



WHEN I
DESIRE A
PART OF
ME



HUNNA / هُنَّا

On view from
19.05.22 to 05.06.22

'When I Desire You A Part Of Me Is Gone'

A solo show by Aidha Badr

at Jossa by Alserkal,
Alserkal Avenue, Dubai

Foreword

"When I Desire You A Part Of Me Is Gone" is Aidha Badr's third solo show and her first in the UAE. Formally trained as a portrait painter, her works are representative dreamscapes and portraits of her life: memories from her childhood, thoughts, flashbacks and daydreams that are born from them.

'Can desire exist without lack of what we seek? Is it the finding and fulfilling of our desires what makes us human or is there a space yet to be filled?'

The duality of the color red allows her to explore the object of desire, questioning whether it comes from within or if it's merely the things and scenes we transform into supporting our inner world, appearing objective, but in fact, a façade.

An ode to the journey of self-exploration, this show builds on her evolving visual language. As some of the most honest work she has created, it continues a deep dive into finding her place-the axis of herself.



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**'When I Desire You
A Part Of Me
Is Gone'**

*a solo show
by aidha badr*



AIDHA

Curatorial Note

'All human desire is poised on an axis of paradox, absence and presence its poles, love and hate its motive energies' - Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, 1986.

In her seminal book *Eros the Bittersweet*, Anne Carson explores the multidimensional possibilities and intricacies of desire. Through a philosophical and poetic analysis of the Ancients - Aristophanes, Socrate and others - the Canadian poet, essayist, translator, and classicist reflects on the paradox of love that ultimately results in what Greek poet Sappho coined as *glukupikron* ('bittersweet') love. As Carson puts it, twisting the famous *Cogito ergo sum*, or 'I think therefore I am', of René Descartes: *Odi et amo ergo*, or 'I love and hate, therefore I am'.

Just as desire is at the core of Carson's book, it is at the core of Aidha Badr's new solo exhibition whose title, 'When I Desire You A Part Of Me Is Gone', is a line directly borrowed from *Eros the Bittersweet*. Yet, it is not its sole romantic facet that the artist seeks to understand; rather, she seeks to untangle the roots of female desire by using memory as a medium and exploring theories of attachment.

At the beginning, there was the mother. Following the work of Nancy Kulish and Deanna Holtzman on 'The Persephone Complex', or the intricacies of the daughter-mother relationship, Aidha Badr scrutinizes the way the mother figure and its representations play a significant role in childhood and the early stages of a girl's development. *Her Cloth Was Cut From Heaven, She Wished To Be Me And I Wished To Be Her* (2021) depicts the attachment of the young girl to her doll. By taking care, dressing, undressing, and cuddling the doll, the little girl replays the role of the mother, thus subconsciously constructing a strict set of beliefs about what a woman essentially is and what she must become through this process.

In this painting, the abstract motherly figure holds a small, distant red sun between her fingers. This recurring motif in Aidha Badr's work comes from the song her doll would automatically sing *You Are My Sunshine* by Johnny Cash after pressing the button on her stomach. The iteration of the red sun from one painting to another highlights the way the past intertwines with the present and how a memory - whether it is of an object, a place, or a person - can lastingly infuse and shape one's memory.

In his influential book *Poetics of Space* (1957), Gaston Bachelard analyzed the importance of the sites of our intimate lives, and foremost of the house. For the French philosopher and poet, space is - rather than time - the receptacle of memories that are not fossilized but constitutive of the present and of imagination which allows us to fulfill the desire to stop time. This attachment to places and the objects that shape them is explored in several works of Aidha Badr, such as *My Grandfather's House The Way I Remember It* (2022), where she directly refers to a specific period of her childhood spent in Alexandria. By painting significant objects -the drying laundry, the coffee pot, the ladybug clicker toy, the comb with white hairs, the eau de Cologne and the misbaha - the artist recreates the figure of her beloved grandfather in an attempt to cope with the grief of his absence.

Love and attachment walk hand in hand in Aidha Badr's work; the stronger the love, the stronger of fear of losing the loved ones. Death is inevitable and grief is nothing more than love, all the love that we are no longer able to give, all the objects that were left behind, and all the unoccupied corners and spaces that now take form in the corners of our eyes, and the hollows of our chests. The state of grief is flagrant in *Grief Is Love With Nowhere To Go* (2022) where she portrays herself seated on the checkered tiles, surrounded by objects that embody her attachment to the time in Alexandria, a time she bids farewell while accepting her grief with open arms.

With 'When I Desire You A Part Of Me Is Gone', Aidha Badr follows Ariadne's red thread in the maze of the self. By convoking the works of psychoanalysts and feminist theorists, she unravels the manifold events, feelings, memories and persons that have shaped her identity, especially as a woman. Her examination of the roots of three different desires - love, motherhood, and creation - which she identifies as a fundamental characteristic of womanhood, brings the artist to collect her past through her own memories as well as through hearsay. But this reconstitution is flawed, full of omissions and additions that she explicitly assumes and reclaims; as she warns us, these memories have been altered to fit the story she's telling - a complex story of love, attachment, and desire in which Aidha Badr is both the narrator and the protagonist.



AIDHA

Excerpts from *"My Grandfather's House The Way I Remember It"* an essay by Aidha Badr.

I'm six years old, my mom tells me I'm going to have a baby brother.

"when?"

"soon"

My mom's belly is getting bigger.

"when?"

"he's gone, he's in heaven now, he's with God."

I know who God is, I know what heaven is. I still don't understand.

My mom carries a picture of my dead brother in her wallet, she was going to name him Othman.

My mom's belly is big again, she tells me I'm going to have a baby sister. I don't know how that works, I think God replaced Othman with another baby. I'm excited. We leave Brooklyn to move to Alexandria. We're staying at my aunt's house, my dad's sister. My aunt is paralyzed in one leg and a widow, her husband was a sailor who drowned at sea. She has one daughter, my cousin, who's older than me, she wears leather pants and has a lot of friends. I only have my brother. My cousin tries to push me out of the balcony, my mom starts screaming and she slams the green shutters of the balcony shut and hugs me. What's the big deal? We were on the third floor and there were mounds of construction sand underneath the house, if I fall I'll just land on the soft sand.

My aunt loves me, because I'm talkative and entertain all of her jokes and stories. My grandparent's house is two streets down, sometimes I walk to their house to spend the day. My grandpa tells me stories, he lets me pretend to smoke his cigarettes, and we listen to his red radio. I'm everyone's favorite, everyone loves me. I'm funny, unpredictable and entertaining.



We stay in Alexandria for a year, my grandpa is my dad now. We do everything together, cook together, stay up late, tell each other stories, he helps me with my homework, we go on drives, he takes me to the butcher shop, and introduces me to everyone we meet. He looks after me and buys me apple juice and clementines. My hands are too small to peel the clementines without squishing them, he peels them for me and we take turns feeding each other. I love him more than anyone, he calls me Cinderella. He sings to me.

*When you're smiling, When you're smiling,
The whole world smiles with you,
When you're laughing, When you're laughing,
The sun comes shining through,
But when you're crying you bring on the rain,
So stop your sighing be happy again,
Keep on smiling 'cause when you're smiling,
The whole world smiles with you.*

My grandpa is teaching me how to count to ten in ten different languages. English, Arabic, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian, German, Chinese, Turkish, and Portuguese.

I'm not good at it but I'm trying to be. I'm playing with his ladybug clicker toy, I can tell he's annoyed by it, but doesn't tell me. He has a lot of strange toys and trinkets, as a treat he lets me go through his collection. We buy Hairbo cherry gummies, he splits each cherry in half, I take one half, he takes the other. The red radio is playing in the background and the signal is fuzzy. He braids my brown hair, and tells me I should never cut it, "a girls crown is her hair."

We're making Turkish coffee in the kitchen, he's teaching me how to make it, he tells me I'll make it for him next time. I'm anticipating that, so I pay close attention to each step. We go back out into the living room, he's smoking cigarettes and drinking Turkish coffee, I sit on the arm of the couch he was sitting on. I need to be close to him. He's telling me our plans for tomorrow and asking me to remember them.

My uncle is getting engaged, the engagement party is at his fiancée's house. I wear the same dress I always wear to any special occasion. I only had two dresses, it's a light blue dress, with a big white bow that goes around my waist, and a tiny red rose between the collars. They're on the ninth floor and there's no elevator, it's an old building. I just want my mom. I ask my grandpa if I could call my mom from his phone to see when she's coming back. He calls her for me, I go outside, sit on the staircase and start crying.

"When are you coming back?"

"Soon, I'm not sure yet"

"I'm at an engagement party and there's no elevator. I'm so tired, there's so many stairs."

"I'll come back soon, I promise. Just be good."

"Did you buy me a doll?"

I'm back at my aunt's house, my mom should be coming home today. My brother and I wait in anticipation. I'm imagining myself playing with the doll, I wonder what doll she got me, what if she got me more than one? I wonder if the doll is as big as me, I want her to be my size, so I can wear her doll clothes, and she can wear my human clothes. My mom is here, her belly is getting bigger, she's unpacking, I sit on her bed.

"Did you buy me a doll?"

She takes a big doll out of her suitcase and tells me she picked one that looks the most like me. The doll is wearing blue jeans, a red shirt and has long brown hair. I love her. I press the button on her stomach, she starts singing.

*You are my sunshine
My only sunshine
You make me happy
When skies are grey
You'll never know, dear
How much I love you
Please don't take my sunshine away*

Artworks



We Are Where We Are Not
370 x 200 cm
Silk Satin, cotton, Lamé, 2022

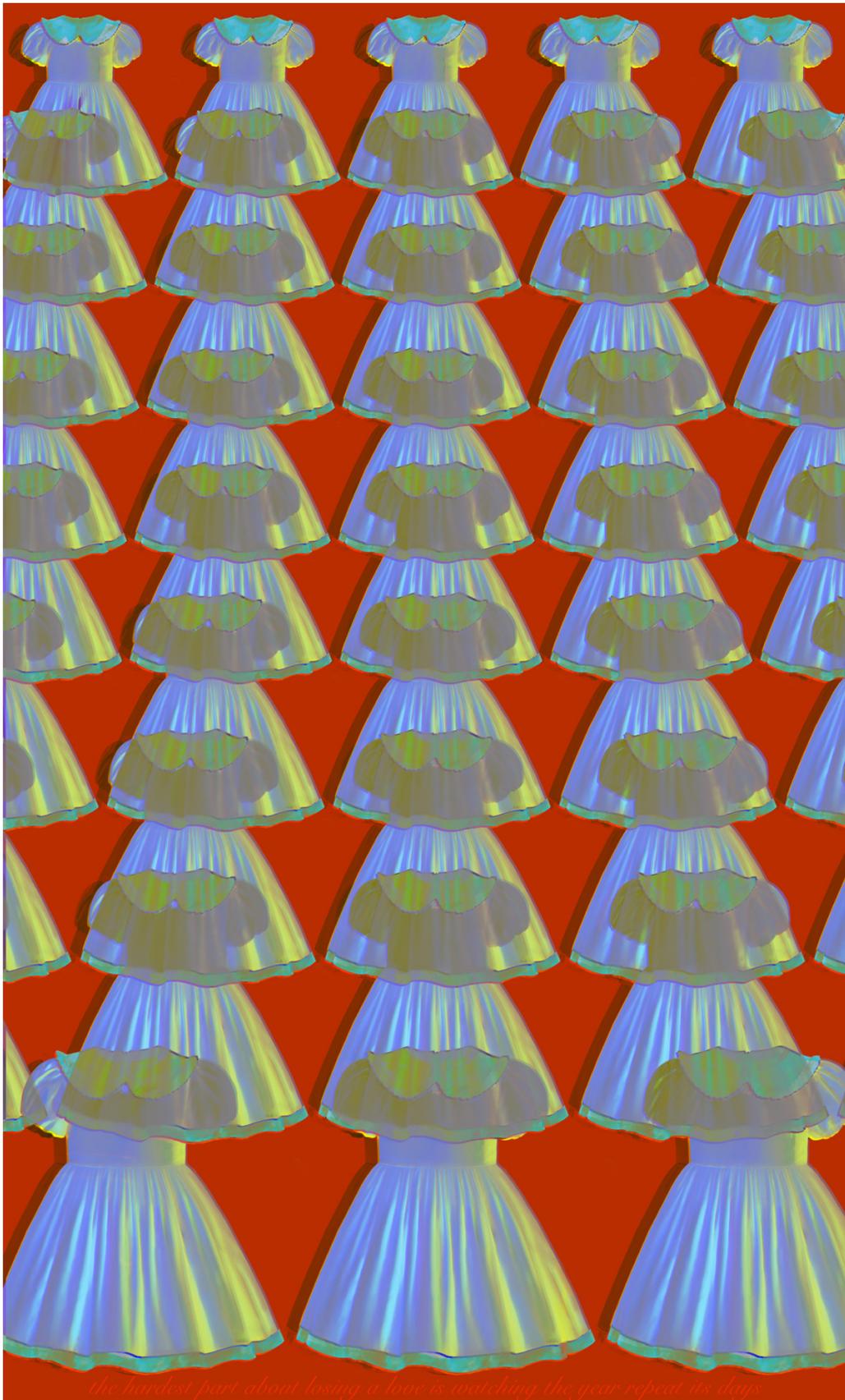


Portrait Of A Woman Waiting
210 x 147 cm
Oil on canvas, 2022



*Between "I Love You" and "I Love You Too" The Absent Presence Of
Desire Comes Alive*

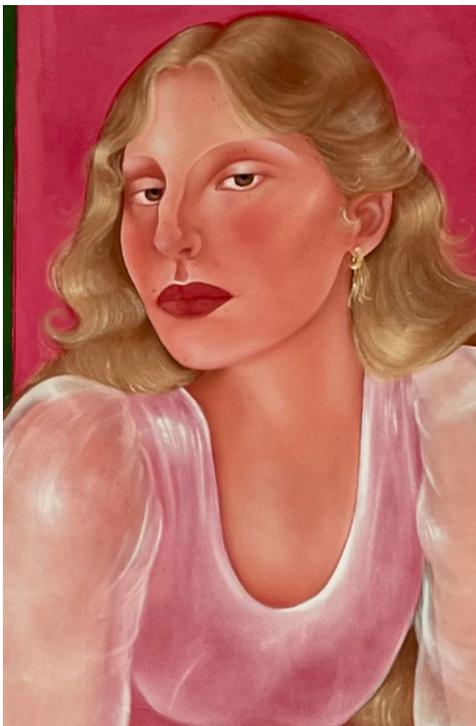
Various dimensions
Heart Balloons, 2022



*The Hardest Part Of Losing A Love Is Watching The
Year Repeat Its Days*

200 x 100 cm

Digital Print, 2022



Uncertainty Of Almost

150 x 280 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



Hermanas III

212 x 120 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



My Grandfather's House The Way I Remember It

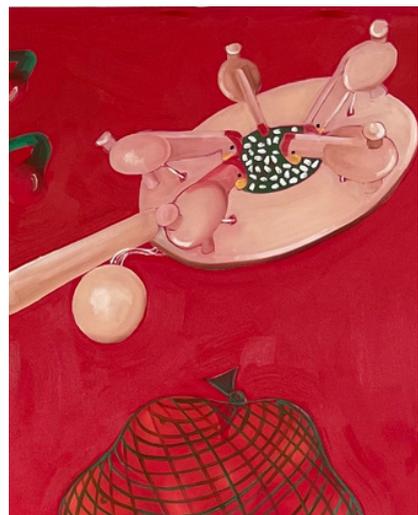
44 x 34 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



Incentive To Leave I - IV

61 x 45 cm each
Oil on canvas, 2022



All The Earthly Possessions Left Behind

162 x 220 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



Memory Is An Unreliable Narrator

166 x 93 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



Grief Is Love With Nowhere To Go

205 x 150 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



Portrait Of A Woman Waiting I - VI

Various Dimensions

Oil on canvas, 2021



*Let Go Off All Earthly Possessions To Be Reunited With Your
Loved Ones*

176 × 125 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



To Be Running Breathlessly But Not Yet Arrived

205 x 150 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022





*Her Cloth Was Cut From Heaven,
She Wished To Be Me And I Wished To Be Her*

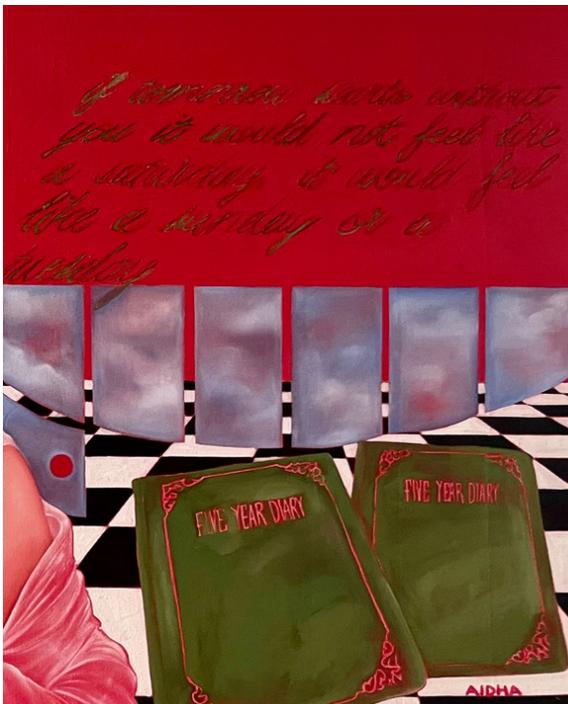
185 x 150 cm
Oil on canvas, 2021



Always Home I
81 x 67.5 cm
Oil on canvas, 2022



Always Home II
81 x 67.5 cm
Oil on canvas, 2022



Nothing To Write Home About

150 x 280 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



Desire Tripled Is Love, Love Tripled Is Madness II

134 x 100 cm

Oil on canvas, 2022



One Life Lost Is Another One Gained

6 x 6 m

Chiffon, girl shoes, , 2022



aidha badr



Aidha Badr

Primarily focusing on the early onset realization of what is referred to as a 'loss' of the object occurring during the early years of a woman's life, Aidha Badr is a painter who uses memory as a medium while exploring theories of female desire, attachment, and object relations which compel women to an eternal life of desire and longing.

Aidha Badr's work deals with universal experiences of femininity, childhood, and domestication and how women cope with emotional states and interpret affective information. Painting in an abstract timeline she works through her memories from the perspective of her childhood self, exploring parallels and unravelling her own childhood as she remembers it, as well as how it was told through stories and hearsay.

Aidha Badr

— by Elina Sairenen

In the eyes of a seven-year-old, her grandfather's house in Alexandria is a treasure chest. A wondrous space full of exciting details unfolding into endless possibilities that caress a child's imagination: a green marble table becomes a car, ideal for playing a mechanic and lying underneath the table, repairing the vehicle and gently touching the bottom side of the cold heavy green marble slab; a tiny corner between an armchair and chiffon curtains, perfect for hide-and-seek. The most important, however, in these scenes, is a loving grandfather, who braids the young girl's hair, buys her Haribo cherry gummies splitting each cherry in half and teaches her to count to ten in ten different languages, entertaining her in a manner strictly reserved for grandparents: ever-so-generous, kind and wholeheartedly allowing. The year the seven-year-old girl spent in Alexandria, inextricably bound up with these memories, marks a starting point for the story of Aidha Badr's, a Brooklyn-born and Cyprus-based visual artist, whose work explores memories, daydreaming and the intricacies of female desire.

Alexandria does not only contain significance for Badr's personal narrative, but also for her professional one. It was in the ancient city of Alexander the Great, known for nurturing a number of significant modernists including Mahmoud Saïd (1897-1964), the Wanly brothers, Seif (1906-1979) and Adham (1908-1959) and Hussein Bicar (1913-2002), that Badr, at a mere seven years of age, realised that she, too, wanted to become an artist. Her desire for artistic appreciation was so strong that the young artist-to-be showed her mother's hyperrealistic drawings to her classmates as her own. After Alexandria, Badr's family relocated to Kuwait, where she engaged in artistic endeavours of her own and remained determined about her aspirations. After high school, she enrolled at a BFA course in fine art specialising in painting, graduating in 2017. Currently, she is pursuing an MFA in Cyprus at Girne American University.

Badr follows the same ritual before she gets to work: playing Pitbull's discography on shuffle, guided by her sentiments: 'I start painting the entire canvas red with no preconceived idea of what will go on it.' A process best described as intuitive and inward-looking yet fuelled by a sense of an uncertainty-cum-anxiety of what is to come translates into feminine figures that are not characterised by romantic sentimentality but guided by a narrative Badr creates as she paints.

The history of Badr's figurative works, which characterise her oeuvre, dates back to her discovery of self-portraiture. The self-portraits such as *Self Portrait in Silk Shirt* (2018), *Self Portrait in Yellow* (2018) and *Seated Self Portrait* (2018) mark the dawn of her career and the transition from an art student to an artist as Badr started to discover her imprint and way of thinking through self-portraiture at the end of her BFA degree. These honest and intimate self-portraits, where the artist is positioned comfortably in the middle of the composition, standing or sitting in a relaxed manner, holding clementines, a dear fruit from her childhood and the days spent with her grandfather, immortalise moments from a young woman's life.



In the self-portraits, Badr is seemingly comfortable and does not mind the spectator's gaze but strikes a confident pose despite depicting herself in a private setting, sitting on a couch in a place that could be her home, or doing things we tend to do behind closed doors, for instance wearing a LUSH peppermint face mask, blurring the lines between private and public and intimate and distant, thereby enshrining an ephemeral instant of her life and immortalising a glimpse of herself. Since 2018, Badr has been developing portraiture vis-à-vis the concept of memory, which she uses as a medium, drawing inspiration from hearsay, stories about herself as told by others, cross-referencing them with her own memories. The exercises in bringing together memory and portraiture crystallise in titles such as *Her Cloth Was Cut From Heaven*, *She Wished To Be Me And I Wished To Be Her* (2021), where Badr revisits meaningful memories from her time in Alexandria, gently suggesting that these recollections, which are essentially unobtainable from the present time, become objects of desire. Boldly questioning the reliability of her own memory as she comes to learn the details of her memories are not accurate, Badr invites us to consider the authenticity of our past recollections. Although the instants of the past are celebrated in her paintings, Badr's work is not particularly nostalgic; there is no longing for the past as a whole. Instead, her paintings are odes to particular moments, which are rather to be thought of as a road to desire rather than a means to an end.

The notion of memories is well-documented in Badr's portraits of women, too. These portraits do not represent just any women, but women who have impacted her life, for instance her friends, women who resemble her mother and women who possess characteristics such as nurturing, loving and caring-attributes that guide Badr's understanding of womanhood. The women of *Heaven Is A Feeling* (2019), *Eternity Is The Wait Between Breaths* (2019) and *Portrait Of A Woman Waiting* (2021) indeed epitomise Badr's image of a woman: vulnerable yet strong, domestic yet free, nurturing yet sensual. Although Badr recognises the societal pressures that often drive women towards such qualities and the encompassing woman-as-a-caregiver configuration, her works are not to be read as a critique but a celebration of such characteristics and positions. Above all, Badr's female characters have agency and they do not merely exist in order to fulfill their role but are protagonists in their own stories, existing independently despite the surrounding expectations in a space Badr calls 'between heaven and earth', an area not to be defined in a spiritual sense but rather by its absence of spatiality, a kind of non-space, where the red sun unifies the women's experiences.

These characters stemming from Badr's personal experiences and notions surrounding femininity and womanhood are unapologetic about their desires. They sit boldly in their portraits in a dreamy terrain fusing love and desire, resulting to an atmosphere that is accentuated by titles such as *Desire Tripled Is Love, And Love Tripled Is Madness* (2021), *When I Desire You A Part Of Me Is Gone* (2021) and *The Hardest Part About Losing A Love Is Watching The Year Repeat Its Days* (2021).



In her pursuit of exploring the intricacies of female desire, Badr joins the ranks of earlier generations of artists dealing with the very topic. The Lebanese Huguette Caland (1931-2019) and Palestinian Juliana Seraphim (1934-2005), for instance, examined female desire through the lenses of sexuality and lust. Whereas for Caland and Seraphim desire was inherently corporeal and politically motivated as it was so closely linked to liberation, for Badr it is more a question of attachment and the myriad of possibilities projected into the space between the object of one's desire and the needs and promises projected onto it. In this sense, Badr's figures depict women as both the desired and the desiring. Driven by Anne Carson's understanding of desire, seen as an entity that cannot exist without the lack of what we seek, the very presence of it in Badr's paintings does not lead to anything. Desire, in this sense, is a promise that can never be ultimately fulfilled. There is no final destination but a constant search.

Intimately linked with the notion of desire are also Badr's 2019 paintings of figures of women in *Roommates In Heaven* (2019), *Draw Four* (2019) and *Laundry Day* (2019), mostly lounging, doing ordinary chores such as waiting for laundry and playing the card game UNO. These paintings stem from Badr's experiences after her grandfather's passing, from a time when she thought that the only way to be reunited with him would be through purifying herself of all earthly things. In these serene depictions of Badr and her friends, the paintings' protagonists are occupied with the mundane of everyday life, thereby creating a sharp contrast to the ceremonial affairs framing one's passing. Despite the paintings' personal background and significance, Badr manages to discuss the topic with universality that can escape her experiences with her grandfather's passing. The resulting scenes are almost hopeful in their serenity. In this regard, and considering Carson's aforementioned definition of desire and the centrality of the concept to Badr's corpus, grief becomes the ultimate desire as reuniting with a loved one on the Earth will remain impossible forever.

Badr's world is one of wonder and reflection. Driven by her need to make sense of the world around her, her work examines the fading of the personal and the public, creating a discursive space which articulates her generation's freedom from the older ones. In a space where the artist's gaze is inherently in-ward looking and the personal takes precedence over the political, Badr eloquently negotiates her position as an artist who addresses her inner world and beliefs. Badr's paintings demonstrate how her ponderings, personal dreamscapes and ideals about women result in engaging narratives dealing with universally recognisable themes which offer viewers a space to reflect and relate. Badr's timeless depictions of femininity and womanhood both decipher and construct a sensual, mysterious layer often synonymous with women without diminishing their agency. Redolent with beauty and independence while unmasking topics such as desire, childhood, memories and death, the artist's emotive portraits are unapologetic odes to her highest values: love and beauty.

CV

Aidha Badr received a BFA from Binghamton University, New York and is currently pursuing a MFA at Girne American University in Cyprus. In 2017, she was awarded the Novogrodsky Memorial Award for Artistic Pursuits, New York.

Her works were already shown in two solo exhibitions in Kuwait (2018, "As Above So Below", Dar Al Funoon; 2017 "Fomo", Artspace). She also participated in various group shows in New York (Spring Group Show, Rosefsky Gallery; First Friday Group Show, Cooperative Gallery 213) and Kuwait ("Abolish 135").

In 2019, Aidha collaborated with Bloomingdales for the FW19 collection (Kuwait) and with Puma's Spring Campaign Washed Ashore (Beirut).

She is represented by Hunna Art gallery.

HUNNA / هُنَّ

About

Founded in 2021 by Océane Saily, Hunna Art is a contemporary art gallery representing women artists based in the Gulf. Tackling questions of power, of the women body and its representation, of the history of the Arabian peninsula, of social relations and of youth culture, Hunna Art's artists are developing cutting edge visual languages and researches that explore through art historical, social and political narratives as well as dominant representations.

Hunna Art aims to contribute to the vibrant art ecosystem of the Gulf while amplifying the voices and visibility of women artists and art professionals through collaborations, exhibitions, fairs participation and publications. Since our launch, we have been inviting art critics and curators such as Wadha Al-Aqeedi, Lara Arafeh, Afnan Al-Yafaey, Beth Derderian, Juliette Lecorne, Ingrid Luquet-Gad and Elina Sairanen to collaborate with us hence creating an international network composed of the new generation of art professionals while offering new and critical perspectives on our artists' practices.

Initially launched online, the gallery has showcased three exhibitions in Dubai in 2022 and will announce in the coming months the opening of a permanent space.

Hunna Art will also participate in art fairs around the world and implement collaborations with recognized art collections, institutions and initiatives to further the representation of woman artists while diffusing our artists' work regionally and internationally.



Special Thanks

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