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In Conversation. A Painting Show

Nadine Atallah, Duncan Macdonald, Brenda Segone

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MASR Research in Modern and Contemporary Egyptian Art

In Conversation. A Painting Show

April 2019
Sharjah Art Gallery

Guest Curator
Nadine Atallah



IN CONVERSATION:
OF PAINTING AND

Introduction

It is my honor to introduce this exhibition of painters who are expanding upon the realms of possibility afforded by their medium within Egypt and beyond. MASR Research in Modern and Contemporary Art's mission is to create artistic research that allows academics, artists, students, and the public to analyze and critically engage with discursive issues in modern and contemporary art in Egyptian society. We are equally committed to producing professional art exhibitions, artist talks, interviews, workshops, curated events, small-scale publications, and in turn, delivering art-centered education. Annually, we produce two professional exhibitions at the Sharjah Art Gallery, in addition to these associated events. As part of our work, we endeavor to pose a number of critical questions, among them: How can art scenes in Egypt be nurtured? And how can artists be part of a larger sustainable eco-system of artistic creation? The painters in this show are contributing much to the landscape of art creation here. Together with Brenda Segone, co-project investigator of MASR, we explore these issues through the creation and presentation of research that dovetails with art education coursework in Visual Arts.

For our second exhibition, *In Conversation. A Painting Show*, we have had the good fortune of working with guest curator Nadine Atallah. Ms. Atallah has brought together a diverse group of artists who are fully aware of the legacy of painting in this country and choose to expand upon these legacies in an array of trajectories. Their work reaffirms that painting is alive and well in Egypt, despite the fact that the contemporary art world tends to downplay its value with an impossible search for constant newness. In this exhibition, you will find tapestry mixed with painting, film deconstruction and reconstruction through paint and stop motion, the questioning of photographic truth, the representation of aesthetics and politics in street art, and much more. This show is a wonderful example of how art inevitably coaxes the viewer into imagining a range of possible new worlds, each as complex and unique as the artist who created them.

This show would not have been possible without the hard work of a small group of people. Firstly, I wish to thank Nadine Atallah for her passionate work in curating this ambitious show. I also wish to thank our research associates, Nour Abdel-Baky, Helena

Abdelnasser, and Jomana El Soufani, for their efforts. Dina Jereidini did an immense amount of coordinating and planning to make this show possible. The technical support team from the Sharjah Art Gallery also deserve thanks for their diligent work to produce this wonderful exhibition. Thanks to Noor Ibrahim for her design work for all materials related to the project. Thanks to the administrative staff in the Department of the Arts for their assistance. Lastly, this research would not have been possible without financial support from AUC in the form of a multi-year research grant.

Duncan MacDonald
Director of Visual Arts
Associate Professor of Practice
The American University in Cairo

Foreword

In line with MASR's attempt to map the diversity of the modern and contemporary art scene in Egypt, for our second edition¹ we invited an external curator, Nadine Atallah, an art historian who is also one of the founding members of Madrassa Collective, a transnational curatorial platform, to imagine an exhibition under the thematic of "Mapping discourses and issues in contemporary art. How is it reflected currently in the media?"

While this exhibition did not follow a typical methodology and was developed gradually based on the incursions made by Nadine Atallah into the Egyptian art scene, it nevertheless followed a guiding principle, even if an unusual one: the desire to do something in a different way. We leave it to the public to discover how our methodology was indeed different. All the parties involved had as a common motivation the desire to produce, to make art speak, and to speak through art. This says a lot about the vitality of the art scene in Egypt.

The usual discrepancy between artistic practices and curatorial statements of funded projects that oblige one to be inscribed in a certain geopolitical perspective is irrelevant here. There is no attempt to forcibly glue the creative processes with certain discourses in order to fit a certain brief. In this regard, *In Conversation. A Painting Show* goes against the discourses one finds around art exhibits by muting them. It gives way to artists and to their creative process with the medium of painting and its hybrid forms as an anchor. The different choices made throughout the development of the project will undoubtedly raise many questions around the current exhibition. It is precisely in the questions themselves, that some answers can be found.

The preparation of this exhibition, within the AUC framework, took place largely on the Internet, but also through a few face-to-face meetings. The exchange of e-mails, in itself a form of contemporary conversation, and the most common in the world of contemporary art, if not the exclusive form, raises questions about the artist as an

individual and the Internet as a structure. There were indeed plenty of conversations! At times short, at times long, at times passionate, or complacent, at shorter or longer intervals, sometimes offset, the whole gamut was there. Needless to say, that with a *conversation*, comes the *interval* of reflection until the next conversation, and so on, to the point where everything gets transferred to the audience.

I would like to sincerely thank Nadine Atallah for her immense engagement with and enthusiasm for the project. I would also like to thank the artists and all the collaborators of the MASR team!

Brenda Segone
Writer, Researcher
Visual Arts Program, AUC

¹ Our first exhibition was *Concrete Poetry in Space*, a solo show by Hazem El Mestikawy, Fall 2018, AUC.

In Conversation. A Painting Show

Conversation: A Tradition in the History of Painting

Paintings do not explain themselves; they require interpretation and imagination. This is one of the preliminary statements of *In Conversation. A Painting Show*. Discussion with practicing artists is an essential starting point to understanding the conceptual processes shaping their work, and the visual and plastic codes at play. In art history, there has been a tradition of conversation with painters since the Renaissance, in line with the writings of Alberti, Félibien, and more recently, Isabelle Graw who even states that there is “no theory of painting without conversation.”¹ Even if it does not take the form of interviews, the seminal book on Egyptian modern art by Aimé Azar, *La Peinture moderne en Égypte*,² also derives from studio visits and exchanges with the artists. Conversations operate as a driving force for observation and insight, but they certainly are not a reader’s guide to an artist’s work: language is the tool of art historians, critics, and even to a certain extent, of curators; it is not the tool of painters. Therefore, this exhibition is not an attempt to define a theme, a category, or a label which would supposedly reveal an intrinsic likeness of the exhibited artworks, or worse, a purported essence of contemporary painting in Egypt. Rather, this “Painting Show” stems from empirical observation and from conversations with artists, fellow researchers, and curators. It owes a lot to these exchanges in its attempt to elucidate some painting practices taking place in Egypt today. At the same time, this exhibition aims to stimulate further conversations between different artists who all have a reflexive approach to the medium of painting; especially as most of them were unfamiliar with each other’s work before the exhibition. The reality of contemporary painting in Egypt, and more broadly of contemporary creation, involves ramified artistic communities and individuals, which may or may not interconnect. This multiplicity of art worlds is shaped by the artists’ diversity of training and life paths: Institutional education at the Fine Art School of Cairo and its counterparts in Alexandria, Minya, and Luxor or at the Higher Institute of Art Education; non-academic studies; residencies and projects in countries such as Japan, Germany, and Brazil; and migration, both from and to Egypt. Even if the local scene is often self-declared as a “small” one, its complexity should be acknowledged.

1 Graw Isabelle, *The Love of Painting. Genealogy of a Success Medium*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2018, p. 18.

2 Azar Aimé, *La Peinture moderne en Égypte*, Les Éditions Nouvelles, Le Caire, 1961.

Historicizing Painting in Egypt: Starting Assumptions

One of the motivations for the conversations behind this exhibition was to place Egyptian reality in confrontation with the global obsession with the end of painting. Starting in the 1980s, numerous exhibitions and publications in the West have pointed to a crisis in painting, leading to reflections on its “post-medium condition”.³ The past few years have seen a revival of painting on the global scale, but for a long time, some have posited that photography irrevocably wiped out painting as a means of representation, or have asserted its obsolescence in a world increasingly affected by the proliferation of images. Others have cited the breach created by minimalism and conceptual art in reaction to the cumbersome past of the most traditionally revered medium of fine art. But painting, as it has been practiced in Europe for centuries, is a much more recent tradition in Egypt. While it doesn’t share the same historical burden, it does carry another heavy weight, that of colonialism and its reverberations. Indeed, painting, as a fine art tradition, was introduced to Egypt in the 19th century by European Orientalist painters.⁴ Some of them became the first professors at the Faculty of Fine Arts founded in Cairo in 1908, contributing to the medium’s institutionalization. This means that, effectively, fine art painting developed concomitantly with photography in Egypt, which was introduced in the 1860s by European amateurs and professionals who produced touristic views of Cairo for the eyes of foreign audiences.⁵ One can assume that such a chronological coincidence involved major differences in the ontology of painting in Egypt in comparison with the West. No comprehensive study has examined this phenomenon yet, however, it would certainly seem that painting and photography evolved side by side, as non-rival correlative practices. Many modern painters in Egypt used to paint based on

3 See for instance: Harris, Jonathan, editor. *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting. Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism*, Liverpool University Press, 2003; de Chasse, Éric. *Après la fin*, Collection Les Mondes de l’art. Klincksieck. 2017; “Renouveau de la peinture.” *Ligeia* 2006/1, n°65-68, 2006; Hoptman, Laura, editor. *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*. The Museum of Modern Art, 2014; Hochdorfe, Achim, et al. *Painting 2.0. Expression in the Information Age*, Prestel, 2015.

4 For further information on the introduction of fine arts in Egypt, see: Radwan, Nadia. *Les modernes d’Égypte*, Peter Lang, 2017.

5 For further information on the beginnings of photography in Egypt, see: Collective *Le Caire dessiné et photographié au XIXe siècle*, Collection D’une rive l’autre. Picard, 2013.

photographs, and some of them even produced their own photographs as models for their compositions.⁶ This is a widespread practice all around the globe, but the essential difference is that fine art painting has no pre-photographic existence in Egypt.

Thereby, in the Egyptian context, painting could have developed as a non-representational medium from the outset, because the alternative of photography was always there – regardless of the technical and financial criteria at stake. Yet, interestingly enough, this isn't what happened: the academic teaching methods of those first European professors still prevail in the painting departments of the Egyptian faculties of fine arts today. Fruit baskets and ceramic pitchers are arranged on pedestals dramatically wrapped in colorful pieces of fabric for groups of students painstakingly endeavoring to copy the installation. While most art schools in Europe and the US emphasize theoretical and critical thinking over drawing skills, the fact that still-life classes continue in Egypt suggests that there's never been any urge to revolt against or even to challenge the necessity of representation, and through it, of painting. The fine art tradition has been adopted even though its history wasn't inherited. Incidentally, it is meaningful that no specific terms accurately and specifically designating the painted image or painting as a medium were ever coined in the Arabic language. *Tasweer* and *surah* refer to all kinds of images, whether painted, photographic, material, or digital; *al-fann al-rasm* literally means “the art of drawing”; *lawn* means first and foremost simply “color”; and *lawha* can refer to any regular wooden panel as well as to a painted work of art. This shortcoming in the art vocabulary implies an intermingling of the concepts of painting and imagery while suggesting the supremacy of depiction over the plastic specificities of the medium. In fact, the intricate relationship between the emergence of modern art and the establishment of the modern Egyptian nation-state may have played a role in encouraging figurative painting over abstraction. Since the beginning of the 20th century, and more obviously during the Nasser era, the development of political representations based on an identifiable iconography, has been encouraged by competitions and state commissions to fulfil the need for a national imagery capable of sustaining a major political project: independence from colonial rule.⁷ Yet, it should be stressed that figurative painting at the time was rarely naturalistic, or even realistic: although it usually related to the real world, it did not pretend to illusion.⁸

6 This practice is documented, among others, in the personal documentation and photographs of artist Margo Veillon kept at AUC's Rare Books and Special Collections Library.

7 For instance, representations of fellahin busy in the fields, of workers and popular neighbourhoods, or of Aswan's high dam, are some of the subjects typical of the iconography of the 1950s and 1960s.

8 Those who are not familiar with Egyptian modern art can observe the paintings by Gazbia Sirry displayed in the administrative building of AUC's new campus. Not only did Gazbia Sirry experiment with various modes of figuration, but she also shifted to a more abstract painting style from the late 1960s. Examples of geometric landscapes from the AUC's collection suggest that abstraction, as she practiced it, was not a complete rejection of representation, but rather a way to engage in new plastic researches.

Intermediality as the Future of Painting?

Representation methods and painting themes have evolved since then: the socio-political concerns at the core of modern painting have given way to more intimate explorations of the self and the human psyche. In fact, it appears that contemporary painting is scarcely informed by the styles and issues of Egyptian modern painting. Indeed, the new generations usually know little about the work of their predecessors, as it is usually not part of their art education. The dearth of information about cultural initiatives, as well as the difficulty in accessing some collections, do not help young artists assimilate the history of Egyptian painting. As a matter of fact, the practice of contemporary Egyptian painters seems generally more impacted by the advent of new media and their normalization since the 1990s than by a sense of belonging to a national visual culture. Incidentally, the notion of contemporary art is usually associated with new media, such as video, installation, performance, or digital arts. Even though it still is widely exercised, painting is often accused of being too academic and decried as purely decorative. Within the Arab world, however, it is undoubtedly the medium favored by collectors, and as such, galleries enthusiastically support its production. The challenge, therefore, is for painting to find a way to assert itself as a contemporary practice. It is not a matter of renegotiating the necessity of painting today; this has been demonstrated as a non-relevant issue in Egypt. Rather, the question that arises is whether the digital era is arousing the revolution in the status and the essence of painting which photography didn't provoke. The ability of painting to be reinvented as the confluence of photography, cinema, Internet imagery, manual, industrial, and digital processes implies deep transformations in the ways a picture is conceived, sketched, and realized. The painters introduced in this exhibition may all have their own poetics and plastic languages; however, they all share a self-reflective and introspective relation to images, stemming from the combined force of new media, postmodern thought, and painting history.

Aya Tarek's large-scale painting hanging on the building's façade opens the exhibition. The usual banner has been replaced by an original artwork, both as a celebration of pictorial matter over printed image, and a nod to the bygone tradition of painted posters, in particular, those of the Egyptian movie industry. Originally a street painter, Tarek produces work that is usually site specific, spreading out over buildings and interacting with urban landscapes. The impossibility of continuing this practice in the streets of Egypt implies a reconfiguration of her processes and even of the status of her work, impacting the paintings' temporality of production and lifetime. For *In Conversation. A Painting Show*, Tarek has explored the ancient myth of the origin of painting as told by Pliny in his *Natural History*: A young woman from Corinth draws in

outline on the wall the shadow of her lover's face, before he leaves for travels abroad. While pointing to the fact that mural painting preceded the medium's assimilation as a fine art, Pliny's story also suggests that the history of painting began with a woman, and more precisely with female desire. The eroticism underlying the painter's look and gesture are captured in Tarek's carnal sketches. These sketches, which show a research in progress, are produced with a graphic tablet and are meant to take shape and flesh only in the final painting.

Lina Osama's works provide a sense of continuity between the tradition of fine art and contemporary painting practices. Although Osama has taken part in the Salzburg Summer Academy founded in Vienna by the expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka, her work is more informed by a thorough knowledge of the various ages of Egyptian art history rather than by European expressionism. She has studied Egyptology and is also familiar with the oasis cultures. Fed by these references, she elaborates a personal mythology. *The Girl Screaming at a Cow's Head* (2008) and *Girl Screaming at a Skull* (2008) depict exaggeratedly anxious women struggling with an archaic symbolism. The artist explains that a cinema workshop at Cairo's Jesuit school in 2007 made her more aware of composition and lighting issues, while enhancing her capacity to express drama through body language. *My Living Units* (2017) shows the evolution of the artist's work towards a more intimate and more intricate iconography.

Nada Elkalaawy grew up between Egyptian and British cultures. Her personal history is also her primary work material. She uses the photo albums of three generations of her family to dream up an ideal world, while experimenting with ways of shaping memories which are not always hers. Her compositions combine elements taken from several photographs, intertwining multiple temporalities and localities with purely imaginary details. In her small-scale paintings, she experiments with various techniques including transfer (*The Girl in White*, 2018). Her relationship to time does not only express itself through nostalgia, but also through sophisticated production processes, such as the patiently handwoven tapestries in *Summer Blues* (2019). The *Queen of the Night* (2019) is originally a painting on glass inspired by a photograph and converted into a digital file to produce a jacquard tapestry using a computerized loom. The immediacy of the mechanical production is offset by the initial painting work and by dainty finishing touches such as hand-embroidered details. The tapestry depicts young girls on a stage, dressed as 'arays el-mouled, typical sugar dolls sold to celebrate the birth of the Prophet. The dark blue sky expands in a mural painting evocative of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's set design inspired by Egyptian style for Mozart's *Magic Flute*, which gives the piece its name.

Hend Samir's paintings saturate the wandering eye with accumulated details, like off-the-wall materializations of media hype. She, too, reuses figures taken from her personal photo albums, but she mixes them with pictures found on the Internet and in magazines, fusing intimate scenes with advertising. Samir explains that she conceives her compositions as collages that juxtapose elements in some kind of aesthetical relativism. The main protagonists are children, usually lined up as if for a class photo. Yet, while seated, they actively engage in daily life activities or surreal games (*Rhythm of a Little Piano Player*, 2016), struggle with nightmares, or stroll in adventurous dreams (*Night Critters*, 2019). The figures' boundless energy is conveyed by hazy backgrounds which do not frame a setting but structure the compositions either with large brushstrokes (*Future Seeds*, 2017) or a harmonious palette (*Little Musicians in the Never Land*, 2018). The panoramic format of some of the pieces enhances their narrative dimension. The compositions' balance is emphasized in the black and white paintings and stems from vivid contrasts in some instances (*Dinner in Bed*, 2018).

Rania Fouad has been working on a project titled *Parallel Architectures* since 2015. Both modest and concurrently ambitious, the work in progress is conceived as an entirely hand-painted animated film made using the rotoscoping process. The sequences exhibited here are extracted from Pina Bausch's *The Plaint of the Empress* (1989), Godfrey Reggio's *Kyoyaanisqatsi* (1982), and Mona Hatoum's *Changing Parts* (1984). Through painting, frame by frame, Fouad tries to capture the infinitesimal instant which separates, or—conversely—connects, two moving images. This way, she deconstructs the film extracts and gives them a material flesh, fixed in silent immobility. Each sequence lasts only a few seconds and is the result of more than a hundred painstaking frames, made of layers of oil painting over a photographic image. This extremely slow manual work contrasts with the cinematic speed. Breaking down the movement sometimes leads to the abstraction of the represented image. This is particularly apparent in a scene of explosion taken from *Kyoyaanisqatsi*. Similarly, in the sequence from *The Plaint of the Empress*, the series of geometric shapes modelled in a bluish grey palette, reveal the graceful body of a draped dancer only when animated. The frames play with various scroll speeds and are filmed in 16 mm or digital video. Particular attention is paid to the paintings' textures and skins, as Fouad tries to convey their haptic properties.

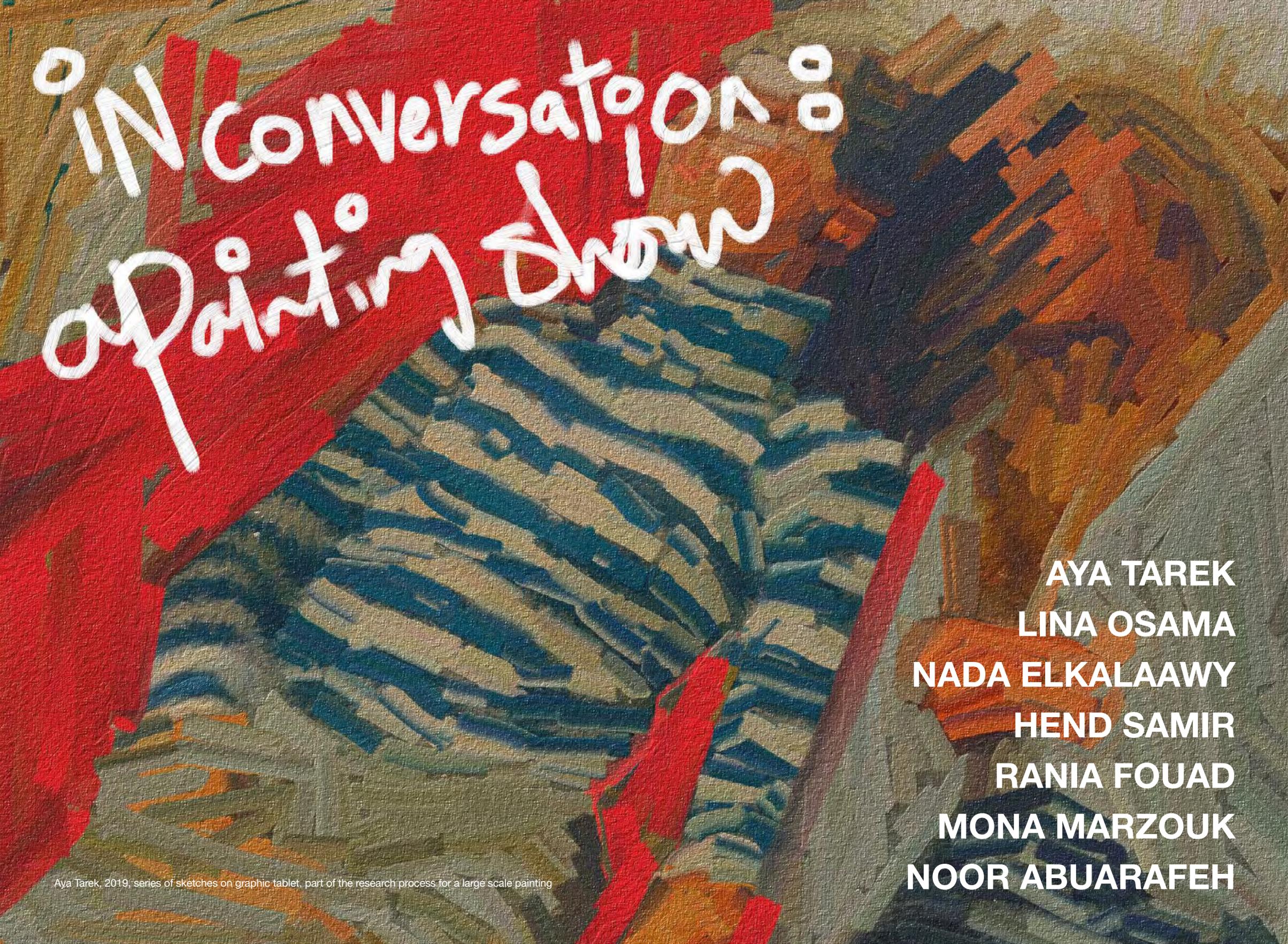
Mona Marzouk's *Bark* series (2018) uses a minimalist aesthetic to address virtual reality. With the simple image of a tree trunk, Marzouk imagines a history of technology: a robotic hand lights a fire by rubbing a stick against a log, referring to one of humanity's primary acquired technical skills. A symbol of human beings' fundamental interactions with nature, the trunk also stands as the antithesis of

virtual reality as disembodied experience. It also reminds of environmental issues previously addressed in *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Energy's Evil* (2008). Over the various paintings, the tree trunk becomes in turn a museum object, a subject of laboratory tests, and a projected image on a screen; sometimes it looks somewhat anthropomorphic or animal, and other times, it is just inert. The compositions seek to provide a three-dimensional impression and the vibrant colors suggest the hypnotic attractiveness of screens while echoing the aesthetic of the first videogames. Marzouk makes her sketches from images collected on the Internet and assembled using digital editing. Using manual processes, she then traces the outlines on the canvas to give form to the pictorial image.

Noor Abuarafeh provides a counterpoint to the history of painting in Egypt with her video *Observational Desire on a Memory that Remains* (2014) by evoking the case of modern painting in Palestine. Abuarafeh is not a painter, and her presence in this "Painting Show" may seem odd. Yet, in addition to advancing the intermedial dialogue, her video creates a link between two fundamental issues addressed here: the legacy of modern painting for new generations of artists and the reflections on paintings as both objects and images. The video tells the story of fourteen Palestinian painters, all male, who participated in an exhibition in 1985 and were captured together for posterity in a group photograph. The photo soon turns out to be a hyper-realistic painting printed in China as part of a project by artist Khalil Rabah; and from the outset, the image's ambiguous status casts a doubt on the veracity of the facts uncovered by Abuarafeh. The artist investigated to try to find out what had become of these painters, focusing on one of them in particular. The narrative, which emphasizes the artist's research journey, reveals the complexity and discontinuity of the relationship between two generations of artists developing in fundamentally different societies and art worlds. Some paintings are re-enacted as living tableaux: paradoxically, this physical embodiment, instead of maintaining the painting's materiality, makes it dissolve into the digital video recording. Thus, the persistence of paintings both as images – in the memory of those who have seen them – and as objects – found, hidden, forgotten, or lost – is questioned. But the only image which could never be re-enacted is the one representing the group of painters: Abuarafeh's attempt to gather them all again failed due to mobility restrictions and death. More recently, the artist found out that a woman took part in this 1985 painting show, although she does not appear in the photograph. She has started an ongoing research to discover who this woman was.

Acknowledgments: I wish to warmly thank the team of the AUC and the MASR project, and especially Brenda Segone who kindly invited me to curate this exhibition and followed each step of its preparation, as well as Duncan McDonald and Dina Jereidini for their valuable help and enthusiastic support. Deep thanks to the many protagonists of the conversations directly or indirectly behind this exhibition, and in particular to Doa Aly, Ghalia Elsrakbi, Victor Guégan, Samir El-Kordy, Ash Moniz, and Bassem Yousri, and to all the artists who kindly opened the doors of their studios to me. My gratitude also goes to Aleya Hamza and Sara El-Adl from Gypsum Gallery, as well as to Lina Mowafy and the Arts-Mart team for their kind collaboration. Last but not least, many thanks to Aya, Hend, Lina, Mona, Nada, Noor, and Rania who provided, through their work and our exchanges, great insights on what painting is to them.

Nadine Atallah
Curator, Art Historian

An abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes in red, blue, and brown. The background is a mix of these colors, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. The overall style is gestural and textured.

IN CONVERSATION :
Painting Down

AYA TAREK
LINA OSAMA
NADA ELKALAAWY
HEND SAMIR
RANIA FOUAD
MONA MARZOUK
NOOR ABUARAFEH

AYA TAREK

“A supernova is the closest to what we call home.

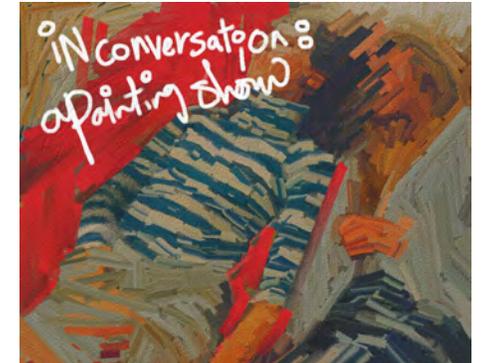
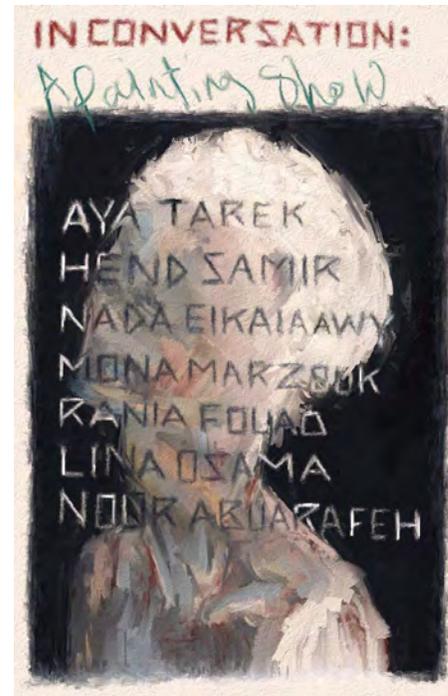
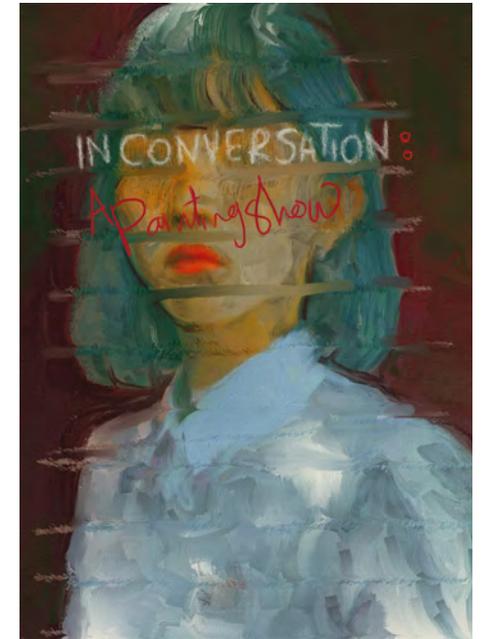
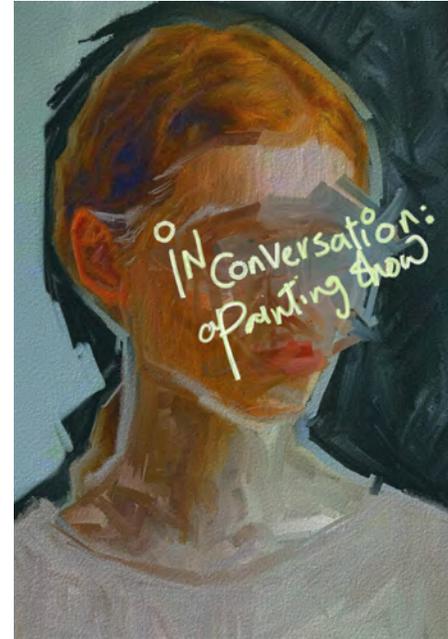
Homo sapiens, you have got to organize, categorize, trim – cut – clip and define everything that has ever been and ever will be so it can be digested by your mortal beings. We are the Y2k at the beginning of the millennium. We are Mathew McConaughey in a black hole portal trying to control the gravity of the past, but we can barely be felt. We are off your grid and we fit in endless dimensions where we can exist; where you are not the norm and we are not forced to conform.”

Born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1989, Aya Tarek is a painter, street artist, and illustrator with an exciting portfolio of diverse art projects, feature films, and art collaborations in countries ranging from Brazil to Germany.

Her work explores the different interchanges within modes of urban communication and the dynamic of a public space. Using a vibrant, comic-derived aesthetic, and often working through site-specific murals, she aims to trigger a humorous sense of controversy, investigating different ideas pertaining to the different public contexts.

Tarek has showcased her artwork in various exhibitions and events around the world, including Omar A Sharif Mural, Antigal Festival, Geneva (2018); Sprezzatura, SOMA Art, Cairo (2018); Aya in America, Portland (2017); Paper Trail, Gypsum Gallery, Cairo (2017); Objects in the Mirror Are Closer than They Appear, SOMA Art, Cairo (2017); Afreaka Festival, Sao Paulo (2016); World Premiere of a New Mural by Aya Tarek, USF Contemporary Art Museum, Florida (2015); Urban Art Biennale, Weltkulturerbe Völklinger Hütte, Völklingen (2015); Djerbahood, Itinerrance Gallery, Djerba (2014); Vagabonds Congress, Theatre RMPH, Stuttgart (2014); Cityleaks, Cologne (2013); White Walls, Beirut Art Centre, Beirut (2012); Arabic Graffiti & Egyptian Street Art in Frankfurt, Frankfurt (2012); Ankh Project, ITP Berlin (2011); Graffiti: Style/ History/ Experience, Goethe Institute, Alexandria (2011); Bytes and Pieces, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah (2011); Shopping Malls, Alexandria Contemporary Art Forum, Alexandria (2010); PICK 4, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2009).

She is also a recipient of several residencies, including Dakakin, Alriwaq Contemporary Art Space, Bahrain and Artist in Resident Show, Arnaldo Pomodoro Foundation, Italy. In 2015 and 2016, she worked with master printer Tim Baker on photogravure at the University of South Florida's Graphic Studio.



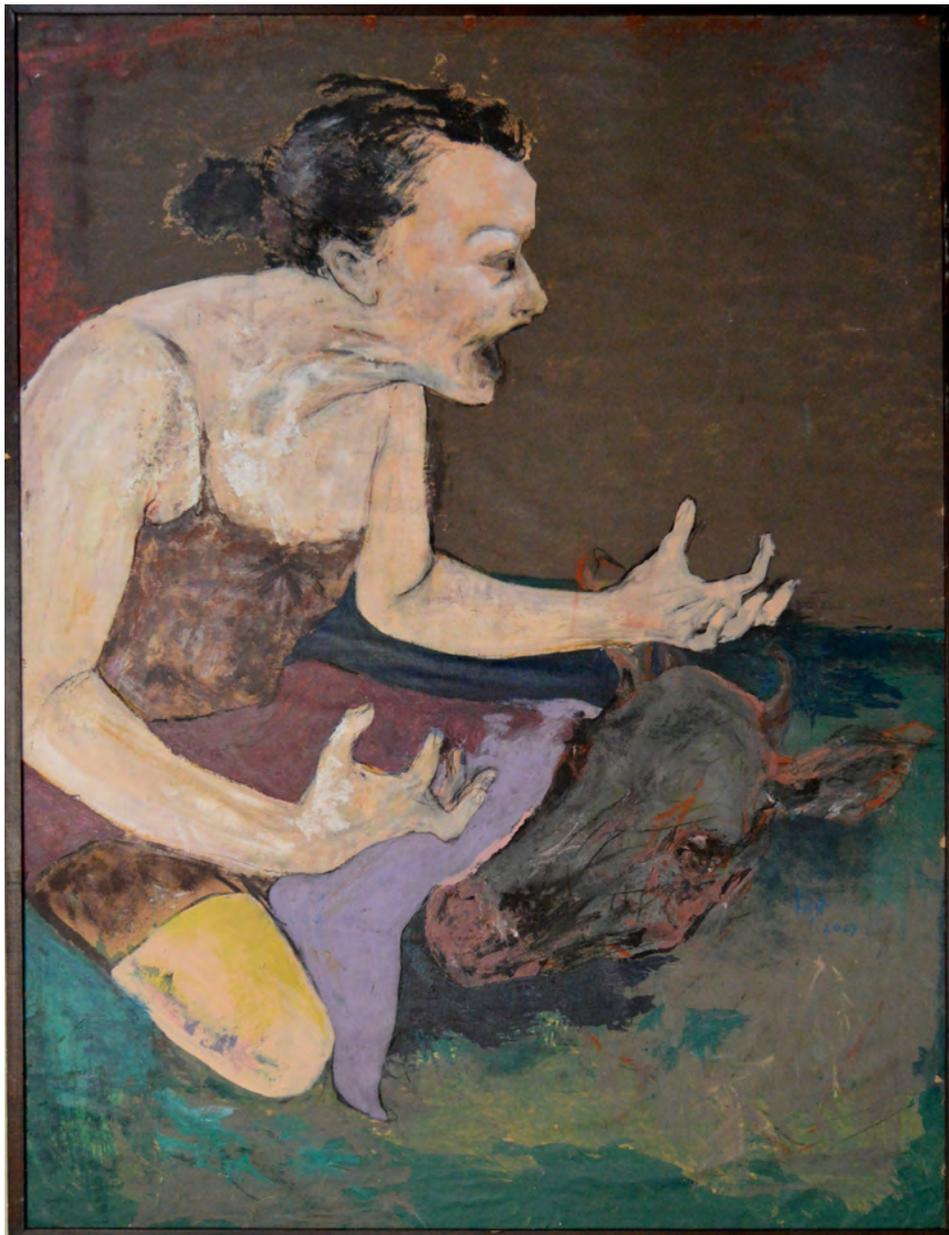
2019, series of sketches on graphic tablet, research in progress for a large scale painting

LINA OSAMA

Born in Cairo in 1986, Lina Osama is a multidisciplinary visual artist. She holds a bachelor's degree in painting from Helwan University's Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo, 2009 and has won scholarships at Salzburg and Traunkirchen Fine Arts Academies in Austria in 2006, 2008, 2009, as well as residencies to Siwa Oasis in 2009 and 2018. She won a painting prize at the Cairo Youth Salon in 2007 and the first prize in painting at the Young Artist Salon in 2015. She has participated in more than 70 exhibitions since 1999 in Egypt, Austria, France, Italy, Romania, and Morocco. These include Art Times, Picasso Art Gallery, Cairo (2018); Agenda, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria (2018); Humans, Made in. Art Gallery, Italy (2016); Printemps du Nil, Paris (2011); Port Said Biennale, Port Said (2009); a group exhibition at Gmundten 422, Austria (2008); and the Cairo Youth Salon, editions 14, 18, 21, 25, 26, and 27. In addition, she has also had solo shows at the Cairo Atelier (2010); the Austrian Cultural Forum in Cairo (2015); and Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development (2017). She is also the founder and curator of Living Units exhibitions at the Goethe Institut, Nile Art, and the Gezira Art Center in Cairo; the Egyptian Cultural Office in Vienna; and Go Arts in Bucharest 2016–2018. Osama has official and private collectibles in Egypt, USA, France, Morocco, and Austria.



My Living Units, 2017, mixed media on canvas, 250 x 145 cm



Girl Screaming at a Cow's Head, 2008, oil on canvas, 120 x 160 cm



Girl Screaming at a Skull, 2008, oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm

NADA ELKALAWY

Mass of White

“I see a mass of white. A bride, a groom, a young lady grinning like a Cheshire cat or an eccedentesiast. I then see a shadow that depicts a candle, on top of an overflowing tablecloth. The white leads me to the bottom right corner of the image. There is an accidental shadow that extends beyond the frame. It could be the hand of the photographer. It could also be a ghost. The ghost is something that is lost, or barely visible, something that is seemingly not there to our eyes but then makes itself known. I feel like the language of photography often leaves us with paradoxes. There is something passive about the notion of looking but nothing about photography is passive, since the act of taking a photograph itself is a conscious action. I skip the man about to wipe his glasses, the woman staring



Family Photograph, 1980s, Alexandria

right at the camera, and spot the velvet magenta coat. She stands out, possibly because her coat is one of the few non-sepia-toned elements. I start wondering if it is by coincidence or if she is someone of significance, a guest of honor perhaps. Behind her sits an old man wearing a striped suit. Assuming he is well hidden behind the crowd, he decides to snooze, unaware that his image is being captured. I go back to the starting point where the bride and groom stand and my eyes hover for a bit before they are dragged to the next white item on the left. I pause and start thinking about the nature of the medium and how deceptive and misleading it can be. The timing of the shutter click and the angle the photo is taken from can give an impression that differs from reality.

Above, at the back, are two men acting like they do not belong to the gathering. I say that because of how they are dressed and the way they look at the others. The only thing they all have in common is that they are in the same place at the same time but the rest of the party fails to notice them. There is a having-been-there quality that acts as proof to the existence of a specific thing in a specific place at a specific time. The degree to which a photo reveals its meaning, message, and the photographer's decisions is variable. The 'studium' and 'punctum' as described by philosopher Roland Barthes make those decisions clearer for us. The 'studium' is the overall scene represented in an image. In this case, it is a wedding of a middle to upper class family in the 1970s. The 'punctum' represents all those instant, small, and unexpected details I have mentioned, the ones that initially lured me to this photograph.”



The Queen Of The Night, 2019, detail of a jacquard and hand-embroidered tapestry and mural, dimensions variable



The Queen Of The Night, 2019, detail of a jacquard and hand-embroidered tapestry and mural, dimensions variable



Vitrine, 2018, oil on canvas, 30 x 45 cm



The Girl In White, 2018, acrylic and transfer on canvas, 50 x 60 cm, detail



Babouche, 2019, oil on canvas, 15 x 15 cm



Summer Blues, 2019, hand-embroidered tapestry on canvas, 25 x 22 cm

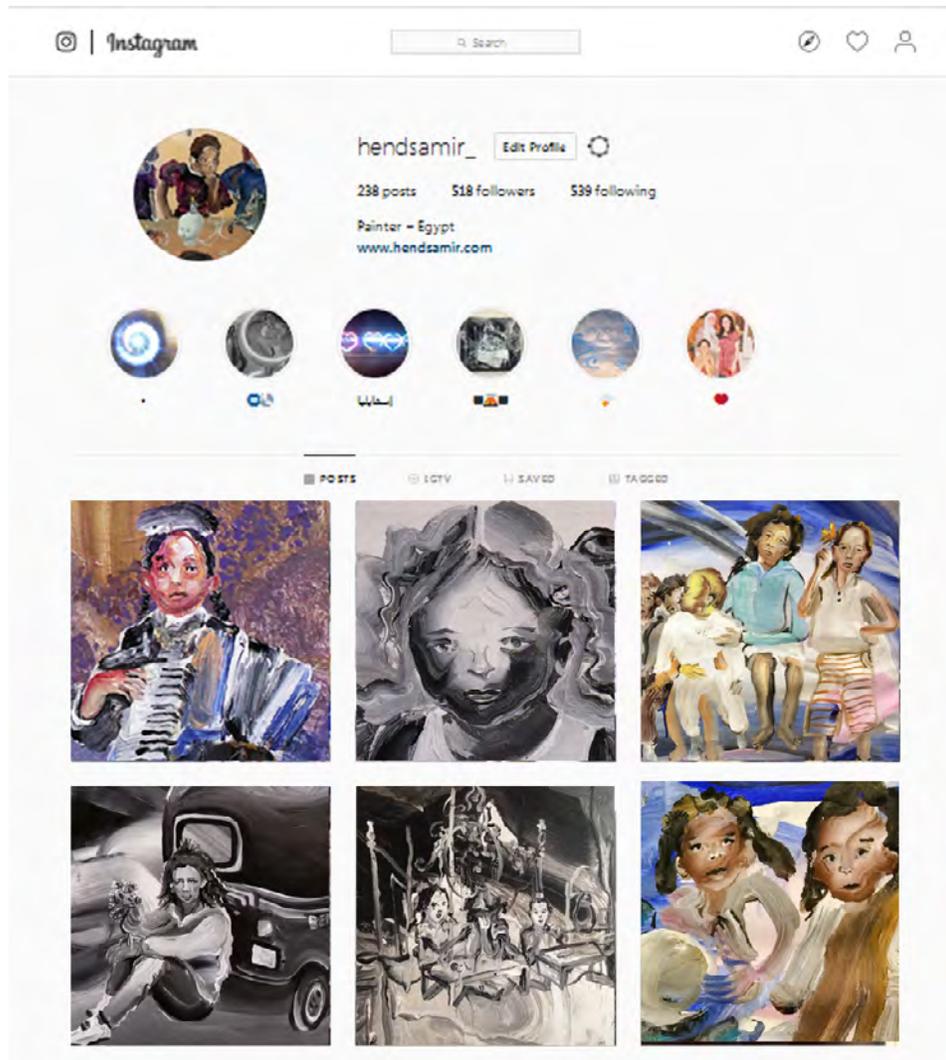


Moulid Knight, 2019, oil on paper, 21 x 29.7 cm



Mimi and the Yellow Taxi, 2018, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm

HEND SAMIR



“In my new paintings one of the main themes has been juxtaposing innocence with scandal and I find myself delving deeper into this idea and questioning the ways in which we encounter or create ‘a scandal.’ This phenomenon has become ever-present in this age of the internet and fast-traveling information. We see the scandals of people we’ve never met, based on the opinions of other anonymous people. Often the phrasing of a headline is what makes the event what it is. Masses are consuming these revealing stories, as the media perpetuates their appetite. The power of a scandal relies on the threat of disclosure to the public or on the revelation of contradictions and secrets that stoke people’s curiosity. Just like all ceremonial rituals, it needs an audience. My works build on the investigation of what is hidden and what is revealed – in social, familial contexts, and human relationships. It is the extremities of both contrasts that interests me most.”

Hend Samir superimposes layers of desire, adventure, and fantasy onto seemingly ordinary familial contexts. Using acrylic paint on canvas, she constructs her scenes like collages, mixing elements from personal family photos with those of strangers in magazines and internet imagery. The theatricality of her compositions seeps into the characters’ psyche, as her characters “act normal” with awareness of being viewed, like in reality TV shows, but in this case, the artist takes on the role of director. Her work also explores the various forms of adventures that can be sought in urban spaces with limited resources, chasing the spirit of children making fortresses out of bed sheets. The physicality of these little adventurous activities, their randomness and their penchant for absurdity are captured within a timeless space, where old and contemporary images are cards in the same game. Her maze-like compositions invite the viewer to maneuver and engage in that layer of playfulness.

Samir is based in Cairo and works primarily with painting. Born in 1986, she graduated from Helwan University’s Faculty of Fine Arts, Printed Designs Department, in 2008.



Night Critters, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 170 x 45 cm



Rhythm of a Little Piano Player, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 35 cm



Little Musicians In The Never Land, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 55.5 cm



Presence of Growth, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 170x45 cm, detail



Dinner in Bed, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 55.5 cm



Future Seeds, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 260 x 95 cm

RANIA FOUAD

Introduction to Parallel Architectures

An ongoing film project based on moving color sequences.
Units within a greater time organism being gradually constructed.

“In painting, time pivots on one single timeless image. The mere depiction of visible realities has become insufficient. I am more interested in portraying the ephemeral structures of mental space. With disjointed assemblages, I paint the more abstract, intangible movements of thought.

I weave ‘cine-tapestries’: moments that are fragmentary, wandering, and not seeking to advance in one single direction. Weaving recalls the operation of memory and dreamwork, combines facts with dissonant consciousness. I blend scenes taken from cinema and video archives with others from real-time documentary, making them all interact seamlessly through the persistence of a painterly skin, but also through a non-linear narrative based on images, not on storytelling.

One can create poetry just by using colors. And I know I can make moving images in line with what I have been sensitized to as a painter. I borrow and reexamine video and film archives to create a dynamic void and to fabricate loops – executed with a sense of muteness – in which time becomes viscous and coagulates into circular moments of repetitive gestures. A vibration of an instant that causes an infinite ripple and celebrates the absence of progress.

I rely on moving images as a form of transformation. The uncertainty of seeing, and the everlasting shift from one still to another, make tangible the ‘in-between’. The ‘in-between’ is a spatial concept, but also a time interval that generates rhythm and simultaneous awareness of the pause between two structural parts. In Japan, it is called *Ma*/間, or the space between two things. It is not considered as an absence that separates, but as a relationship. Not the absence of something, but the heart of things. The interval which shapes the whole. *Ma* provokes the eye to scan the screen for nuances of the unseen, shifts attention to the spectator’s eye, to the fleeting ghosts that take refuge in the *ma* (giving them shapes, forms, colors, and textures).

I wonder if I can create my own kind of synesthesia that spans across various media

as a non-verbal register of perception. One that transgresses the boundaries and expands the parameters of painting by putting it in dialogue with time-based visual media, injecting time into painting by cinematic means to celebrate haptic visuality/ the tactility of moving image. This ‘requires the viewer to contemplate the image as a material presence rather than an easily identifiable representational cog in a narrative wheel’¹

Parallel Architectures is still in progress. Along its laborious phases of production, sequences were shown within the following venues: Gypsum Gallery, Cairo (2016); the Centre for Creative Activities, Ustka (2016); the Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo (2016–2018); Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria (2016); Contemporary Image Collective (CIC), Cairo (2017).

For this exhibition, I worked on two new sequences; mostly ‘people-less’ shots in which the absence or the hardly perceptible presence of human figures was replaced by tracking space or (an exploding) landscape. Both sequences act, within the context of the original film, as psychological doors to the otherness of the self, as mirrors, or media to express hypothetical inner spaces of various women.”

¹ Totaro, Donato, 2002, Deleuzian Film Analysis: *The Skin of the Film*, vol. 6, issue 6. Online: http://offscreen.com/view/skin_of_film



Parallel Architectures, 2018, oil painting on photograph, frames from a sequence based on film archive



Parallel Architectures, 2018, oil painting on photograph, frames from a sequence based on film archive

Parallel Architectures, 2018, oil painting on photograph, frames from a sequence based on film archive

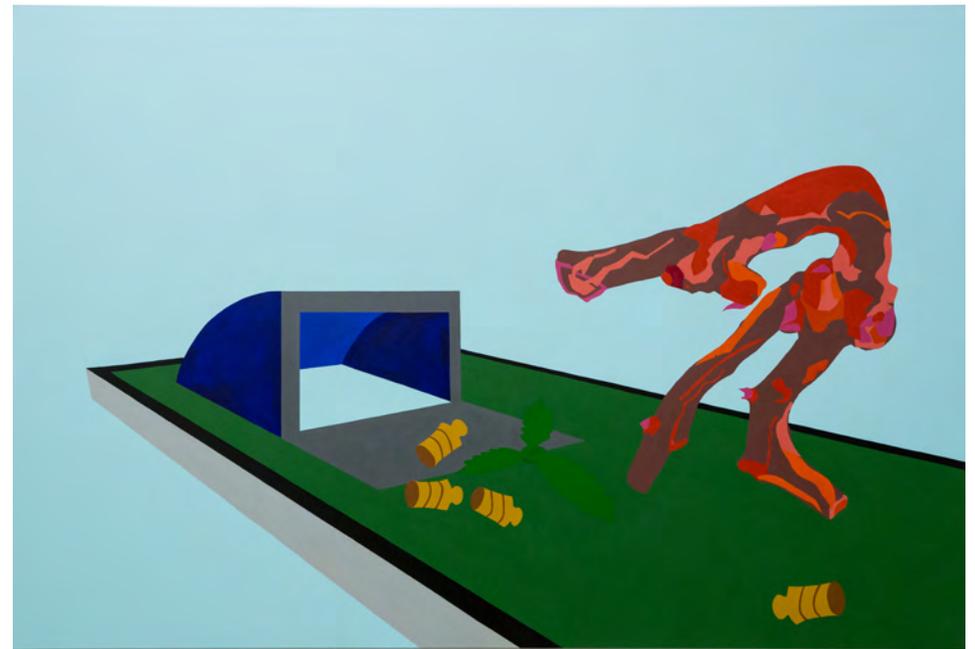
MONA MARZOUK

Mona Marzouk's interest in architectural histories is visible in her paintings, sculpture, and site-specific murals. Blurring the boundary between past and present, biomorphic and geometrical, and masculine and feminine, Marzouk plays with our perception of the world. With the sensibility of a maverick architect, Marzouk envisions aesthetic systems that draw on a diversity of cultural traditions, but which only exist in the realm of the imagination. Her work reassembles disparate architectural and natural elements, as well as animal and body parts to construct unified compositions, referencing a post-minimalist aesthetic with their sharp edges and flat expanses of solid color. With a whimsical touch, her work pulls us into a futuristic, mythological universe compelling us to forge unexpected relationships between what is otherwise familiar or ordinary.

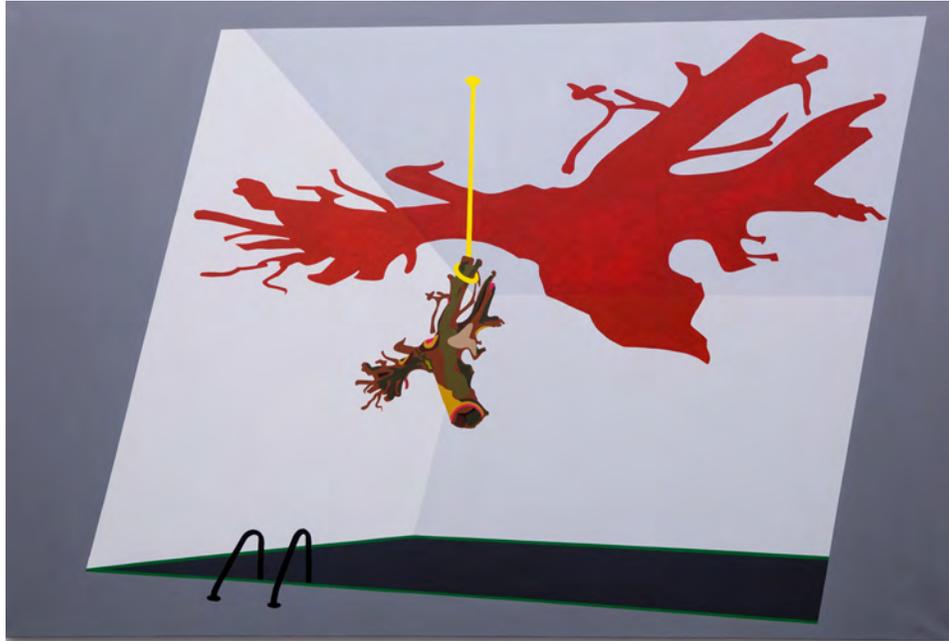
Born in Alexandria, Egypt, Marzouk graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, Düsseldorf, Germany in 1996. She is based in Helsinki, Finland. Some of her solo exhibitions include BARK, Gypsum Gallery, Cairo (2018); RENEWAL, Villa Romana, Florence, Italy (2015); Trayvon, Gypsum Gallery, Cairo (2014); The Bride Stripped Bare of Her Energy's Evil, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, (2008); The New World, Art in General, New York and Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (2006); The Morphologist & the Architect, Falaki Gallery, the American University Cairo, Cairo (2004); Majestic Ciphers, Marco Noire Contemporary Art, Turin (2002). Selected group exhibitions include Very Sustainable--Environmental Revelation, MOCA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Yinchuan (2017); Terra Mediterranea in Action, NiMAC, Nicosia (2017); Terra Mediterranea in Action, HALLE 14 – Centre for Contemporary Art, Leipzig (2016); What are you doing, object?, Gypsum Gallery, Cairo (2015); EVA International, Ireland's Biennial, Limerick (2014); The 11th Havana Biennial, Havana (2012); Second World, Steirischer Herbst, Graz and Galerija Nova, Zagreb (2011); 1st Festival of Contemporary Art in Algiers, Algiers (2009); 7th Gwangju Biennial, Gwangju (2008); 1st Canary Islands Biennial, Las Palmas (2006); Trial Balloons, MUSAC, León (2006); An Image Bank for Everyday Revolutionary Life, REDCAT Gallery Los Angeles (2006); Out of Space, Gallery Sfeir-Semler, Beirut (2006); Progr, Zentrum für Kulturproduktion, Bern (2005); Il periplo creativo, Museo dell'Accademia Ligustica di Belle Arti, Genova (2004); Transfers, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, Brussels (2003); Mediterranean, Culturgest, Lisbon (2001).



Bark #5, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 108 x 160 cm



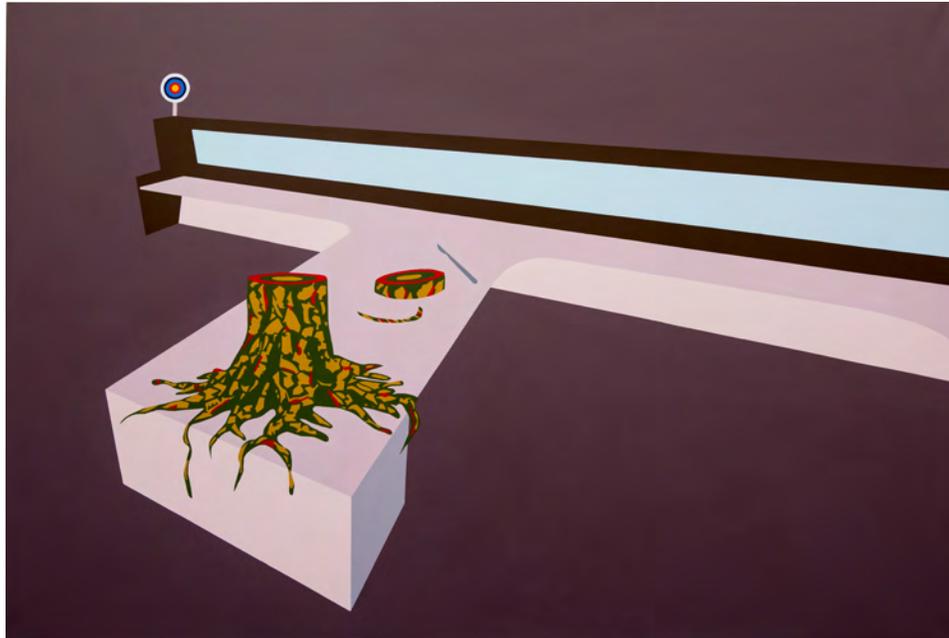
Bark #3, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 108 x 160 cm



Bark #2, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 108 x 160 cm



Bark #9, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 112 x 150 cm



Bark #1, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 108 x 160 cm



Bark #7, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 112 x 150 cm

NOOR ABUARAFEH

“What can artists tell about history that historians can’t? In recent years, I have become more aware that I am interested in history as a concept, and the possibility of rewriting it. What does history mean? And how is it shaped and constructed? How is it made, perceived, visualized, and understood? This interest came from a growing consciousness that historical narratives are not given but rather produced in part by an ongoing engagement with an institution such as an archive. I developed my method of looking into the past by digging for what happened during historical events, searching for forgotten episodes, detecting through information that was never on the surface, or collecting testimony from people who witnessed a particular event; this process combines the idea of a storyteller with a history-teller.

In my work *Observational Desire on a Memory that Remains*, I was interested in looking at the Palestinian art archive during the seventies and eighties. I went to several art institutions seeking their archives and realized that there is no archive in most of them as they were established after the Oslo agreement in 1993. From this point, I started to imagine the past rather than searching for institutional documents. The process started by interviewing people who lived/witnessed the past, looking at their personal archives, and trying to create a network of people who might give information about the history. This information is the source of the work’s narratives.

The work is an attempt to create an imaginary archive of the art history of Palestine. The history of art significantly predates the presence of art institutions themselves in Palestine: there is a big gap that isn’t documented. Imagination is my solution to recovering and rewriting the archive.”



Observational Desire on a Memory that Remains, 2014, video, video still



Observational Desire on a Memory that Remains, 2014, video, video still



Observational Desire on a Memory that Remains, 2014, video, video still

IN CONVERSATION

06

Painting Now

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Painting the W

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