

CULTURE

Yusra Wahba transforms stress into strength at Firetti Contemporary show

21 Feb 2024 



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In her debut solo exhibition *Translucent Threads of Life* at Firetti Contemporary (Dec. 8, 2023 – Mar. 8), Saudi-born, UAE-based, Egyptian artist Yusra Wahba celebrates nature, identity, and the resilience of women. Wahba is celebrated for her exploration of the interplay between nature, memory, and emotion. The exhibition, unveiling the beauty found in life's unconventional and wilder aspects, embraces the allure that emerges from such unorthodoxy. It comprises a series of four, and the show invites visitors to embark on a journey through translucent layers of material, exploring the fusion of science and art, while encouraging an appreciation for the beauty that arises when boundaries are recognised and pushed.

Wahba's sculptures and installations are mainly done in transparent resin, a medium which finds its place in artists' ateliers due to its symbolic connotations. It is a clear, luminous, and untamed material and in skillful hands, can be made to reflect multiple thoughts, among which are the peril and beauty of existence. Wahba is an alchemist; she manipulates temperature and pressure while moulding the resin, and transforms the liquid into solid form, creating sculptures that symbolise both delicacy and strength — an artistic message that speaks of the resilience of nature and the can-do spirit of women.

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In the series *Wild Beauty Unveiled*, bold, red-layered sculptures depict the never-say-die aspect of the feminine spirit, and the artist finds its resonance in plant life and marine ecosystems. It is Wahba's contention that below the tame routine of civilisation, there exists an untamed allure, beautiful and dangerous, which emerges when boundaries are forced. It manifests itself amidst adversity, and is a testament to the American author's definition of courage as grace under pressure.

Continuing the exhibition, viewers will encounter *Interconnected Echoes - Tidal Rhythms*, which are sculptures that ripple with the rhythmic patterns of ocean tides. The series makes a tapestry woven by the rhythmic movements of the ocean, coloured by the azure blooms of marine life and the fractal beauty of coral. The sculptures mimic the ebb and flow of the ocean, on which the lives of innumerable mariners have depended through immemorial ages. It is a dynamic interplay of humanity and nature. Transparent threads intertwine, portraying unseen forces that have shaped and shape our existence. Just as tides align with the moods of the moon, our lives too, says the artist, are influenced by the cosmic rhythm.



Yusra Wahba is based in the UAE.

Harmony Unbound - Immersed in the *Quiet Blue* series is an immersive installation. It is inspired by a quote from Kuwaiti-born Palestinian-American writer and human rights activist, Susan Abulhawa. She wrote: "It wasn't long after that when I went into the quiet blue, that place without time, where I could soak up all the juices of life and let them run through me like a river", in her book *'The Blue Between the Sky and Water'*. Abulhawa's work offers a poignant exploration of the Palestinian experience, providing the human side of the conflict. It weaves together themes of family, identity, resilience and the enduring connections between people and their homeland.

Through *Harmony Unbound*, Wahba pays homage to the profound philosophy inherent in Abulhawa's writing, crafting a narrative that mirrors themes of change, liberation, and the enduring quest for harmony as found in the book. Wahba's personal journey is oriented with rhythmic currents, fostering introspection and self-discovery in tranquil blue surroundings. Comprising sculptures bathed in shades of blue reminiscent of the ocean, the installation serves as metaphors for life's fluidity, where elements of identity, memory and culture seamlessly intertwine. *Harmony Unbound* is a living entity that has the heft to immerse viewers in a roller coaster sensory journey.

Gulf Today



An installation from the Harmony Unbound series.

Much like Abulhawa's evocative words invite readers to investigate the profound aspects of human experience in the Palestinian context, Wahba's sculptures and installations encourage viewers to reflect on universal themes. They include identity, resilience, and also the organic links between life and nature. Finally, in the series Exquisite Moments, Wahba urges us to "pause and relish the exquisite moments of life". This last of the series delicately balances strength and fragility, with thin layers of translucent sculptures standing for life's transient nature, but indicating purposeful movement and unending durability. The artworks explore both scientific and aesthetic boundaries, fusing biology, science and art into an all-inclusive whole.

Translucent Threads of Life is a celebration of the unconquerable human spirit, the ever-changing rhythms of nature, and the gracious moments that adorn our lives. Wahba's practice revolves around the concept of freezing memories, encapsulating experiences and evoking patterns found in dissected biology and emotional wavelengths, within the framework of time. With a background in Pharmaceutical Science, she attempts to bridge science and art, pushing the limits of her materials to create sculptures that capture the vibrancy of the natural world and its interconnectedness with human life.

"Her artwork embodies a perpetual sense of transformation, beautifully mirroring the ever-evolving nature of both the natural world and the human experience," says Celine Azem, curator. "Yousra's art is marked by a play of contrasts, such as light and dark, transparency and opacity, mirroring the complexity of life." "My focus is on crafting spaces that are ephemeral, bathed in light, and etched in the footprints of memories," says Wahba. "My art endeavours to explore how time moulds our perceptions of the world and influences our understanding of self and identity."