other sexually. Text flanks the characters, working as both a design element and a narrative framework from which to interpret the images (for those who know the Iraqi Arabic dialect, that is). Filled with bilingual puns and vulnerable revelations, the exhibition gives insight into coming of age as a person caught between two cultures.

Hayv Kahraman's "How Iraqi Are You?" is on view at Jack Shainman Gallery through April 4.

Hayv Kahraman, *Naboog*, 2014. oil on linen, 115 x 110 inches (in two panels 115 x 55 inches each)
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Hayv Kahraman, *Ummo-doch*, 2015, oil on linen, 100 x 79 inches
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Hayv Kahraman, *Person nummer*, 2015, oil on linen, 96 x 73 inches
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



Hayv Kahraman, *Broken Teeth*, 2014, oil on linen, 96 x 73 inches
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Hayv Kahraman, *Swedish Class*, 2014, oil on linen, 104 x 79 inches
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Hayv Kahraman, *Wattania Class*, 2014, oil on linen, 104 x 79 inches
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Hayv Kahraman, *Naboog*, 2014, oil on linen, 115 x 110 inches (in two panels 115 x 55 inches each)
©Hayv Kahraman. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Hayv Kahraman, *Barboog*, 2014, oil on linen, 108 x 72 inches

DEFYING DEFINITION

HAYV KAHRAMAN'S NEW WORK PUSHES BEYOND GENDER ROLES AND GEOPOLITICS INTO FRESH TERRITORY

BY ERIC BRYANT
PORTRAITS BY ANDY FREEBERG

Hayv Kahraman in her Oakland, California, studio in front of a work from her ongoing "Waraq" series, begun in 2009.

EVER SINCE HAYV KAHRAMAN BEGAN to garner attention for her paintings in the mid 2000s, critics and curators have slotted her work into various politicized categories. It is easy to see how she got the label feminist artist from such early works as *Honor Killing*, 2006, a sumi-ink drawing featuring a dozen hijab-draped women hanging from the branches of a dead tree, and a 2007 set of nesting dolls that enact an excruciatingly slow striptease so that by the fifth doll only the figure's head and shoulders have been uncovered. Her meticulously detailed "Sacrifice" paintings from 2008—which were called a breakthrough when word spread that Charles Saatchi had snapped up work—present a group of regally clad women killing, skinning, and serving up a lamb.

Kahraman's life story, which is entwined with important international events of recent decades, has garnered her other labels as well. She was born in Baghdad in 1981 to a Kurdish mother and Arab-Turkish father. In 1992 the family fled the war to Sweden, and Kahraman has been living in America since 2006. Because of her origin and her gender, she has found a place in a dozen exhibitions around the globe focused on women in the Arab world or on contemporary approaches to the Islamic artistic tradition.

When I asked her during a visit to her Oakland, California, studio if she felt pigeonholed, the artist immediately smiled. "Don't we all love categories?" she asked sardonically. "I don't like it, but I recognize that I live in the West, where things that are different are automatically placed in their own little sections. I hope a lot of my work combats the whole concept." Indeed, the easy categorization of Kahraman as an Iraqi and a woman glosses over the dizzying array of influences that course through her practice, from Chinese ink painting and Japanese woodblocks to Russian nesting dolls. Perhaps even more unfairly, such labels obscure the intimate nature of her work. Kahraman says she herself has only recently begun to grasp how deeply personal much of her imagery is.

The paintings of floor plans of typical Baghdad dwellings that populated "Let the Guest Be the Master," Kahraman's show at New York's Jack Shainman Gallery last September, had their genesis in her father's decision to sell her childhood home 20 years after the family was forced to flee. There was a political element to the decision to sell. Because both children are daughters, the house would pass outside the immediate family to a distant, male heir upon her father's death. To Kahraman, the loss was less about Iraqi property laws than about her sense of place and history. "For me, that home represented this tangible space where I could go back and retrieve all these childhood memories that are fading now," she says. "I never thought I would go back, but it was the major connection I feel to that place." Working from this personal link, she layered the paintings with other elements that allude

to the place of women in many Islamic cultures. She chose to depict courtyard homes, she explains, "because the courtyard acts as this intermediary, semipublic space where women are not allowed when there are guests coming into the house." The architectural designs determined the shapes of the large wood panels that serve as grounds for the works' geometric patterns, painstakingly painted by Kahraman in her live-work studio space. Floating ghostlike in the passageways surrounding the compositions' courtyards are translucent versions of the serene female figures that have become something of a signature in the artist's work.

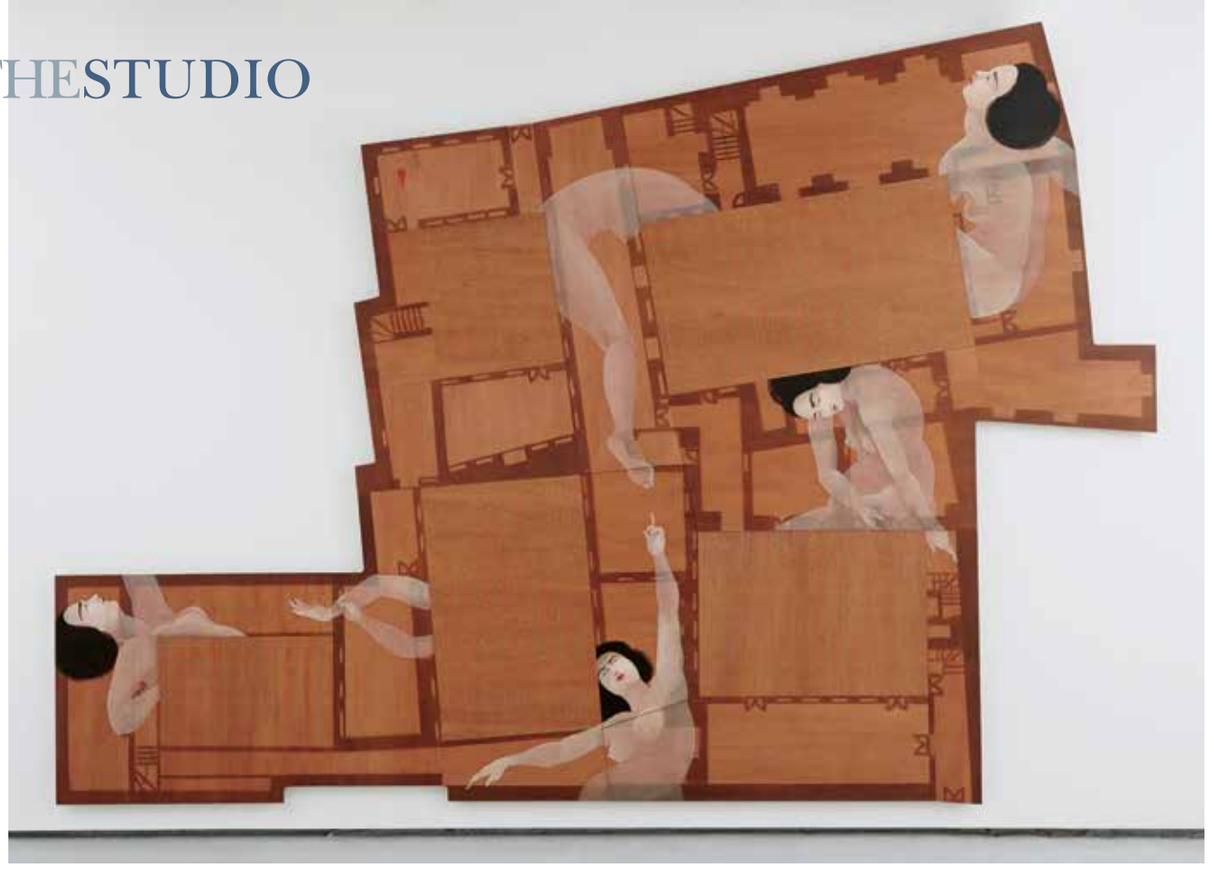
In 2009 these beautiful raven-haired women were portrayed as marionettes in a series of the same name. The knowing yet distant looks on their faces and the mannered yet graceful poses of their bodies stood in contrast to cutting titles, such as *Hegemony*. Critics saw the works as straightforward feminist critiques, but much more personal undercurrents were in play. When she moved to the United States, Kahraman says, settling in conservative Arizona near her American husband's family, she felt isolated and controlled. "It was difficult to be in a place at war with my own country," she recalls. "There were feelings of guilt, of betraying my people." By 2010 her female figures, still exquisite but sometimes morphed into hybrids that borrowed from the grotesqueries of Otto Dix, appeared in a series called "Pins and Needles." In those compositions, they poke at each other in ways that simultaneously allude to beauty treatments, such as waxing, and torture.

The figures have remained so recognizable from one series to the next because Kahraman bases them all on photographs she has taken of herself. She finalizes the elegant poses and draped, flowing fabrics they wear—often featuring colorful geometric patterns—by sketching on paper before rendering them in paint. Despite this intimate connection to her subjects, she would never identify with the women or their predicaments. "My mom asked, 'Why all these women? Are you OK?'" she recalls. She answered she was fine. "I would tell people I just find the subjects intriguing." It was only after making a move to California's Bay Area and getting a divorce that she came to realize her life was playing out in her work: "When I finally admitted to myself that I felt I was in an abusive situation, I understood why I was doing what I was doing. Today I feel a closer connection to these women."

Even as Kahraman was installing the show at Shainman—her first solo in New York and first outing with the gallery—she was at work on new pieces for exhibitions opening early this year. "Neighbors," which opened in January at the Istanbul Modern museum, features two works that continue her series "Waraq," an Arabic word that means "playing »

Kahraman gained attention for works such as *Honor Killing*, 2006, right, which alludes to practices in her native Iraq. *Body Screen*, 2013, far right, references traditional Islamic design, but some of the laser-cut-walnut apertures are formed from cross sections from a scan of her body.

FROM LEFT: HAYV KAHRAMAN; HAYV KAHRAMAN AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK



DO STUDIO ASSISTANTS STRETCH AND PREP CANVASES? "OH NO, THAT CAN BE VERY TRICKY," EXCLAIMS THE ARTIST.

cards" and is a play on the English words *war* and *Iraq*. The paintings feature near-mirror images of individuals, one directed up and one directed down, as on face cards. She is passionate as she describes how the images, the style of which recalls South Asian miniature painting, are extrapolated from her father's experience as a professor of linguistics who left his country. "Each painting represents an uprooted character where the narrative of past and present are intertwined in one space," she says. "Once a wealthy man, now a clown as his most esteemed quality was lost and the tedious rebuilding of life needed to begin once again." This month Kahraman debuts new paintings from the "Guest/Master" series as well as drawings of abstracted floor plans in a solo booth at Art Dubai for the Third Line, the host city's most prominent gallery for international contemporary art.

Although she says she might consider adding a third gallery, to represent her in Europe—where she has participated in numerous group museum shows in recent years but hasn't had a solo exhibition since 2010—she sounds a cautious note. Her show at Shainman sold very well, and the Third Line maintains a long waiting list, at which the artist chips away by taking a few commissions each year. Kahraman is clearly worried by the prospect of taking on further commitments because her exacting work habits limit her output. "I'm a control freak," she admits. When I ask her if she lets studio assistants do the basic work of stretching and prepping canvases, she exclaims, "Oh, no, that can be very tricky."

In fact, her process is not only tricky but also rather old-fashioned. In the corner of the studio near the entrance are large bolts of linen, which Kahraman imports from Belgium. After attaching the fabric to wood stretchers, she

applies a thin, even layer of rabbit-skin glue to make the surface taut as a drum. She learned the technique in Florence, where she earned a degree in graphic design from the Accademia d'Arte e Design, though she never formally studied art. "I am kind of happy I didn't go to an art school," she reflects. Instead, she picked up instruction from artists and conservators who were in Tuscany learning the old ways. "I don't know how my work would have been if I had gone to an institution," she says.

A decade later, curiosity still drives Kahraman. Her constant research feeds into both the technical execution and the content of her work. To obtain accurate plans for the sort of traditional homes featured in the "Guest/Master" paintings, Kahraman reached out to several architects in Baghdad and carried on months-long correspondence about the significance of various building styles, different neighborhoods, and the history of specific houses. One of her studio worktables is still covered with photocopies and books of floor plans. At the same time, she devised a new, complicated system of support for the paintings, the irregular shapes of which are created by bolting together several heavy wood panels. Each work begins with inch-thick mahogany slabs cut to the shapes of the rooms. She then has much of the wood removed from the back with a computer-controlled »

Works are formed as floor plans of traditional Iraqi homes in the series "Let the Guest Be the Master," as seen in *Five Court Compound*, 2013, above. In her studio, the artist poses with a router-cut wood sculpture.

TOP: HAYV KAHRAMAN AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

router, leaving just enough to provide structural support and attachment points for special brass fasteners. She oversees the work herself, using assistants only to help assemble and move the large pieces.

Elsewhere in the studio are remnants of other experiments. On a desk sits a stack of playing cards printed with Kahraman's mirror figures from the "Waraq" series, first shown in 2010 at Frey Norris Gallery in San Francisco. She hand-stitched 1,800 of these cards together to form *Al Malwiya,* a 13-foot-tall inverted minaret that was shown at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 2011. While she prefers to work in series for solo shows, she will often revisit themes and reinterpret elements from earlier series for commissioned pieces and one-off artworks developed especially for group museum shows.

Leaning against the wall in another corner of the studio are large, wavy sheets of a brittle, translucent material. Kahraman explains they are dry rawhide and pigskin. "When it arrived frozen from Texas, the rawhide looked just like skin; you could still see the hair," she recalls. "Different parts of the animals stretch in different directions, so I had to figure out which parts would hold their shape. When it dries it becomes very thin, and the light through it is amazing." She developed a system of mounting the hide on a thick sheet of polycarbonate—a bulletproof plastic, she points out—to stabilize the hide while allowing light through. This material that simultaneously conveys life and death then could be mounted on light boxes or inlaid into wood panels. The finished works for the 2011 show "Extimacy" at the Third Line were painted with elaborately detailed anatomical cross sections based on early modern scientific illustrations.

Such cross sections have become another recurring element in Kahraman's multifaceted practice. She has long been

"I WANT TO SEE HOW MY BODY LOOKS, USE MY BODY AS A TOOL," KAHRAMAN SAYS.

fascinated by early European anatomical texts and became particularly focused on a book by Wilhelm Braune featuring illustrations he based on cross sections of frozen cadavers. "That led me to think I want to see how my body looks, use my body as a tool," says the artist. When she found out a neighbor in Oakland had special equipment he used to create 3-D scans of archaeological sites, Kahraman invited him to her studio to scan her. "I was nude and had to be covered in cornstarch and hold my breath. He pieced together about 80 scans, and now I have a perfect model I can manipulate in various ways."

Kahraman has been using a computerized router to cut cross sections of that model from wood panels in geometric shapes that can then be assembled as wall-mounted reliefs or 3-D sculptures, such as a nearly seven-foot-tall dodecahedron shown by the Third Line at Art Dubai last year. As with all her work, the allusions are layered and sometimes contradictory, but more literally than ever before, she is at the heart of her work. The cut panels immediately recall the scrims of traditional Islamic architecture. Her inspiration, Braune's book, could be seen as prurient and based on violence, or educational and containing the promise of healing. Her own cross sections become a means to pull herself apart for analysis while maintaining a distance through the abstraction of the process. "It was interesting because I was looking at my body but I felt no connection," she recalls almost puzzled. "When I have looked back at my work more recently, everything fell into place." ⊞

***Hexahedron,* 2013, an oil and ink on paper mounted on panel, is an example of the artist's interest in juxtaposing the body with the forms of patterned cross sections.**

HAYV KAHRAMAN AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

NEW YORK

John McCracken

David Zwirner // September 10–October 19

WITH THIS EXHIBITION, Zwirner proves the point of mounting museum-quality gallery shows. Offering some 50 works on loan made between 1963 and 2011, it is a virtual retrospective of this L.A. Cool School stalwart. But the overt pedagogy that often weighs down institutional exhibitions is replaced by a scholarly charm provided by curator Robin Clark, who lovingly corrals the power of these works without resorting to institutional clichés.

Clark jumps into McCracken's investigations of the object's relationship to space, architecture, and the body with a room of early works. The cruciform-shape *No. 26*, 1964, and 1965's *Theta-Two*, *Mykonos*, and *Rainmaker*—sublime executions of line forged as channel—resolve the artist's interest in two-dimensional formalism rendered in 3-D. A field of works from the '80s and '90s address angularity, movement, and light. All the while, the artist's well-known planks stand guard, making spectacular use of architect Annabelle Selldorf's floating white walls that don't quite meet the concrete floor. On the second floor, a gallery full of brilliantly colored works on pedestals from the late '60s and '70s reads a bit like a Brobdingnagian chess set, while three late plank pieces, including the artist's last, hold a windowed room: *Sunlight*, an incandescent polished bronze from 2010, and an untitled stainless-steel edition completed in 2011. These flank *Chakra*, 2008, a row of white posts that provide the first overt reference to the artist's spiritual sensibilities.

For sheer drama, the ground floor's *Six Columns*, a grid-cum-forest of black forms conceptualized in the 1970s and produced in 2006, seems unbeatable—but a trip up Selldorf's glass-and-concrete staircase calls that judgment into question. At the bottom of the five-story well stands *Fair*, 2011, a triangular pillar of polished stainless steel that reflects the industrial surfaces around it to the point of disappearing. It was the proverbial rabbit hole that made this viewer want to fall happily into McCracken's world of peerless perfection. **—Deborah Wilk**

John McCracken
Installation view of *Fair*, 2011. Stainless steel, 116 x 17 x 14½ in.

NEW YORK

Hayv Kahraman

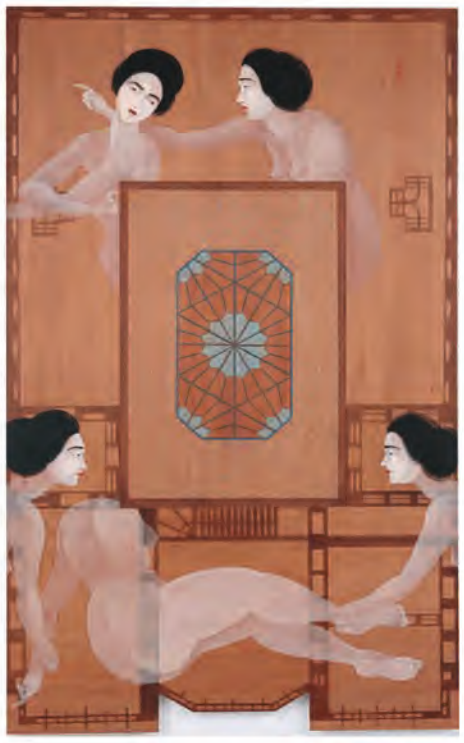
Jack Shainman Gallery // September 10–October 12

THROUGH HER FLESHY, slender-necked female forms, Kahraman continues to examine notions of displacement that have haunted her since migrating to the U.S. from Iraq, via Sweden and Italy. In her New York debut, these cathartic self-portraits are less violent. Their limbs are not fractured; they are not lifeless marionettes weighed down by ornamental garb. Instead, they float in naked abandon, still languid but free of a patriarchal gaze. Composed with faint calligraphic lines and translucent layers of ocher and white, they have an unearthly transience yet are grounded by banal details like the wrinkle before the protrusion of a belly or the spiral of a pubic hair.

House in Kathemiya (all works 2013) is an irregular polygon composed of shellacked mahogany panels. With its cryptic, painstakingly applied geometrical markings, it reveals itself from a distance as a floor plan based on Iraqi architecture. Kahraman's ghostly figures hover over it, drifting toward the magnetism of a courtyard demarcated by traditional, translationally symmetric Islamic patterns. This work, along with four other similarly themed wood pieces, were crafted after the artist's childhood home in Iraq was demolished. The loss uprooted but perhaps also freed her.

The gallery's inner sanctum displays the artist's most nascent techniques. In *Octahedron*, a faint layer of mathematically arranged organic shapes covers a racially mixed nude like a disease. To arrive at the shapes, Kahraman underwent a three-dimensional scan of her own body that produced 542 cross sections; thus, an oval represents her upper thigh and a cell-like outline, her chest. The shapes in the wooden sculpture *Body Screen* create a latticework window (*mashrabiya*) commonly found in Iraqi homes. In a frustrating yet tantalizing quasi-installation, the screen obscures an inaccessible room that hides two more nudes. The entire show, in fact, feels like one is peeping in on an oeuvre that, although pregnant with potential, has not yet reached maturity.

—Sehba Mohammad



Hayv Kahraman
Mohamed Effendi Kerbala, 2013. Oil on wood, 116 x 73 in.

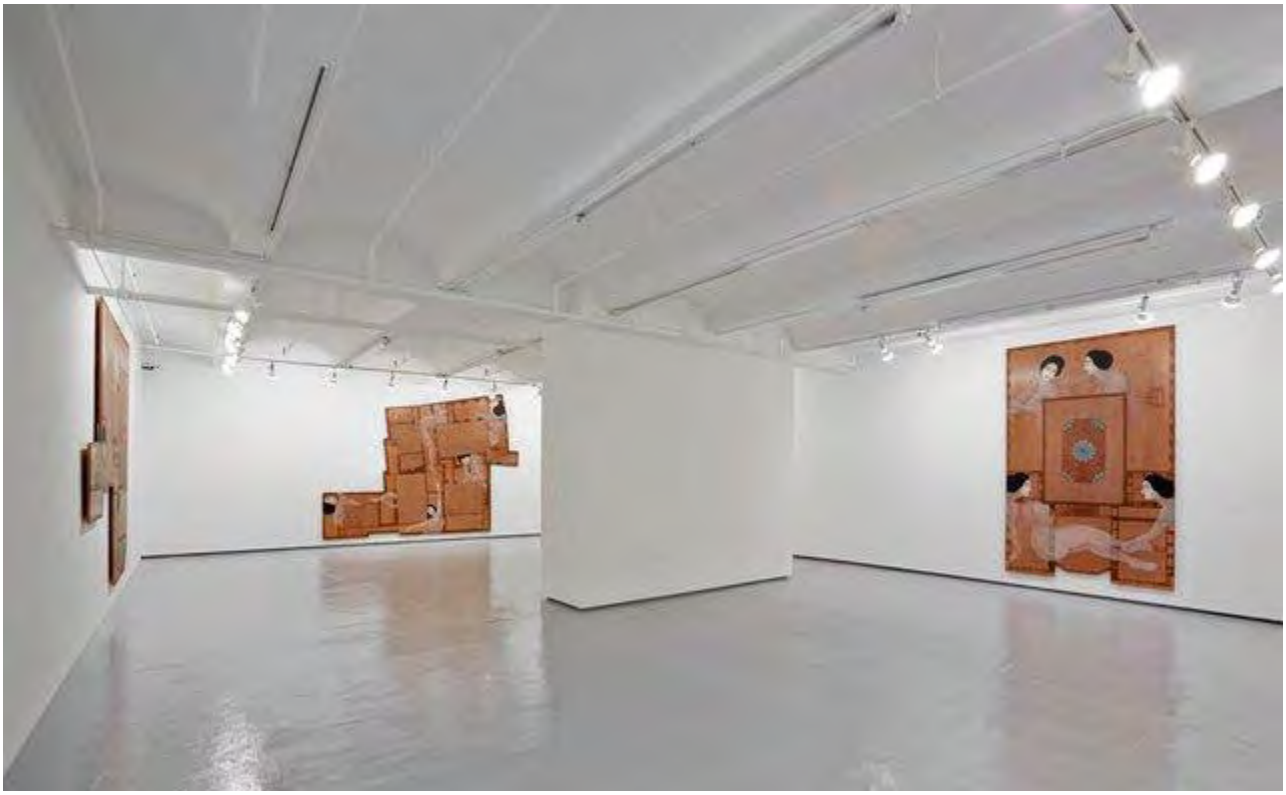
FROM TOP: THE ESTATE OF JOHN MCCRACKEN; HAYV KAHRAMAN AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

IBRAAZ

SENSING OTHERWISE

A Story of an Exhibition

Walter D. Mignolo **30 September 2013**



Installation shot, *Let the Guest Be the Master*, 2013, an exhibition by Hayv Kahraman at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

I.

You just arrived, half an hour late. Had to walk three blocks. There was an accident and a traffic jam. The taxi left you on 8th and 22nd. There is already a small crowd in the gallery. You pick up the description of

Mignolo, Walter D. "Sensing Otherwise: A Story of an Exhibition" (Jack Shainman Gallery exhibition review). *Ibraaz.org*, 30 September 2013. Online. <http://www.ibraaz.org/projects/57#.UkrAu627jBc.twitter>

the exhibit and the list of pieces being exhibited. You walk to the first large panel, in the wide entrant hall of Shainman Gallery. Now, you are looking at an oil painting on wood panel, *Bab el Sheikh* (2013).You look at the details; you step back and appreciate the modular construction of the surface: small panels, which you notice are mounted together, like in a puzzle**.** The panels are neither rectangular nor square.

You gaze at the floating female bodies – they look transparent. You fixate on their movements: those graceful arms and legs that blend with the colour of the wood. The women are not naked, nor do they have clothes.

'Interesting space disposition,' someone behind you says while looking at the same large panel.

'Yes,' you respond without looking back.

'The shape follows the contour of an aerial view of a house in Baghdad,' the person continues. He tells you he is an architect.

You walk together toward the main room of the gallery, where four other panels are hanging. You see a rectangular panel facing the entrance. But before you reach this rectangular panel, you spot a third panel to your right, hanging on the same wall: *House in Kathemiya* (2013).

You stop and step back to look at its shape. Similar contours than those in *Bab el Sheikh*. They all have similar shapes and perspectives: aerial views of a house with women floating within the frame like ghosts, rendered on surfaces that are somehow misshapen and modular.

'These houses with a courtyard have a long history, from Persia to the Arab world, and even to the South of Spain,' says your interlocutor. 'You can find them there still today: hundreds of houses of this type with a courtyard at the center. It is interesting to me how Hayv is blending architecture and history with feminism.'

There are one or two square distinctive spaces in each panel; a light green tone. 'That must be the courtyard,' you say to yourself. You are familiar with houses with courtyards, but had failed to realise that was not only the contour of an aerial view, but an aerial view in which the courtyard has been flattened.

'Yes, indeed,' you respond. 'The Silk Road, through oasis and deserts, from Baghdad to Samarkand: the same civilisational patterns. Do you know the artist?' you ask.

'She was born in Baghdad –'

'Oh. I know that.' You interrupted him. 'I also know that her family left the country when she was ten because Saddam Hussein was bombing the Kurdish region in the North of Iraq. The family settled in Sweden. I also know she studied graphic design in Florence and web design in Sweden.'

'So you know her.'

'No. I know of her but do not know her. How do you know her?' You want to know more.

'Just by chance – She was doing research in Baghdad in preparation for this exhibit. She was looking for house floor plans and she was working with architects who are friends of mine. I was in Baghdad at that time and meet Hayv.'

'Are you Iraqi too?' you ask.

'No. I am from London but live in New York. Twin cities – you know, like Minneapolis and Saint Paul.'

Funny, you think.

Installation shot, *Let the Guest Be the Master*, 2013, an exhibition by Hayv Kahraman at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

II.

You're in the middle of the room where the four panels are hanging. You look at them from a distance, and move to avoid the white column in the middle of the room, blocking your view. Then you approach each panel to see the details: the patterns, the invisible floor plan, the contours of the buildings viewed from above, the walls, the borders in the panel like dividing walls, the screen in the middle, over the courtyard.

'What do you know about the courtyard?' you ask your interlocutor.

'It is a very interesting space and very problematic at the same time,' he says.

'Why so?'

'It is deeply engrained in Muslim, Persian and Arab notions of experiential space.'

'And Samarkand,' you add.

'Yes, sorry. And Samarkand. It is like the front yard and the back yard in urban American architecture. Are you American?' he asks.

'My father is, I was born in Uzbekistan; my mother is an Uzbek Muslim. In Samarkand many houses with a courtyard remain, they are still standing. Samarkand was not bombed. We moved to US when I was 18.'

'So, you may know what I mean.'

'Yes, I do. And what I like is that the courtyard is the space that connects the outside, the street, with the inside, the house – a border space of sort. And as any border space, there is a hierarchy between the two sides of the border.'

'Certainly, the architecture of the courtyard is a problematic space because it is a spatial differentiation of gender roles. It is the place where men meet. Women are inside. But, women can observe men in the courtyard without being themselves observed. That doesn't ameliorate gender relations for women but it is part of the spatial distribution of gender roles.'

As he speaks, your eyes become glued to the magnificent oil on woodwork depicting a complex floor plan with five interior courtyards: *Five court compound* (2013). 'I guess you're right,' you respond half listening, half caught in the entanglement of walls, partitions and floating ghost-like women; you are mesmerised by that blending of flesh with the materiality of the building. 'Kahraman´s work demands an uncoupling of aesthetics from aesthesis,' you murmur.

'What do you mean?' – he nterjects your reverie.

'I mean, she is liberating her sensibility from the prison house of Western art history and sensibility. She has to go through the technical aspects of Western art, but that is all, she doesn't have to obey the expected regulations. And as a matter of fact, she doesn't.'

After a pause, you continue: 'You see, if you are from Iraq and move to Europe and the US, it is not the same as being from France and moving to the US or to Iraq. There is a differential in the value of human beings that today are measured by Consulates and by passports. An artist carrying a non-European passport and experiences and dwelling in Europe or the US embodies that difference and that difference is migrant consciousness.'

'That's an interesting idea,' he responds. 'It makes me think that consciousness is only a universal awareness while could only carry the singularity of local memories and sensibilities. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense to speak of consciousness without an adjective.'

'Yes, you are right.' You agree with enthusiasm. Kahraman's body has been stamped with body-political differentials. Her work is at once both a response to what migrants are made to feel and a denial to surrender towards that feeling. Migrant consciousness is either a curse or a blessing. In Hayv's work it is a blessing.'

He interrupts. 'That's why we have to uncouple aesthetics from aesthesis to understand Hayv's work. That makes sense. I remember a conversation in Iraq, a lunch we had with the architects Hayv was working with. She was telling us about her work. I remember Hayv saying that she threw herself fully into her art. I did not understand what she meant at that time. Now perhaps I am beginning to understand what she meant – she is there, in those women entangled within the walls: *they are her*. And she is there for a reason. Now I see; and the reason is that her work emanates from a dark, female complexity – from migrant consciousness and from her awareness of Iraq in the global order.'

'Yes, yes,' you react eagerly. 'Yes. That's why she's been questioning identity and identification, not only in how you identify yourself but how you identify yourself in relation to how you are identified when you are a migrant, and more so if you are from the Middle East.'

'How do you know that?' he asks.

'Oh, I don't know, I read it somewhere, or perhaps someone told me.'

Installation shot, *Let the Guest Be the Master*, 2013, an exhibition by Hayv Kahraman at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

Mignolo, Walter D. “Sensing Otherwise: A Story of an Exhibition” (Jack Shainman Gallery exhibition review). *Ibraaz.org*, 30 September 2013. Online. <http://www.ibraaz.org/projects/57#.UkrAu627jBc.twitter>

III.

A brown-skinned and dark-haired woman, young and elegant, all dressed in white, is distributing large cards to viewers. She extends one to each of you.

You both walk back to the first panel, *Bab el Sheikh*. Standing there and looking back to the main room you exchange views on the exhibit, and read what is on the card:

The house is my domain. When you enter you will resign and obey. At least that's what I have to believe if I were to survive. Indeed you can have the rest but these rooms, these kitchens, these balconies, these toilettes are mine. They are an extension of myself. And within the confines of these walls I will do what I please. I will watch you from above. Through the screens I can see everything you do and you wont even know that I'm watching. I will laugh when you stumble and I will hear your conversations with others. You will not see me because you can't handle seeing me. I am too seductive. My black hair, my skin. I am behind these walls. Tamed and constrained. Yet this is my domain."

'That explains it,' your interlocutor says.

'Explains what?'

'Sandro Botticelli: Italian male. He painted red- and blond-haired and white-skinned women, naked. There was a sensibility that prompted his art, a renaissance sensibility imbibed with a regional sense of beauty and a system of gender.'

'I don't understand where you are going with this,' you interrupt, again.

'There is another sensibility in Hayv's work – a female that migrated from Iraq, and paints black-haired and brown-skinned women. You know, the Greek word *aesthesis* means sensing, sensations, what we feel in our bodies. European philosophers of the eighteenth century appropriated aesthesis and colonized it. They did it by regulating their own taste and disregarding the taste in other civilizations that were not their European taste.'

'I see,' you say, and indeed you begin to 'see' and understand what has been shaping your taste and sensibility without you knowing it.

'Aesthetics,' he continues, 'became a form of western policing through taste. Now we are here witnessing a re-emerging of what is alien to western sensibility but, yet, rendered in a visual frame that makes it some how familiar. It is border aesthesis, indeed – that is, a sensibility that is grounded in non-western memories rendered familiar by the appropriation of western visual codes.'

'It's like sensing otherwise,' you concede. You turn to face the entrance to a small room. Before entering, you see that there is still another small room in the back. 'Look,' your interlocutor says: 'a Mashrabiya.'

The rectangular Mashrabiya has been placed in the centre of the white wall that divides the two rooms in the gallery. You both enter the first room and approach the Mashrabiya. 'What is a Mashrabiya?' you ask.

'The Mashrabiya, like the courtyard, cuts deep into Islamic visual memories. It is a sort of screen of ornamental designs but very functional. It regulates air circulation and sunlight. But it is also a place to observe without being observed. You see, what we were talking before about the courtyard. Women behind the Mashrabiya look at men in the courtyard, a type of voyeurism that puts women in a temporary status of domination.'

You put everything together: the houses, the courtyards, naked ghost women, almost transparent bodies embedded in walls, screens regulating air and sunlight are at once offering a place of observation without you being observed. All of a sudden you fee; as if you are in a courtyard, being observed from the small room you cannot enter. The Mashrabiya is blocking the entrance.

Installation shot, *Let the Guest Be the Master*, 2013, an exhibition by Hayv Kahraman at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY.

IV.

'Look,' the architect says while taking a closer look at the human torsos shaping the figures of the Mashrabiya. 'See the torsos have the same shape as the women's bodies on the canvas and the woman in the painting, in this room and in the room we cannot enter. We have to peek through the Mashrabiya. We are like the women in the house, looking through the Mashrabiya. We, the guest, are allowed to be the master. We are voyeurs!'

'You're right,' you say after a while. 'Now I just realise that all those women are one woman.'

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'Sure,' your interlocutor says, as if he knows something you don't.

'What do you mean?' A strange sensation runs through your spine.

'I mean,' he says, 'that if she scanned her body as you said a few minutes ago, then she most likely scanned herself all around and used that scan on the canvas and in the painting.'

'And how do you know that?'

'This is something I remember from the conversation at lunch, in Baghdad about a year ago.'

'She scanned her body,' you repeat, as if asking yourself.

'Yes, what surprises you? We are all being scanned all the time,' the interlocutor continues. 'Every time we go through those scanning machines at security control, arms up, and nude to the voyeur who is policing us.'

The sensation in your spine increases. You have never thought about being seen nude each time you acquiesce to a scan at the airport: any and every airport.

You are silent for a few minutes, watching the torsos, peeking into the room you could not enter, watching the painting on the two walls of both rooms: the women, the woman. The nude bodies are disrupted when you approach the painting: geometric shapes and rounded or curved geometric figures replicate the scanned organs that compose the Mashrabiya.

You approach the paintings on the wall, one at the time: *Tetrahedron* (2013)on one wall and *Octahedron* (2013) on the other. You cannot see the title of the painting in the room you cannot enter, but you see that the paintings have the same logic: a naked woman's body. You feel like security. You are behind a screen, watching. You concentrate on the straight lines of flat platonic solids (those you liked so much in elementary school when learning geometry), and those rounded geometric figures disrupting it.

'This confounds me,' you interlocutor says, who is also looking at the painting with the kind of attention one might expect from an architect.

'I can imagine this is not architectural design,' you tell him.

'It certainly isn't.'

V.

You ramble, trying to organise at least some of the thoughts that come to your mind: 'The rounded figures remind me of Arab and perhaps Persian ornamental designs and architecture. There are no rectangles or straight lines, you see beyond the flat geometric figures. I have seen this in previous works by Kahraman.

It sounds to me like she is disturbing geometric forms so dear to western civilization with geometric forms that are so dear to Islamic civilization. She uses those round forms like weapons.'

'But these particular round shaped geometric figures don't look to me like Islamic shapes.'

You think for a while. Something is dancing in your head, like a déjà vu you can't place. You think about the composition of the painting: naked body, flattened platonic solids disrupted by round shaped forms, as if those forms where coming not from geometry but from the inside of the human body. Then, bingo, – you remember*Extimacy* (2012), one of Kahraman's previous exhibitions that most impressed you*;* like an even earlier show,*Sacrifice* (2008)..[1]

'You seem to have discovered something,' your interlocutor observes.

'Well – not discovered but *remembered*. In *Extimacy,* Hayv scanned her body and 'externalised' the organs. It is a powerful de-eroticisation of the female body that we find particularly in the western world and its areas of influence. Her work, I am realising, is deeply sociogenetic.'

'Sociogenetic?' the interlocutor asks. He's never heard of the word.

'I mean, it is how you conceive your own identity once you realize that your identity depends on your awareness of how you are perceived by others. And if you are a brown skinned and dark haired women in the West, well, you become aware of that pretty soon.'

While you are talking, two men in suits and ties and the woman you had seen welcoming visitors at the entrance of the gallery enter the room you do not have access to, blocked by the Mashrabiya. You notice a door there. 'Who are they?' you ask your interlocutor.

'I don't know.'

'And why they are entering there and we cannot?'

'I don't know. But I do know that the most private room in a house is at the back of it. This seems to be that kind of room.'

At that moment you feel someone touching your arm, calling your attention. You turn and next to you is the same brown-skinned, dark-haired woman dressed in white that handed to you the first card a short while ago. She extends another large card to you, which you receive. It says:

I'm a commodity. My paintings are a commodity. My figures are a commodity. I pose in the nude and photograph my body to use as outlines for paintings. My figures then are visual transitions of my own body. They are buying my body. The figures are rendered to fit the occidental pleasures. White flesh. Transparent flesh. Posing in compositions directly taken from the renaissance. Conforming to what they think is ideal. Neglecting everything else. Colonizing my own body to then be displayed gracefully into my rectangular panels. Carnal and visceral palpability. I provide for you in my rectangles. I know you

like it. That's why I paint it. To catch your gaze. To activate your gaze. I want you to buy me so you can look at me all day long. I'm your little oriental pussycat. You can pet me I don't bite.

You finish reading and check the time. It's late. Your friends will be at Pegu in ten minutes. You walk to the door and turn around to say goodbye to your interlocutor, but he's not in the room. You look for him in the gallery where the four large panels are. He's not there either. You walk towards the exit and look back once again. You do not see him.

You exit, call a taxi and feel the sensation of a shift. Botticelli – with his naked, white-skinned and fair-haired women – has been reduced to size.

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[1] Eid Al Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) commemorates Ibraham's (Abraham) willingness to obey God by sacrificing his son. Kahraman series depicts elegant women decapitating a lamb, taking away the job traditionally done by men, and not necessarily in elegant attires.

About the author
Walter D. Mignolo
Walter D. Mignolo is an Argentine semiotician (École des Hautes Études) and professor at Duke University, who has published extensively on semiotics and literary theory, and worked on different aspects of the modern and colonial world, exploring concepts such as global coloniality, the geopolitics of knowledge, transmodernity, border thinking, and pluriversality.

Mignolo, Walter D. "Sensing Otherwise: A Story of an Exhibition" (Jack Shainman Gallery exhibition review). *Ibraaz.org*, 30 September 2013. Online. <http://www.ibraaz.org/projects/57#.UkrAu627jBc.twitter>

ART+AUCTION
THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE
FOR ART COLLECTORS
BLOUINARTINFO.COM
JUNE 2013

50 UNDER 50
The Next Most Collectible Artists

HAYV KAHRAMAN

In the Baghdad-born painter's highly stylized oeuvre, raven-haired beauties wax each other's upper lips, Botox each other's wrinkles, clutch each other in solidarity, and pose gracefully in the nude. "She tackles femininity in the Middle East, the role of women, and the role of beauty," says Hala Khayat, a specialist in modern and contemporary Arab, Iranian, and Turkish art at Christie's Dubai, where Kahraman's *The Triangle*, 2012, realized $98,500 on a $25,000-to-$30,000 estimate last fall. "Technically she's very strong," Khayat adds. "I visit a lot of collectors who own her work in New York and London, as well as here in Dubai." Many more are actively looking for pieces, which tend to sell quickly on the primary market. Kahraman, who studied in Florence and is based in Oakland, California, exhibits with the Third Line, in Dubai, and Jack Shainman in New York; her work has been acquired by the Saatchi Gallery, the Rubell Family Collection, and Qatar's Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art.

–RW | *DISEMBODIED 1*, 2012. OIL ON PANEL WITH RAWHIDE, INLAY, AND POLYCARBONATE, 96 X 46 IN.

The New York Times

IHT SPECIAL

Dark Memories of War Illuminate an Artist's Work

Hayv Kahraman/The Third Line

CHAINED WOMEN: Hayv Kahraman's large-scale paintings on canvas and wood make references to the horrors of war, so-called honor killings and female genital mutilation.

By NINA SIEGAL
Published: January 11, 2013

Air raid sirens punctuate Hayv Kahraman's earliest childhood memories. The Kurdish, Baghdad-born artist says her parents often told her about how, in 1981, when she was just 3 months old, they had to stop their car in the middle of a busy street to crouch under a building while missiles flew overhead.

That was during the Iran-Iraq War. Later, when she was about 8 or 9, she said, she had vivid memories of the time when President Saddam Hussein was threatening to use nuclear weapons on northern Iraq.

"I remember we were in the souk, the market, and the air raid sirens started," Ms. Kahraman said in a phone interview.

“Everybody ran,” she said. “We ran back home and the entire family hid in the basement and waited, just waited in the dark.”

She turned 10 during the first Gulf War, while the air raid sirens were wailing again, and her parents finally had had enough; they hired a kachakchi, or cross-border smuggler, and escaped to Sweden.

“We left everything behind,” she said. “I don’t remember taking much — a few toys. The road from Iraq to Sweden took more than a month, because we stopped in many countries. We went to Jordan first, and stopped in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia; we stayed in Yemen for about two weeks and then Frankfurt and then we flew to Stockholm.”

“As soon as we reached Stockholm, my mother took us right to the bathroom in the airport and flushed our fake passports,” Ms. Kahraman added. “She went to the police and said ‘We’re here, what do we do?’ It was about 3:30 in the afternoon and it was dark.”

Ms. Kahraman went on to grow up in Sweden, to study classical painting in Florence and ultimately to settle in the United States, but her work continues to explore the dark memories and current events of the world she left behind.

Her large-scale paintings on canvas and wood, which employ elements of classical Japanese painting, illuminated Arab manuscripts and Italian Renaissance painting, make references to the horrors of war, so-called honor killings and female genital mutilation.

The combination of Eastern and Western influences and political subject matter has made them surprisingly sought after in the Middle Eastern art market. In October, Christie’sDubai sold one of her most recent paintings, “The Triangle,” for $98,500 — an extraordinary price for a 31-year-old contemporary artist. At least five bidders in the room and on the phone were driving the price higher, said Hala Khayat, Christie’s Dubai’s head of sales for modern and contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish art. She called Ms. Kahraman one of the “very hot” artists selling in the region today.

Ms. Kahraman’s Dubai gallery, The Third Line, was selling her works for about $14,000 to $20,000 at the FIAC art fair in Paris in November, but “they could basically ask whatever price they want right now,” Ms. Khayat said.

The gallery sold the paintings in her most recent show, “Extimacy,” at the end of November, for $35,000 to $40,000. The six panels depict gracefully drawn women, each of whom is extracting a cross-sectional slice of her own flesh.

“Having these women violently detaching their limbs, for me, is very reminiscent of the psyche of a refugee,” said Ms. Kahraman, “and that sense of detachment you have from your land that you’ve had to leave behind. That’s the idea of the diasporic women, who are fragmented, or cyborgs almost. They’ve had to give up part of themselves.”

Siegal, Nina. “Dark Memories of War Illuminate an Artist’s Work.” *The New York Times*, 11 January 2013: illustrated.

Previous works have depicted women as marionettes, as bodies draped along a clothesline, and as “strange fruit” hanging from the black branches of a twisted tree.

In a series presented at the Saatchi Gallery in London in 2008, Ms. Kahraman explored the story of the sacrifice of the lamb from both the Koran and the Bible, a narrative that is central to the Islamic festival of Id al-Adha. But in Ms. Kahraman’s reworking, women were represented in the place of the lambs.

The paintings have struck a chord with collectors in the Middle East, said Ms. Khayat, because there is very little material coming out of that region that is attuned to sociopolitical matters. Since artists in the Middle East face censorship or condemnation if they address such sensitive political issues, it take an outsider to reflect effectively on what is going on there, she said.

Middle Eastern collectors “either like things that relate to their countries — so it’s perhaps a bit of a nationalistic approach — or talks about a certain period of past glory,” anything prior to the 1970s, that golden time between the 1950s and 1970s, Ms. Khayat added.

“But when it comes to contemporary art there are very few that reach out to the hearts of people,” she said. “I think what’s happening in the region, women being oppressed again, this is connecting with people.”

Kathy Davis, senior researcher at the Research Institute for History and Culture at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, who wrote Ms. Kahraman’s catalogue essay, likens her images to the French feminist conceptual artist, Orlan, who has undergone many rounds of cosmetic surgery to repeatedly remake her own face.

“Women have a long tradition of using their bodies to exert some sense of control over their situation,” said Ms. Davis. “Cosmetic surgery under more ordinary circumstances also has that. Women feeling that their bodies are defined by outside forces, and by trying to focus on outside forces they’re taking control.”

Ms. Davis suggests that the popularity of Ms. Kahraman’s work may have to do with “an increasing interest in women’s issues that have to do with power and inequality and women’s social position in the Middle East.” But also, “the drawings are visually elegant, the tradition she’s working in comes from decorative art, so it’s about beauty and also at the same time things that are the antithesis of beauty — shocking, ugly things.”

There are no air raid sirens in the background anymore; Ms. Kahraman paints from the safety of her home in Oakland, California, where she lives with her cat, Mochi. “She’s half Persian, half American,” said Ms. Kahraman, wryly. “She’s a hybrid, too.”

She still has conflicting emotions about leaving Iraq.

“If I had stayed there, my work would have probably been about being in an oppressive environment under Saddam, which would probably result in my hanging or something,” she reflected.

Siegal, Nina. “Dark Memories of War Illuminate an Artist’s Work.” *The New York Times*, 11 January 2013: illustrated.

“Life under Saddam was horrendous, and I am part Kurdish and we all know how he treated the Kurds,” she said. “However, when I first move to the States, I was very depressed, because I had moved to the country that at that time was actively bombing my home country. I felt this immense guilt — that I should be there, I should be doing something. There was part of me that wanted to do something; that’s something that comes out in my work. It is an avenue for me to make it right.”

A version of this article appeared in print on January 10, 2013, in The International Herald Tribune.

Siegal, Nina. “Dark Memories of War Illuminate an Artist’s Work.” *The New York Times*, 11 January 2013: illustrated.

Of Violence and Beauty

Hayv Kahraman's women

BY YASMINE MOHSENI

ALL IMAGES: HAYV KAHRAMAN AND THE THIRD LINE, DUBAI

ONLY UPON ENTERING the inviting world of Hayv Kahraman's paintings does one recognize its gruesome reality. The lyrical grace of her female figures, along with the beautifully rendered textiles and patterns, seduces the viewer. The eye then quickly homes in on the violent gesture: women hanging dead from the branches of a tree in *Honor Killing*, 2006; three women slicing the throat of a lamb in *Collective Cut*, 2008; the woman in *Migrant 3*, 2009, poised and ready to cut off her own tongue with a pair of scissors. What is the source of violence in her work? "It might be my past experiences with war, and then being a refugee," Kahraman says. "I think it's more of an intuitive attraction and less cerebral than people might think. My work is still aesthetically pleasing, which I like. Because of my rigorous training in graphic design, I'm an advocate of symmetry and composition."

Born in Baghdad in 1981, Kahraman fled Iraq with her mother and her sister during the outbreak of the first Gulf War, in 1991. After brief stays in Ethiopia, Germany, and Yemen, the three finally arrived in Sweden on a winter afternoon. "My mom got fake passports from smugglers. When we arrived in Sweden, she asked us to flush them down the toilet," she recalls. "We were put into a refugee camp on the outskirts of Stockholm. I remember we got there at 4 P.M. It was dark, and I was thinking, Where are we?" A year later, after her father joined them, the Kahraman family settled in Hudiksvall, a small town three hours north of Stockholm. The artist spent her formative years in Sweden, leaving at age 22 to study graphic design in Florence. In Italy she met her husband, the American artist Anthony Velasquez. In 2006, the couple moved to Phoenix. Feelings of guilt about settling in the country that had virtually destroyed her own sent Kahraman into a depression. "This irrational resentment of the United States led me to seek refuge in painting, which served as an outlet. The creative juices were overflowing in that melancholic period," she says. This was the point of departure for her career as a fine artist. Kahraman and Velasquez are now based in Oakland, California, and they share their live-work industrial loft space with Mochi, their Persian cat. "She came from Sweden—she has a passport!" Kahraman exclaims. That her first pet is a Persian cat from Sweden named after a Japanese dessert is a wonderful example of Kahraman's pervasive international perspective, in which borders and boundaries are continually broken down.

Kahraman's paintings also embody a global viewpoint, as exemplified by "Marionettes," a series from her 2009 solo show at the Third Line gallery in Doha, Qatar. In it, Kahraman says she seeks to address "the submissive role assigned to women. The marionettes are puppets performing chores like cooking and cleaning." Kahraman borrows freely from art history to portray these doll-like women. For instance, in *Toilette* from this series, the reclining figure is a clear nod to Ingres's *Grande Odalisque*. Yet the disarticulated female form punctuated by marionette strings also recalls the early 20th-century Surrealism of Dalí and de Chirico. The figure's graceful and emotionless face, with almond-shaped eyes and swooping eyebrows, brings to mind Persian miniature painting, while the voluminous hair looks further east to Japanese prints. The flat and richly rendered textiles recall Italian Renaissance painting,

and the geometric patterning on the cloth is reminiscent of Islamic tessellation.

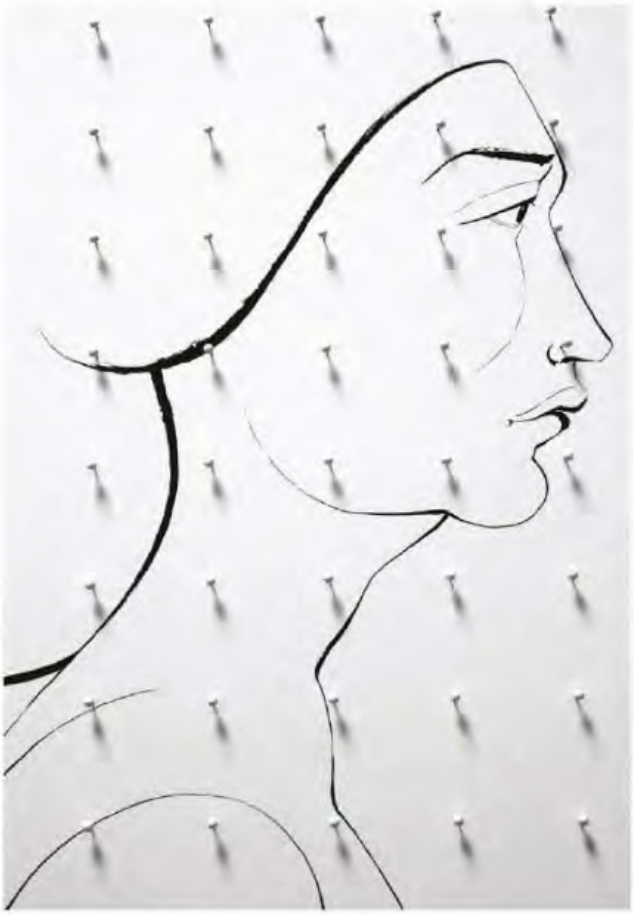
In 2011, Kahraman was short-listed by the Victoria & Albert Museum, in London, for the Jameel Prize, which is awarded to contemporary artists inspired by the Islamic tradition, and her work is featured in the prize exhibition that is currently traveling through Europe and will tour the United States toward the end of this year. It was Kahraman's 2010 "Waraq" series—paintings in the form of oversized playing cards, which address the issue of fractured identities as a result of war and subsequent population displacement—that caught the attention of the prize committee. In it, figures are doubled, with certain telling details altered. In *Migrant 8*, a pious-looking bearded man in a turban is portrayed as a clown on the card's other half. *Migrant 1* depicts a woman hanging from a noose, her eyes shut; her mirror image is blindfolded, her identity hidden. Kahraman's work is often discussed within the context of contemporary Middle Eastern art, a critical perspective she understands but finds inadequate. "Is my artistic expression defined by my place of birth? The necessity to categorize stems from a need to identify that which is not part of the collective. It's 'us' and the 'other,' which automatically places me in the latter category. It's a limited opinion of my work." Although Kahraman does draw on her birth region's artistic traditions, as reflected in her choice of subject matter—for example, the "Waraq" series—and in her growing interest in tessellation, the defining characteristic of her oeuvre might more accurately be said to be her treatment of the female figure.

In the 2011 "Fragmented State" series, Kahraman uses ink on paper and map pins to portray women adorned with decorative geometric patterns in the shape of various map projections. These represent the surface of the globe in a two-dimensional format, which distorts the lines of longitude and latitude, causing them to form geometric patterns. *Conformal Dissection* shows a woman pulling up her own skin to reveal map pins placed in the shape of a Mercator projection. "I was interested in dissection, and it was natural for me to link corporeal and

FROM LEFT:
Hayv Kahraman.

Quasi-Corporeal, 2012. Maple and walnut wood with aluminium, 87 x 80 x 80 in.

OPPOSITE:
Migrant 1, 2010. Oil on panel, 70 x 45 in.



ABOVE:
Arm study, 2011 (detail). Ink and map pins on paper mounted on panel. 30 x 76 in.

RIGHT:
Asad Babil, 2011. Oil and custom-made poker-sized playing cards on panel. 70 x 97 in.

territorial borders. Maps are used to manipulate and control: You form who you are based on the location you're in. So when you have these divisions and borders, your identity is fractured." This series is perhaps Kahraman's most personal reference to the traumatic upheaval of her own formative years. With *Quasi-Corporeal*, 2012, and "Nets," 2012, she takes this a step further by inserting her own body into the work.

A large-scale wood sculpture measuring more than 87 inches high by 80 inches wide, *Quasi-Corporeal* takes the shape of a dodecahedron perforated by geometric patterns. Geometry has long been a through line in her work, figuring most often as decorative textile patterns in her oil paintings. Science is now an increasingly important source of inspiration for her abstract art, in which, she says, "Patterns are the focus." This has led to an interest in the tessellation derived from Islamic architecture and, on a micro level, the atom-size mosaic patterning of quasicrystals, the discovery of which won the 2011 Nobel Prize in chemistry. For *Quasi-Corporeal*, the artist had her entire body scanned and the image uploaded into a computer program, which then sliced the virtual three-dimensional rendering into quarter-inch cross sections. These amounted to 541 "slices," which she had made into wood cutouts that were nested into the 12 pentagons that make up the dodecahedron. "What really draws me in conceptually is that it's so abstract yet it's extremely figurative. If you were to take all the pieces and stack them in the correct order, you would produce an almost flawless Hayv," says Kahraman. She has literally deconstructed and reconstructed her own body in order to view it from a different perspective. Familiar themes of violence and the female form are present, but only the title, *Quasi-Corporeal*, reveals its figurative aspect. In the "Nets" series, the focus of her upcoming solo show at the Third Line gallery's Dubai branch in October, Kahraman abandons any recognizable trace of the representational. For this exhibition, she is creating two- and three-dimensional works using cowskin, with cutouts in the shape of her corporeal cross sections. This new body of work is a marked departure from past series such as "Marionettes" and "Waraq," which mined art history. "I feel that I gravitate toward contemporary work now—more specifically, installation," she says. The newfound physicality of her practice takes a cue from the Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum, while her engagement with geometric abstraction recalls the work of such artists as Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and Gerard Caris.

During the past several years, Kahraman has progressively pared down her style. A colorful palette and a representational approach have given way to a monochromatic abstract aesthetic. Kahraman says that she now finds color and form distracting. She has replaced the lyrical female form with the virtual physical matter that makes up a woman, one cross section at a time. She has also simplified her signature. In *Seven Gates*, 2009, and "Marionettes," her signature has a round flourish and includes Arabic text that translates as "The inner travels of Hayv." The circle has since been eliminated, and now she signs her name only. "I'm tired of clutter," she says. "I want some order in this chaos." MP

***Tomato Offer*, Hayv Kahraman , 2008**
Oil on Linen, 112cm/178cm
Courtesy of the Artist and The Third Line Gallery

Marionnettes, Hayv Kahraman
7 Mai - 10 Juin, Qatar

Texte - Béatrice Grossi

Artiste invitée à la Biennale de Sharjah et simultanément présentée à la foire d'art contemporain Art Dubai… La péninsule arabique AIME décidément Hayv Kahraman, jeune et talentueuse peintre irakienne. Elle nous revient ce mois-ci à Doha, pour y exposer sa toute dernière série de créations, *'Marionnettes'*. Rencontre.

"L'univers que je peins est un monde précaire rempli de possibilités effrayantes. Certaines choses se passent, se passeront et se sont passées; des choses qui peuvent causer une grande souffrance si l'on en parle; des choses qui sont considérées comme tabou, ou trop dures à régler. Pour l'instant, je sens que la seule façon de soulever le sujet est par la beauté et l'art proposés au spectateur."

Hayv Kahraman tente ainsi de présenter, en toute simplicité, l'objet de son art et l'approche qu'elle entend privilégier :

De beauté, il en est irrémédiablement question lorsqu'on observe la longue série de créations accumulées depuis 2006. Précision du trait, éclat des couleurs, souci du détail, Hayv fait montre d'une exigeante acuité dans la réalisation de ses compositions. Alors qu'on voit défiler avec elle son portfolio si parfaitement agencé sur le site web qu'elle s'est elle-même créé avec brio, l'artiste reconnaît *'parvenir aujourd'hui, grâce à l'utilisation de la peinture à l'huile, à expérimenter des couleurs encore plus riches, à travailler les reliefs et ainsi à donner naissance à des expressions encore plus personnelles'*. Son passage à la peinture sur toile de lin – grand format semble aussi avoir généré chez elle de nouvelles impulsions créatives. Elle se réjouit de l'effet naturel procuré par les toiles.

Nul doute, la jeune artiste ne cesse d'évoluer et se trouve vouée à un avenir prometteur. Son style, empreint de multiples influences artistiques -art japonais, miniatures grecques et perses, peinture classique de la Renaissance- est, à chaque nouvelle création, un peu plus raffiné. Une esthétique indéniablement soignée, méticuleusement travaillée qui, comme elle le souhaite, permet à Hayv de sensibiliser encore mieux son public à un ensemble de thèmes souvent difficiles à traiter en image. En effet, sous les traits gracieux et délicats des personnages au regard troublant qui envahissent les tableaux de l'artiste, se cache inéluctablement une critique sociale acerbe. Composition, géométrie des corps, mise en scène des couleurs, contrôle des mouvements, chaque aspect de la création suggère en fait à sa façon le climat de tension sur lequel repose, paradoxalement, chaque oeuvre.

Exilée d'Irak à l'âge de 10 ans, l'artiste ne peut nier la tourmente dans laquelle le pays se trouve plongé depuis des décennies. Les ravages de la guerre et l'oppression féminine sont ainsi des thèmes prédominants dans toute son oeuvre. Si sa dernière série (*'Marionnettes'*) traite des processus d'aliénation inhérents à la dureté du quotidien conjugal, certaines des premières créations n'ont pas manqué de montrer du doigt des pratiques encore plus extrêmes telles que les cas de pendaisons pour rétablir l'honneur d'une famille.

A l'instar de nombreux artistes contemporains du monde arabe en exil, aujourd'hui aux confluents de l'Occident et de l'Orient, Hayv n'a de cesse de rétablir, au sein de sa peinture, ce lien rompu avec sa terre natale. Animée du désir de mémoire et de contestation, l'artiste prône l'espoir *"qu'un jour l'humanité pourra connaître de profonds changements"*.

Marionetes,Hayv Kahraman
May 7 - June 10, Qatar

Translation - Hélène Poirier

She was invited both at the Sharjah Biennial and at the contemporary Art Dubai fair. The Middle East does love Hayv Kahraman, a young and talented Iraqi painter. She is back this month in Doha for an exhibition of her latest body of work, *"Marionetes"*.

'The world I paint is a precarious state of terrifying contingency. Things are happening, will happen, have happened; things that will lacerate when spoken about; things that are considered taboo or too harsh to deal with. At this stage I feel that the only way to put these issues up front is by inviting the viewer through beauty and design'.
Hayv Kahraman thus tries to introduce her work and her outlook in a simple manner.

The word beauty definitely springs to mind when discovering the extensive series of creations which she has been developing since 2006. Clear lines, bright tones, attention to detail, Hayv displays an exacting acuity in the composition of her works. Looking with us at her portfolio on a website that she created herself, the artist acknowledges that through the use of oil paint, she can *"reach today richer colours, work more on the texture, and thus create more personal expressions"*. The move towards large scale linen canvases also generated new creative impulses. She is thrilled by the natural effect thus achieved in her works.

There is no doubt about it: the young artist keeps evolving and has a promising future. Her style, reflective of her many artistic influences – Japanese art, Greek and Persian miniatures, Renaissance classical paintings – becomes more refined with each new creation. Her very meticulous aesthetic enables Hayv to introduce her public to themes that are often difficult to convey visually. For underneath the mostly delicate and graceful features and distracting gaze of the figures who populate her paintings assuredly lies a sharp social criticism. Composition geometry of the bodies, staging of the pigments, control of the movements, each aspect of the creative process suggests in its own way the tense environment paradoxically underpinning each piece of her work. The artist left Iraq when she was 10, but she can't put aside the troubles her country has experienced for decades. The devastation of war and women's oppression are prevalent themes in her work. If her latest series "Marionnettes" deals with the inherent alienation of domestic life, some of her earlier creations were pointing at extremely violent practices such as honor killings.

Like many other contemporary Arab artists living in exile, at the cusp of East and West, Hayv never ceases to re-establish through her paintings her severed link to her native land. Moved by the desire to remember and rebel, the artist advocates the hope that *"one day, humankind will experience deep changes"*.

***Marionetes* will be shown at The Third Line Doha from May 7 to June 10**
For more info on the exhibition, check page 44 (Events Listing) or more info on the artist log on to www.hayvkahraman.com

canvas

ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 6 NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2009

SEVDA AND CAN ELGIZ
A Dedicated Passion

ST CATHERINE'S MONASTERY
Sacred History at Sinai

HALUK AKAKÇE
Visual Manifestations

THE HAERIZADEH BROTHERS
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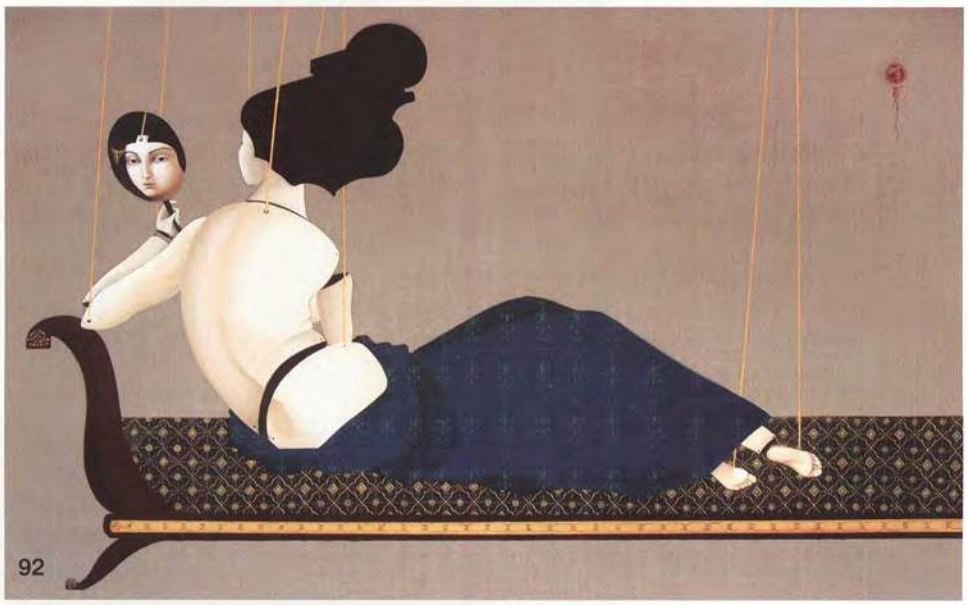
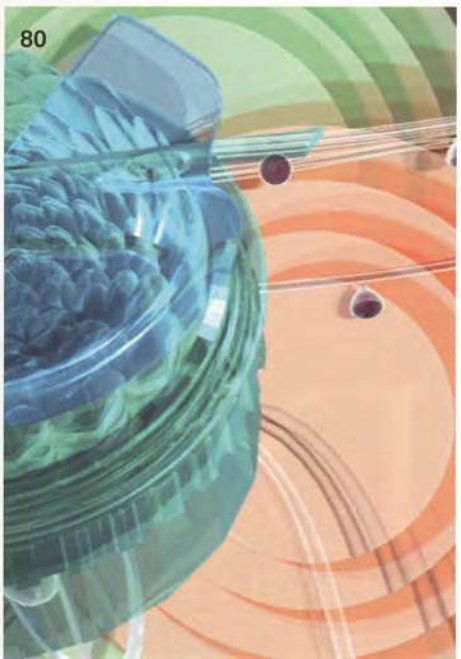
profile





photography

regulars


inner travels
hayv kahraman

The rich web of life can lead us in many directions and still leave us with our identity unresolved. Yet by drawing on all experiences, regardless of destination, Hayv Kahraman is revealing how the true artistic soul will always find a means of sustenance and direction.

TEXT BY YASMINE MOHSENI
IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THE THIRD LINE

Three women sit with colourful robes barely covering their pale bodies. Their delicate round faces, red lips, almond-shaped eyes and sweeping black eyebrows are framed by billowing masses of black hair. Two of them look out into the void while the third figure, sitting in the centre, looks at the viewer, conveying both submission and defiance. Floating on a bare canvas, the figures are suspended in midair by strings, affixed to the tops of their heads, which continue beyond the frame. These women are both of this world and otherworldly. Welcome to the complex, beautiful and melancholic world of Hayv Kahraman. And this is *Repose*, part of Kahraman's *Marionettes* series. The painting does not fit into one art historical canon but rather borrows from multiple cultures and art traditions; with influences that include the Italian Renaissance, European Surrealism, Japanese and Middle Eastern art, among others. In the past few years, the 28 year-old Iraqi painter has received international attention through showcases at venues including the Saatchi Gallery, The Third Line and Art Dubai. To say her star is on the rise would be an understatement, but through stepping into her world for a day, it becomes clear that she is taking it all one canvas at a time.

On the Road

To understand her art, one has to understand Kahraman's life and travels. Despite her young age, she has already crisscrossed the globe and amassed life experiences that would be difficult for a person twice her age to match. Born in 1981 in Baghdad, Kahraman fled with her sister and mother to Sweden 10 years later, by way of Ethiopia, Germany and Yemen. Her life in Sweden began with an extended stay in a refugee camp, but eventually the country became her home for over a decade. At 22, she went to Florence to study graphic arts and web design and met her husband, Anthony, there. In 2007 they moved to his hometown of Phoenix, Arizona. While her travels take her increasingly further away from Iraq, her native country is never far from her mind, or her work. "As an adult, I feel this guilt, so being categorised as a Middle Eastern artist makes me feel as though I'm trying to make it right. I feel like I was robbed from fully experiencing the Iraqi culture." Fiercely patriotic, Kahraman has misgivings about living in the USA, but upon returning to Iraq in March 2007, she was surprised to discover that she could not relate to the current Iraqi culture or its people. At that moment, it became clear that she was an outsider, no matter where she went. "When I went to Iraq, I felt like a tourist. In Sweden, I'm a tourist and here [in the USA] I am definitely a tourist!" This sense of belonging nowhere and everywhere has imbued her work with a universal appeal. "The merging of cultures [in

Previous spread: *Cooking*. 2008. Oil on linen. 116.8 x 193 cm.

Facing page: (Detail) *Falcons*. 2006. Sumi ink and acrylic on paper. 61 x 38 cm.

"When I went to Iraq, I felt like a tourist. In Sweden, I'm a tourist and here [in the USA] I am definitely a tourist! The merging of cultures [in my art] is a search for identity. I've never had a home. Well, I had one but it got destroyed."

my art] is a search for identity. I've never had a home. Well, I had one but it got destroyed." After living in culturally rich cities such as Baghdad, Florence and Stockholm, it was in the incongruous context of suburban Phoenix that she found her voice as an artist.

A seminal year for Kahraman was 2007. Her move to Phoenix and visit to Iraq forced her to face the realities of a rootless existence. The isolation she felt living in the USA translated into a period of introspection, which led to a prolific phase in her art. It was at this time that she developed a confident and technically precise painterly style. Perhaps most importantly, she devised a signature that expresses the function of her paintings. A red circle above a small red square depicts words in Arabic calligraphy which translate as "the inner travels of Hayv" and below, also in red, is Kahraman's signature. "My work is an outlet. I don't possess one language perfectly so I have all these words floating in my head, [all] in different languages," she explains. It seems that painting has become a way for her to develop a language with which to express herself with fluency. So what is it that she is expressing, exactly? The subject of women is recurrent and predominant. An older painting hanging in her foyer, entitled *FGM* (Female Genital Mutilation), is a favourite of hers. "I really don't want to sell that one, I'm holding onto it for as long as I can," she says. In the living room hangs *Dwarfing*, a canvas from her 2008 series on bonsai trees, derived from the technique of trimming bonsai trees to keep them small and delicate. Upon closer examination, one sees that the bonsai tree is shaped like a woman. "Every time I hear about something [bad] happening to women, I fall apart." Her sentiment towards women and their role in society, whether it has been imposed or chosen, can be as critical as it can be empathetic.

Before arriving in the USA, Kahraman had a notion of an open-minded culture which did not fit with the reality she encountered. She found that the young American women she spoke to did not have aspirations that went beyond "getting married, having kids and a house, owning a car and having a dog," explains Kahraman. This desire for domesticity shocked Kahraman and inspired *Marionettes*. The women depicted in the series are puppets performing different house chores and adhering to the submissive role traditionally assigned to

Previous spread: *Toilette*. 2008. Oil on linen. 106.6 x 172.7 cm.

Facing page: *Combing*. 2008. Oil on linen. 172.7 x 106.7 cm.

"Every time I hear about something [bad] happening to women, I fall apart."

women. In *Repose*, the three women are in various states of undress because, as Kahraman explains, "another duty of the housewife is to please her man, so these women would fall into that category." Creating a series on women as puppets could veer into the cliché or uninspired, but Kahraman avoids this by concealing the puppet master. "It can be up to chance," she explains. "I don't really want to say that it's the male sex controlling them."

Refreshing Vistas

Kahraman's paintings go down the well-trodden path of examining women in society, but she does it with such fearless earnestness that she renders an old topic new again. A large part of this newness is derived from her actual painting style. In her early work, her point of departure was graphic arts, such as the work of 19th-century Englishman Aubrey Beardsley, who created flat, somewhat macabre compositions. In 2007 she began to widen her sources, while still looking to the past. In fact, aside from Shirin Neshat (see *Canvas* Volume 3, Issue 5), whom she admires to the point of veneration, very few of Kahraman's inspirations are contemporary. One is able to pick out specific art historical influences layered in her work. For instance, the marionettes' hair looks to Japan and the textiles evoke Persian miniatures, while the floating women with strings protruding from their foreheads are drawn from European Surrealism. But what informs her work the most is the Italian Renaissance, even down to the way in which she prepares her canvas with rabbit skin glue, a technique favoured by the Old Masters. Her style of female face and silhouette brings to mind the pointy chin and full cheeks of da Vinci's Madonnas and Ghirlandaio's ladies-in-waiting. Her labour-intensive technique, which requires careful precision and focus, reflects the importance of craft in her work – something often missing in the irreverent world of Contemporary art and a characteristic of her work that she herself recognises. "A lot of people don't understand Contemporary art. My work is figurative and so one might be able to enter it more easily than [a work that is just] a scratch on a canvas. Our world is so cosmopolitan, everything is merged and I think people recognise that unity in my work."

Kahraman reminisces about her childhood and fondly recalls a playroom her parents had set up for her and her sister in their Baghdad home. "We could paint anywhere, on all four walls. Imagine, as a kid, having four walls as a canvas!" While she may have lost her home, sense of cultural identity and roots, she gained a universal perspective that transcends cultural confinement. She looks around the world and borrows from East and West, from past and present, to create a painterly style that is mature beyond a woman of her 28 years. Kahraman's paintings have a gravitas to them which set her work apart. So, which collections would she like to see her paintings in? "All of them!" she exclaims with a laugh. "You can dream big, right?" It seems those dreams might become a reality very soon. Kahraman is showing at a group show at Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin in November 2009, a solo show in January 2010 at the Thierry Goldberg Projects in New York and another solo show at Frey Norris in San Francisco in May 2010. Looks like she has the globe covered.

Previous spread: *Mevlevi Sema I.* 2007. Sumi ink, acrylic, and watercolour on paper. 58.5 x 108.5 cm.

Facing page: (Detail) *Sweeping*. 2009. Oil on linen. 178 x 112 cm.

For more information visit www.hayvkahraman.com and www.thethirdline.com

CRITIC'S PICK HAYV KAHRAMAN

In Hayv Kahraman's recent paintings, like *Hegemony*, 2009, women dangle from marionette's strings.

The black-haired women in Hayv Kahraman's paintings are meticulously rendered amalgams of long-necked Japanese woodblock geishas and Botticelli nudes, dressed in robes with patterns inspired by Persian miniatures. Their polyglot beauty cloaks a palpable sense of distress. The women go about their domestic duties with listless and vacant expressions; they cut up lambs with graceful but lifeless arms.

The languid, pale limbs of Italian Renaissance religious figures and Persian princesses feature prominently in Kahraman's imagination. "I mix all these cultures together probably because I'm searching for a lost identity," she says. The 28-year-old artist was born in Baghdad, immigrated to Sweden when she was ten, and went to school at the Academy of Art and Design in Florence, where she studied graphic design but spent much of her time absorbing classical painting. She also met her husband at the academy—an American artist named Anthony Velasquez, who, they joke, "dragged her" to Arizona in 2006, where they lived in a home owned by Velasquez's mother.

In Phoenix, isolated from the art world, Kahraman poured more energy into her painting. "When I first moved here, I fell into this depression," she says. "I'm actually patriotic and proud of being an Iraqi." Never mind that her family, half Kurdish, fled Iraq in 1992 after the Gulf War. It's that kind of contradiction that fuels her work.

Curator Nour Wali says that Kahraman's East-West fusion is typical of contemporary Arab art. "I also loved the way the women are neither victims nor heroes; they've got this graceful quality," says Wali, who included Kahraman in a show at London's Paradise Row gallery this summer. Coming up, her work will be seen in "Taswir: Pictorial Mappings of Islam and Modernity," opening next month at Berlin's Martin-Gropius-Bau. And, coinciding with her move to San Francisco, Kahraman will be in a show of Bay Area artists, opening on the 8th of this month at the Frey Norris gallery.

Kahraman, whose abundant dark hair mirrors that of the women in her paintings, was picked up in 2006 by the Third Line gallery in Dubai, where two shows have sold out. Charles Saatchi bought five of her works, and she was signed by the New York gallery Thierry Goldberg Projects, where her paintings now sell for between $10,000 and $18,000.

In Kahraman's most recent series of oil paintings, "Domestic Marionettes," women sew, iron, or play musical instruments, with thin lines emanating upward from their hair or arms. According to the artist, these marionettes owe more to her observations of female life in the United States than in Iraq. "I wasn't expecting the notion of the housewife to be so strong," Kahraman says. "In the media, on television, you are just bombarded with the subservient-housewife aspiration."

—Carly Berwick

Carly Berwick is a contributing editor of ARTnews.

RES

ART WORLD / WORLD ART NO:4 SEPTEMBER 2009

INTERVIEW WITH HAYV KAHRAMAN

NOVEMBER PAYNTER You studied graphic design at the Accademia di Arte e Design in Florence and continue to practice illustration. Were you already painting before and during your studies?

Hayv Kahraman at work

HAYV KAHRAMAN Yes, I have painted as long as I remember. As a child I was either going to be an artist or a ballerina. I attended the School of Music and Ballet in Baghdad.

NP How has your painting style developed and how much has it been influenced by your training in graphic design?

HK I think it has changed—or maybe morphed would be the better word for it. I find myself constantly changing, evolving and growing. What is important though is that I have always put my entire self in each piece I do. Not only doing research but really trying to live it and immerse myself in it as much as I can. Yes, my studies in graphic design have taught me valuable lessons in symmetry and composition. This training allowed me to see the beauty in simplicity and the power of color. My early work as a teenager before studying was erratic and very busy. There was just too much going on and I think studying design helped me organize my images and thoughts.

NP The paintings you now produce require a highly sophisticated technical approach. Is this important in terms of the subject matter as well as the aesthetics?

HK Yes, it is extremely important. I always strive for quality and craftsmanship whether I am painting in oils or on paper. I stretch my own canvas and prime it myself using rabbit skin glue, which is a traditional method used for centuries to size the canvas. I leave my canvas unprimed because I absolutely love the nature and texture of the linen.

NP How did you come to develop such a distinctive style and from which cultures have you gained inspiration and specific mannerisms? Do you feel that the way you fuse styles and references stems from your connection/disconnection to Iraq?

HK I look at many images everyday; not only paintings but also random images I find online. The more I see the more inspired I become, and it all grows from there. My style evolved in this way and naturally through endless sketching and developing.

Tomato Offer, 2008
Oil on linen, 70 x 44 in / 178 x 112 cm

1
Denounced Ideal, 2009
Oil on linen with thread and needles, 26 in / 66 cm in diameter

2
Folding Flying Sheet, 2009
Oil on linen, 70 x 34 in / 177.8 x 86.4 cm

3
Sweeping, 2009
Oil on linen, 70 x 44 in / 178 x 112 cm

1

2

3

Having grown up in both the east and west I find that I can share in a mixture of cultures without fully identifying with any of them. I am one of many Iraqis uprooted from their homeland due to war. Having lived in Sweden, Italy and now the United States, I have always felt like a tourist and an immigrant at the same time. My paintings are a gateway and a reminder of my identity. While Iraq will always be my homeland and is an important instrument in my work, having fled my country I am now dealing with emotions of rootlessness, non-identity, longing and guilt. This is the reality of a refugee where issues of living between two completely different worlds in which language and customs differ arise. Living so far away from the Middle East, I always long for a connection with my Arabic identity.

NP Where do the references to Asian painting styles and composition come from?

HK The Asian influence stems from images that I have fallen in love with. I have never visited Japan but I greatly admire their sense of design. They seem to achieve utmost harmony with simplistic strokes and composition. Ultimately I merge many styles that reach from the Italian renaissance and Japanese painting to Arabic calligraphy and Persian miniatures. All of these are major inspirations and perhaps an intuitive approach for unity.

NP Why do you only paint women? And where are the ends of the strings which disappear beyond the frame?

HK It is true that all my figures are women. I think that there are two main reasons for this: first and foremost, it is due to the sense of empathy that I experience whenever I see, hear or read stories about women who have experienced barbaric situations. I feel this powerful connection with them and I feel the need to put this down on canvas.

The second and perhaps more profound reason for painting these things came to me only after examining and contemplating my work. I fled my native soil in Iraq; I left my friends, my home and my people behind. As I mentioned before, now as an adult this sudden departure has resulted in my developing inescapable feelings of guilt and remorse. I paint war not peace, inequality not equality. This all provides me with a sense of redemption or even a voice to revolt against inhumane atrocities like honor killings and war. In short, my paintings are an outlet of rebellion.

As for the strings, maybe they are being held by something/someone else? In cutting the image in this way I leave room for interpretation. Many would assume it is men who regulate the strings, but it can also be circumstance.

NP The women you paint are extremely elegant, why is this so? Is it a form of yearning for another kind of life and is this why you also occasionally paint females in the nude?

HK Yes, the women I paint are longing and searching for a different alternative world that transcends the boundaries of the canvas. In the *Marionette* series, for example, there is a questioning, if you will, of something beyond their repetitive lifestyle of endless cleaning, scrubbing and serving. There is a marvelous quote by Simone de Beauvoir that goes hand in hand with what I was trying to express in this series: "Washing, ironing, sweeping. All this halting of decay is also the denial of life."

NP Where do the patterns on their clothes come from?

Folding Large Sheet, 2008
Oil on linen, 52 x 85.8 in / 132 x 218 cm

TOP
Ironing, 2008
Oil on linen, 42 x 68 in / 106.6 x 172.7 cm

BOTTOM
Hegemony, 2009
Oil on linen, 52 x 86 in / 132.1 x 218.4 cm

HK They come from everywhere. I borrow from Islamic patterns, Italian patterns and Japanese or really anything that stands out to me. I then design my own patterns based on all these different references.

NP Their hair is very ornate and voluptuous, is this a reference to the wearing of the turban?

HK The women's black hair accentuates their femininity and is exaggerated in dimension. I portray it in that way to offer an affirmation of their female identity.

NP Is there any symbolism in your paintings that refers to art historical references or that comes from your own system of signification—such as the women's swan-like necks?

HK Yes, sometimes. I spent a lot of time in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy, looking at master paintings from the medieval ages to the Baroque period and many of the symbolic elements I took from these have appeared transformed in my work. For example, the apple that appears in renaissance art usually depicted with Venus bears symbolic references to a woman's breast. In my work this apple morphed into a tomato. I am not sure why this occurred, but it might be a Middle Eastern influence manifesting itself.

As for the swan-like necks... the swan is a beautiful and elegant creature. I remember ballet rehearsals in Baghdad for *Swan Lake* at my school and falling in love with the music. Although I was just a kid, the rehearsal was very tough and it was something I was proud of taking part in and I couldn't wait to perform. But this experience got interrupted because of the war. My family decided to flee Baghdad and travel north to Suleymania where it was presumably "safer". I left my school and a completely new journey began at that point.

NP Do your paintings contain allegories or refer to specific stories?

HK Yes, some do. In fact I am now working on seven paintings that will represent the mythological Sumerian story of the descent of Inanna into the underworld. In short, she passes seven gates, and before entering each gate she has to take off one of the items she has gathered before entering and that are said to represent civilization. In my paintings she is wearing seven items of clothing (colored in blues, greens and golds, symbolic of the earth's colors) and in each painting one item is removed and set aside to make a pile of clothing in the last one with Inanna appearing as a completely nude figure. This is a work in progress so it is still very fresh.

Hayv Kahraman (b. 1981, Baghdad), studied Graphic Design at Accademia di Arte e Design, Florence and Web Design at the University of Umeå, Sweden. Kahraman recently exhibited work in the Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2009); at the Volta NY Art Fair in a solo cooperation with Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York (2009); in *Marionettes* (solo), The Third Line, Doha (2009) and in *Unveiled, New art from the Middle East*, Saatchi Gallery, London (2009). She lives and works in the United States.

November Paynter is an independent curator and the Director of the Artist Pension Trust, Dubai. She regularly writes for art periodicals including *Artreview, Bidoun, Artforum online* and is the Istanbul correspondent for *Contemporary Magazine*.

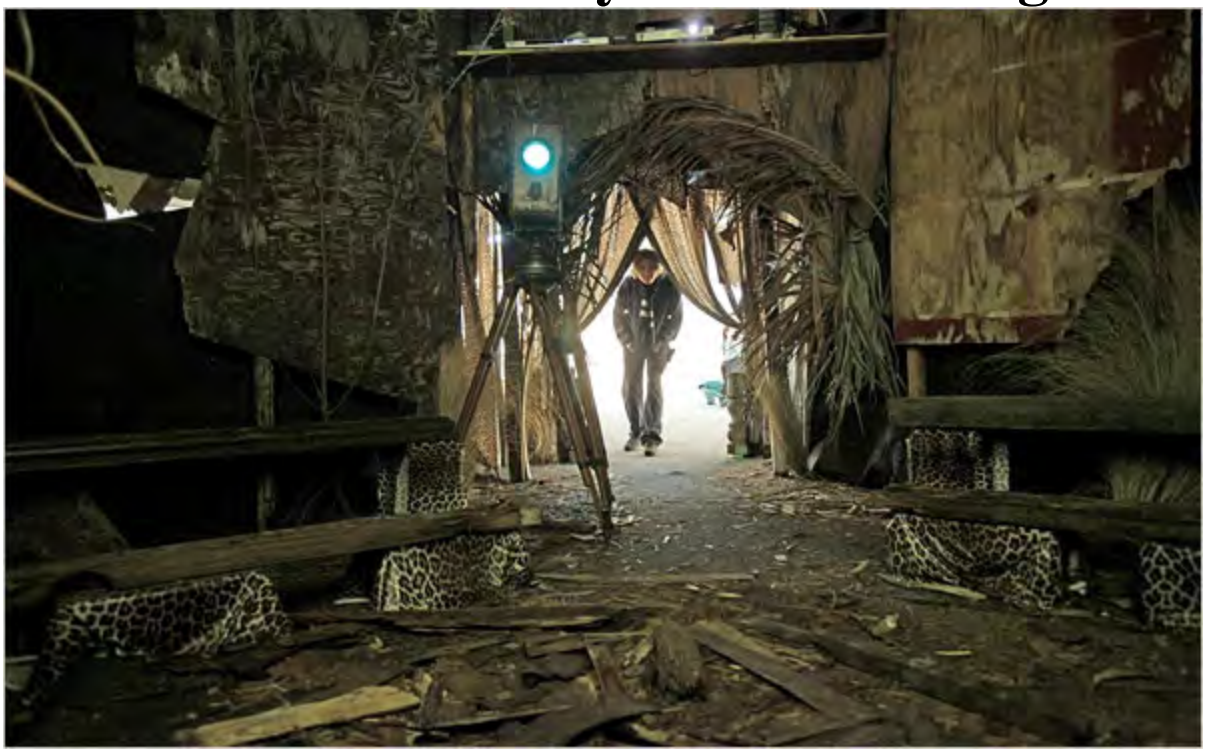
Combing, 2008
Oil on linen, 68 x 42 in / 172.7 x 106.6 cm

Toilette, 2008
Oil on linen, 42 x 68 in / 106.6 x 172.7 cm

The New York Times
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/07/arts/design/07armo.html?_r=1

Art

Toplessness and Taxidermy in a Bottoming Market



David Goldman for The New York Times
Clifton Childree's installation "Miamuh Swamp Adventure," a rickety installation resembling a rotting silent-movie theater, at Pulse on Pier 40.

By KAREN ROSENBERG
Published: March 6, 2009

As a newly sobered art world sizes up this weekend's Armory Show, many are wondering about the fates of smaller fairs with catchier names. What prospects do they have in a crippled economy? A winnowing has already occurred: at least three of last year's Armory-week fairs have opted out of the festivities.

Those that remain are trying out some new strategies. Volta, which shares a parent company with the Armory, strives to be seen as its younger, hipper sibling (something like the Art Statements section of solo-artist booths at Art Basel and Art Basel Miami Beach). Pulse, in its most diverse incarnation yet, is banking on globalization. And Scope supplements its accessible, pop-kitschy wares with a packed special-events calendar of music, screenings and parties.

Everywhere artists were mindful of recession economics. At Volta, Alejandro Diaz's black-marker epigrams on cardboard could be had for $99.99. At Scope, artists hawked T-shirts and other multiples priced from $5 to $250 in a separate pavilion marked "Cheap, Fast and Out of Control."

In previous seasons wry deconstructions of the fair environment, taking a buzz saw to the walls of the booth, for example, or leaving it mostly empty, were common sights. This time dealers showed tidy installations of paintings and photographs, mostly of modest proportions. "Small is the new big," a wall text at Scope proclaimed.

The solo projects at Volta, in particular, exhibited a slightly queasy self-consciousness of art as a commodity. “Age of Anxiety” is the pre-emptively clever theme of this year’s fair, which was organized by the returning team of Amanda Coulson and Christian Viveros-Faune.

One piece raising eyebrows was a sculpture by Fernando Mastrangelo, at the booth of the Los Angeles gallery Rhys Mendes. A white figure of a Colombian coca farmer resting on a mirror-tiled floor in an all-black setting, it was said to be made of cocaine.

At the Belgian gallery Hoet Bekaert, a topless woman enticed browsers to dig for buried treasure — hidden necklaces — in an installation of brightly colored thread clusters by the Thai artist Surasi Kusolwong. Nearby at Haas & Fischer, Joshua Callaghan’s Model-T Ford, wrought from brass lamps and bedposts, competed for attention.

Some booths didn’t need a gimmick to stand out. In this category were paintings of women with nimbuses of dark hair and the stylized features of figures in Persian miniature painting, by the Iraqi artist **Hayv Kahraman**, at Thierry Goldberg.

Celebrities were another marketing ploy. Galerie Brigitte Schenk showed watercolors of creepy figures with gas masks and guns capably painted by the musician Marilyn Manson. At Scope a painting signed Yu Ling, at Eli Klein Fine Art, was revealed to be the work of the actress Lucy Liu. Intentionally or not, Ms Liu’s prank mocked the demand, in recent seasons, for undiscovered Chinese contemporary artists.

(Fledgling fairs dot the perimeter: Bridge, in the Tunnel nightclub space on 27th Street; Pool, in the Wyndham Hotel on 24th Street; and Fountain, on a boat docked at Pier 66. Although the art is strictly entry level, these fairs have the benefit of proximity to Chelsea galleries.)

Scattered throughout Pulse are galleries from Beijing and Shanghai, but other urban centers also vie for attention: Moscow, Manila, Montreal. Most are fluent in the language of international contemporary art: blurry Photo Realist painting, staged and digitally enhanced photography, crafty crocheted sculptures festooned with sequins and bric-a-brac.

There are also special Pulse-commissioned projects like the Miami artist Clifton Childree’s “Miamuh Swamp Adventure,” a rickety installation resembling a rotting silent-movie theater. Inside is a film about Miami real estate scams at the end of the 19th century.

Solo-artist booths, a trend that clearly extended beyond Volta, stood out at both Pulse and Scope. At Pulse, Mark Moore of Santa Monica, Calif., devoted a large booth to Alison Schulnik’s heavily impastoed paintings of hobos and clowns. At Scope, the Chelsea gallery Jonathan LeVine had a winning installation by Camille Rose Garcia: wallpaper, paintings and pillows all adorned with a street-art version of the Disney character Cruella de Vil.

Scope seemed to be in the grip of the dubious urban-frontier trend in décor. Specially commissioned installations at the entrances to both tents, by Maya Hayuk and Kristin Schiele, evoked cabins and shanties. Inside the main tent two pieces of taxidermy art were prominent: Marc Séguin’s bald eagle and a deer head with exaggerated, resin-sculpted antlers by Carolyn Salas and Adam Parker Smith.

In the design world this stuff is old news — but in the art world, it’s evidence of a new survivalism.

Continuing through Sunday are the Pulse Art Fair New York, Pier 40, 353 West Street, at West Houston Street, West Village, pulse-art.com; Scope New York, Damrosch Park, Lincoln Center, scope-art.com; and Volta NY, 7 West 34th Street, Manhattan, voltashow.com; and the Armory Show itself, at Piers 92 and 94, 12th Avenue at 55th Street, Clinton; thearmoryshow.com.