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CULTURE

Childhood to motherhood: Aidha Badr evolves at Firetti Contemporary show

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Oil on canvas work titled Nothing Ever Happens.

Muhammad Yusuf, Features Writer

Firetti Contemporary, in collaboration with Hunna Art Gallery, is presenting *I'm Never Coming Back*, a solo exhibition by artist Aidha Badr, Sept. 19 – Nov. 7. Motherhood marks a quiet yet profound transformation, arriving without ceremony, altering the texture of life and the weight of thoughts until even the smallest parts of oneself perhaps feel unfamiliar, being carefully rearranged, though not replaced.

In *I'm Never Coming Back*, Aidha Badr paints from this perspective, between the daughter she once was and the mother she is becoming. Her works unfold like diary entries, fragile, unfiltered, and emotionally bared. They capture her disorientation or new orientation, of silent unravelling of a previous self and the remaking of identity that moves between what has passed and what is still taking form.

Badr's earlier practice focused on untangling the roots of female desire and exploring the intricacies of the daughter-mother relationship, notably by scrutinising the way the maternal figure and its representations play a significant role in childhood and the early stages of a girl's development. In this new body of work, her lens shifts inwards.



Horse Study in oil on canvas.

Now painting as a mother herself, the canvases become a space to project her own vulnerabilities, reflections, and lived experiences. They are intimate territories where personal memory, maternal identity, and self-exploration, intersect.

The self-portraits which appear in the show are fragmented, portraying the artist as a distant Madonna -aloof, protective, and enigmatic. Cropped tightly and rendered with measured restraint, they withhold intimacy, while conveying quiet authority. Handwritten text punctuates the paintings, echoing fragments of the artist's inner monologue such as Stay with me a little longer or Nothing ever happens. The words trace the subtle shifts of identity that motherhood brings in its wake.

The tension between vulnerability and resilience is mirrored in the introduction of the horse, which emerges as a central motif and represents the process of acceptance and change. In the exhibition, the equine takes multiple shapes: a dissected toy, evoking the fragility and reconstruction of identity; two foals, captured mid-movement, suggesting hesitant, tentative exploration; three studies that culminate in the work I Am Not the Same and I Am Never Coming Back, where a fully formed and proud horse dominates a toy version of itself.

This final image embodies the ultimate acceptance of change, the reconciliation of past and present selves, and the recognition that growth requires both letting go and standing fully in the clothes of one's transformed identity. In the artist's words, "accepting change without fighting it — to move forward quietly, with grace. It's not about running or escaping anymore. It's about being present with whatever's shifted, and finding a kind of freedom in that."



Self-portrait with rose.

Ultimately, *I'm Never Coming Back* is a meditation on the female psyche, on what is lost and what is gained in transition. The voices of the artist, as a daughter and now as mother, are layered and embrace each other. The daughter is curious, playful, sensitive, always looking back. The mother is quieter and more grounded, bringing a protective yet unresolved gravitas. Together, they shape a new body of work that reflects the dualities of becoming, giving space to a transformation experienced by so many, yet perhaps so seldom spoken about in the public sphere.

Aidha Badr was formally trained as a portrait painter, and one of her focuses is on the early onset realisation of what is referred to as a 'loss' of the object occurring during the early years of a woman's life. Her work deals with universal experiences of femininity, childhood and domestication, and how women cope with emotional states and interpret 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 is based in Dubai.

She is an Egyptian American artist, whose practice explores memory as a medium, unveiling theories of female desire, attachment, and object relations. Through painting, she examines universal experiences of femininity, childhood and domestication, often through dreamlike compositions that revisit domestic rituals and inner-child memories. Her earlier works explored maternal relationships through the gaze of a daughter; her current practice reflects the profound shifts of motherhood, offering intimate meditations on identity in motion. Aidha Badr lives and works in Dubai.

In an interview to Canvas magazine, she said that “beauty, femininity and the multifaceted nature of women inspire me. Mothers, sisters, daughters and lovers – my paintings depict female figures as the desired and the desiring. I’m inspired by women who love to be domesticated, who do not shy away from vulnerability, and who are brave enough to be wives, homemakers, and mothers. The women I paint are defined by these characteristics. Female fragility is often mistaken for weakness or even insanity; yet the women I depict are confident in their female roles, upholding traditional ideals of beauty and femininity.” She received a BFA from Binghamton University, New York; in 2017, she was awarded the Novogrodsky Memorial Award for Artistic Pursuits, New York. Her works have been shown in solo exhibitions in Kuwait (2018, As Above So Below, Dar Al Funoon; 2017, Fomo, Artspace). In 2022, she presented her third solo exhibition, When I Desire You A Part Of Me Is Gone, with Hunna Art in Dubai.