



TALALIYA

by Sawsan Al Bahar

September 25 to November 25, 2022, at Firetti Contemporary

Curated by Céline Azem

Firetti Contemporary is thrilled to announce the opening of *Talaliya* by Syrian artist, Sawsan Al Bahar. The exhibition will be inaugurated by His Excellency Dr. Ghassan Abbas, Syria's Ambassador to the UAE.

Talal, in Arabic, is a ruin or a trace of a home; and *Atlal*, plural, are what is left behind once inhabitants of a place leave. In this solo show, Al Bahar presents a series of drawings and a large-scale installation that showcase the artist's preoccupation with intangible traces and remains. Looking at remnants left over by her family, Al Bahar attempts to make sense of her personal history and links her experience to that of Arab Diasporas who share the artist's existential trouble and her loss of place and permanence.

In ancient Arabic poetry, standing over the ruins, *Al Waqfa Al Talaliya*, or *Al Wuqoof 'Ala Al Atlal* is a prominent poetic practice, a ritual of reflection and mourning. Arab poets, standing on the ruins of past homes of loved ones long gone, recite their lines amid the desert sands. This type of poem begins by describing the home, its context and landscape, and then its traces and leftovers - erased by wind, carved by rain, invaded by grass and vegetation.

Well-known Arab poets from this ancient time include Umru' Al Qays, Turfah bin Al Abd, and Amru bin Kulthoom; through their '*talal*' these poets express, in sincerity, their reality: a life of constant journeying, leaving and loss. It is thus, no wonder, that this poetic impulse evolved from the harsh requirements of living in the desert, and from the perpetual yearning for a past home and simultaneous search for a new one.

”وَتَلَقَّتْ عَيْنِي فَمَدَّ حَفِيئْتُ
عنها الطلُولُ تَلَقَّتْ الْقَلْبُ“

- Al Sharif Al Radi

The poet describes his visit to the site of remains left by loved ones long gone by saying that as soon as his eyes lose sight of their traces, his heart flutters with a yearning for them again.

Inspired by these Ancient Arab poets, Al Bahar repeats this practice in an artistic rather than literary form, standing at her ruins and looking at remnants left over by her family: a collection of words, memories and evocations. Reflecting on the generational departures in her family's history and excavating content taken from their past, Al Bahar composes works to reconstruct lives through memories of objects and places, reaching across time to connect contemporary life with ancient experience, and referencing the cathartic practice to reckon with her personal history.

In her installation *Leaving is Home*, 3D printed sculptural sheets are suspended in a flurry, mid-air. Each sheet is inscribed with the words of her late grandfather, taken from his memoirs as he recollects his life in Jaffa, Palestine and his family's departure and gradual settlement in Damascus. With his mother and siblings, he left Palestine in 1947 as a child for a family visit to Damascus, unbeknown to him that he would never return again. 70 years later, Jaffa would not leave him.

Collectively, the sheets reconstruct one unfinished chapter, evoking a past still unforgotten by his granddaughter. Visitors are confronted with the installation at eye level, able to walk amid the pages and make out fractured remembrances.

The drawings, on the other hand, reconstruct memories through domestic objects and places. While they do not depict human beings, they evoke their presence in the traces they leave behind. Hanging in empty space, each object acquires a ghostly presence. The intense but simple draftsmanship in graphite, a medium that is a trace in itself, becomes a carrier of subtler metaphorical qualities. Sometimes referring to photographs and sometimes pulling from imagination, Al Bahar draws from places and objects long gone like a fruit plate in her

grandmother's kitchen, a Jalabiya dress once worn by her mother and other motifs from daily life. Her subjects are interlinked, allowing viewers to uncover connections.

In a contemporary gesture that references *Al Waqfa Al Talaliya*, Al Bahar stands not at the *atlat* of her loved ones, but at the leftovers of their departures and the traces of their yearning and their memories. Collectively these works construct a metaphorical space where the artist recollects her loss, a loss inherited that remains, and links her to the generational displacements and departures in her family's history.

At the core of this exhibition, the artist's fear of death and destruction is laid bare. A mixture of determination and abandonment, *Talaliya* is a hymn of existential disquiet and an act that exhumes the traces of time and distance and the inevitability of generational loss.

SAWSAN AL BAHAR BIOGRAPHY

Born in Damascus and raised in the U.A.E, Sawsan Al Bahar is an artist, architect and researcher based



in Dubai. Sawsan seeks the discreet ways history influences personal narratives in the region, investigating her own and searching for the home myth within works of graphite on paper, digital scans, and text. An intense draftsmanship is the basis of her work, and she employs digital scanning to access and depict an absent homeland. Her meticulous drawings are poetic entanglements, falling at the crossroads of past and future, evoking an intimate past image, and highlighting to the viewer the tension between the real and the fabricated.

Al Bahar has participated in numerous national exhibitions and galleries including *Speculative Links* at Art Dubai (Dubai, 2022), *Ghost Catcher* at the Luxembourg Pavilion Expo 2020 (Dubai, 2021), *Community & Critique* at Art Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi, 2016), *Wra'a Al-Zaman* in Abu Dhabi Music & Art Foundation (Abu Dhabi, 2015), *Sikka Art Fair* (2015, Dubai), *Made in Tashkeel* (2015, Dubai) and *Eyes Wide Shut* at Firetti Contemporary (2022, Dubai).

Al Bahar will be participating in the 17th edition of ArtVerona with Firetti Contemporary under the curation of Sona Stepanyan.

ABOUT FIRETTI CONTEMPORARY



"CREATING MEANINGFUL AND SUSTAINABLE COLLECTIONS"

Firetti Contemporary is a gallery where art and creative concepts align from the region and beyond, encouraging global engagement through creating meaningful and sustainable collections.

By representing both established and emerging artists from all over the world, Firetti Contemporary strives to build a multidisciplinary art space with a strong identity to an international platform. Bringing together like-minded individuals and pioneers of the artistic and expressive future, the gallery assembles a dynamic curation of works that encourage the importance of individuality as well as establishing collective alignment.

Using the vast space of the gallery, Firetti Contemporary ventures to support a network of collaborations with a unique taste in presentation, becoming an integral part of the local community. The gallery embraces the central place that art can play in sustainability and social issues, whilst doing so its mission is to become a vehicle for social change, instilling values in our society through the inspirational power of art.