

FIRETTI  

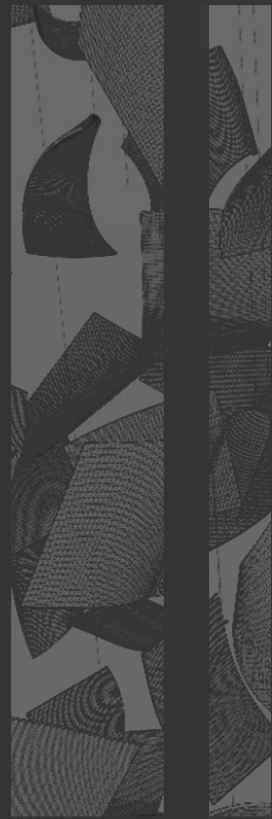
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CONTEMPORARY

# TALALIYA

by Sawsan Al Bahar

طاللييا



FIRETTI  
CONTEMPORARY

TALALIYA | طَلِيَّة

Curated by Céline Azem

September 25 to November 25, 2022 | at Firetti Contemporary, Dubai, UAE

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# TALALIYA

by Sawsan Al Bahar

طَلِيَّة

Wednesday March 19 at  
2 pm:

Although I am, naturally,  
aware of the good things  
that awaited me in dear  
Damascus (incidentally,  
my mother was a  
Damascene), I find myself  
reluctant to leave Jaffa,  
where my eyes have  
opened and seen the  
world for the first time,

# FOREWORD

*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.

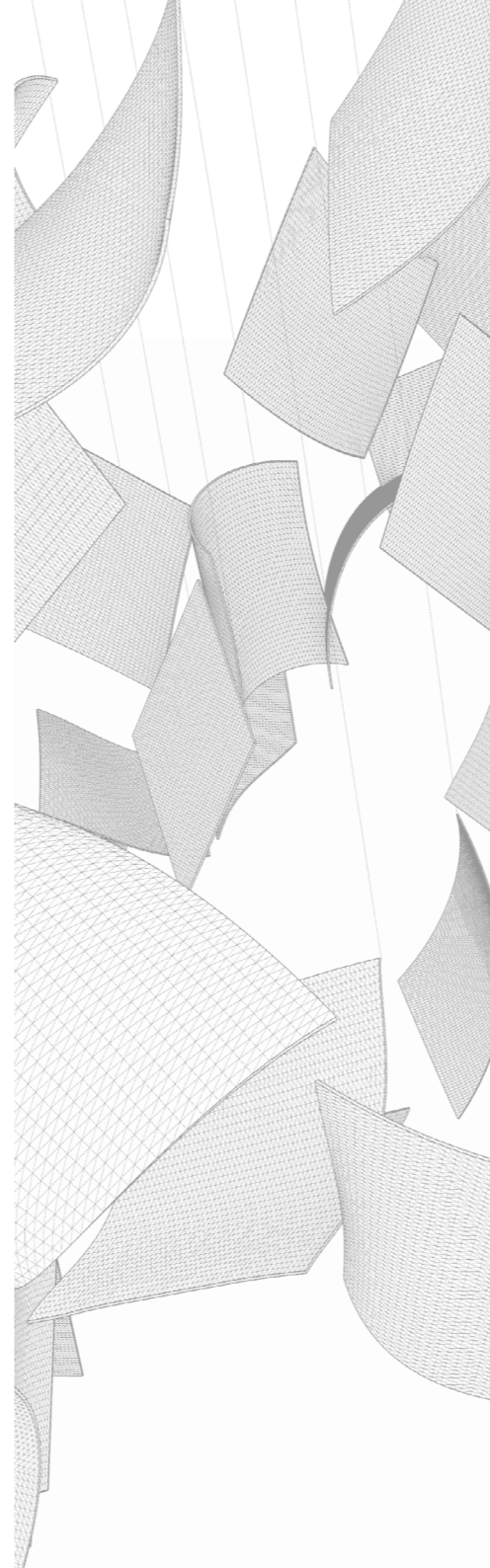
وتَلَقَّتْ عيني فَمَدُّ حَفِيَّتْ  
 عنها الطلؤلُ تَلَقَّتْ القلب  
 - Al Sharif Al Radi

*The poet describes his visit to the site of remains and ruins 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 forgotten 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 atlatl 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.

The background of the page is filled with various abstract, three-dimensional wireframe geometric shapes. These shapes are rendered in a light gray color and consist of interconnected lines forming surfaces that curve and fold in different directions. Some shapes resemble curved panels or architectural components, while others are more complex, multi-faceted forms. The overall effect is a sense of dynamic, organic geometry.

Sawsan Al Bahar

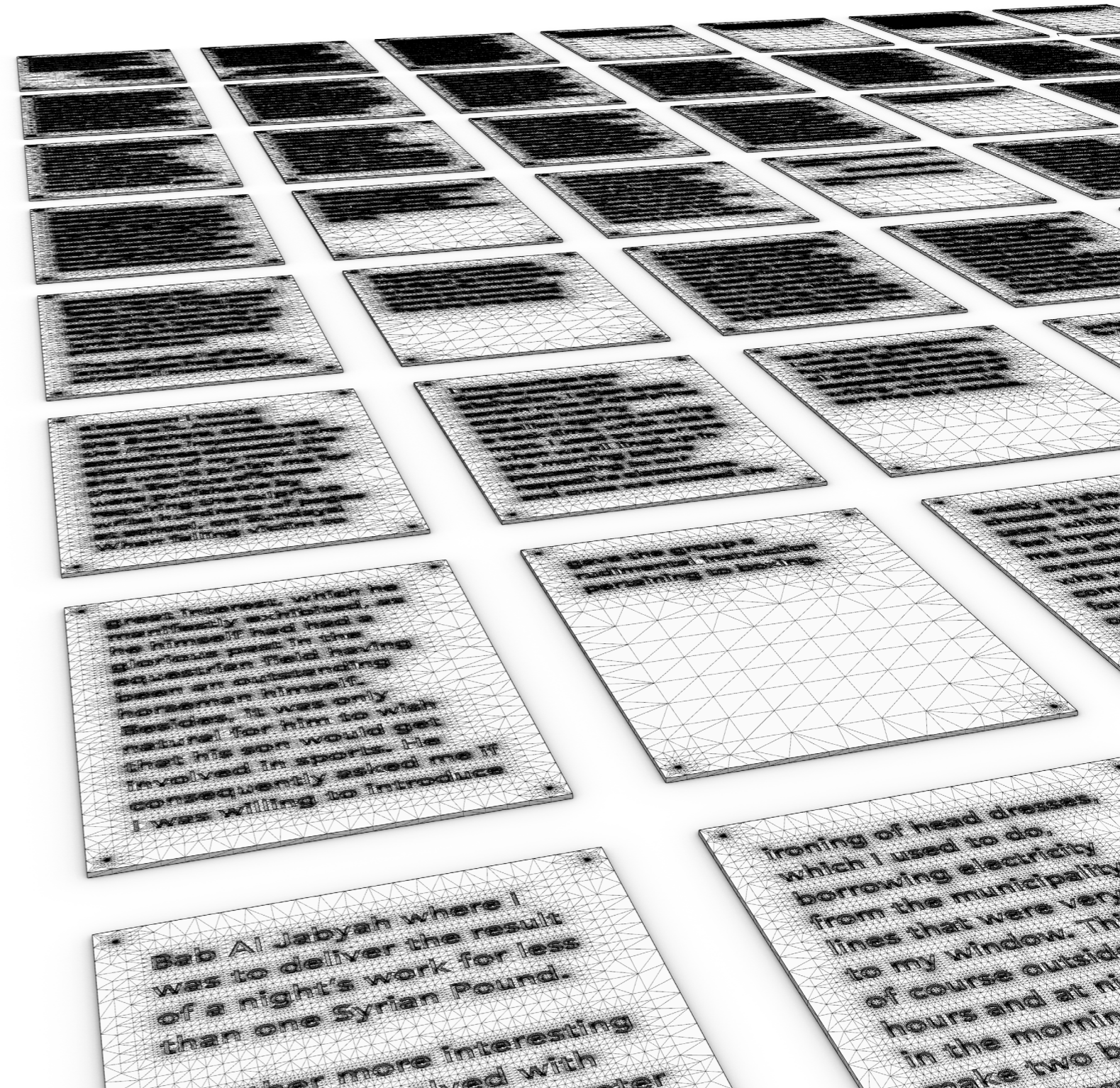
# INSTALLATION

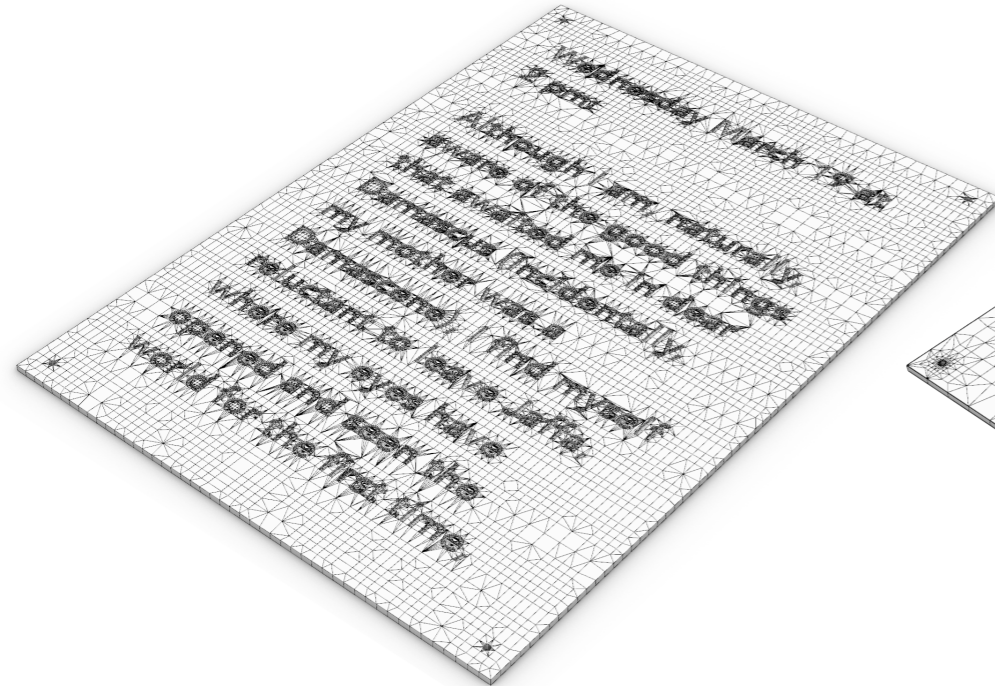
## Leaving is Home

90 pieces of 3d printed PLA, synthetic wire and wood

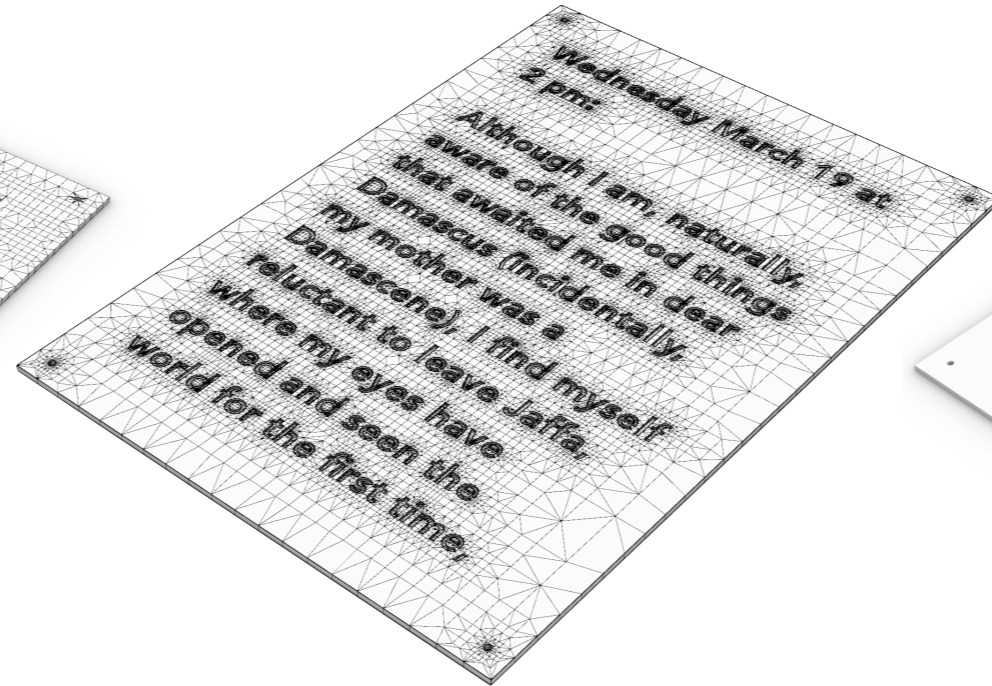
In this sculptural installation, the artist inscribes the words of her late grandfather on every sheet, which she takes from his memoirs as he recollects his life in Jaffa, Palestine as a child, and his family's sudden departure and gradual settlement in Damascus.

A moment is frozen as the pages, suspended as if in a gust of wind, become the physical embodiment of his remembrances, written 70 years after his leaving home. The installation embodies one unfinished chapter in 90 pages.





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*3D Model of Installation*





*3D Model of Installation*



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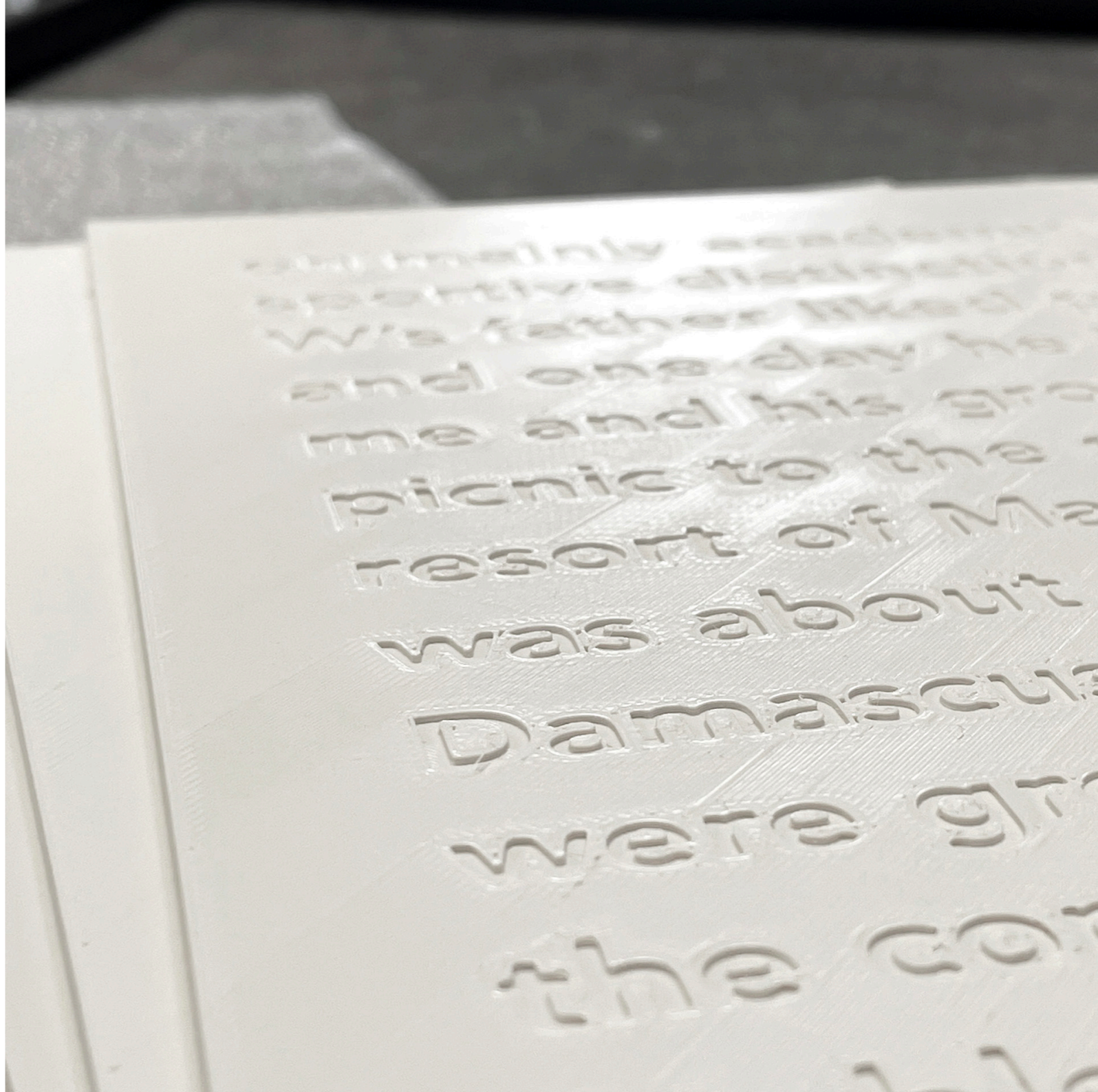
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Sawsan Al Bahar

**MEMOIRS**

## Wednesday, March 19 at 2 p.m.

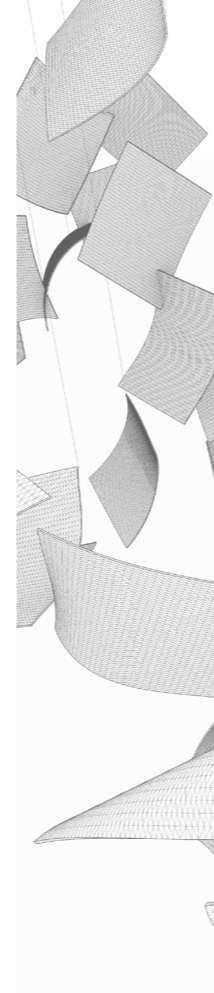
Although I am, naturally, aware of the good things that awaited me in dear Damascus (incidentally, my mother was a Damascene), I find myself reluctant to leave Jaffa, where my eyes have opened and seen the world for the first time, where I had the good fortune of being surrounded by love and appreciation on all sides; where I had the privilege of a first class primary schooling; where I was chosen to recite a very simple poem before an audience of parents who came to attend a celebration of I don't remember what, but do remember the poem and wonder whether it is appropriate to quote it in this context (after deliberation I decided to quote it, come what may, and here it goes:

بي وأمي الغالية\أصبحتما في عافية\تقبيلتان لكما\ظاهرة وخافية/صباح الخير يا أمي\صباح الخير  
يا أبتي\أقبل منكما كفا\أعيش بفضلها الجم. (تصفيق شبه حار على ما أظن)

Back to reminiscing (without adhering to strict chronological order). The Noble Prophet said something like that: Live as long as you wish, but you are bound to die; Love whom-ever you wish, but you will have to say good bye; and act as you wish, but you will be recompensed thereby.

عش ما شئت فإنك ميت\وأحب من شئت فإنك مفارق\واعمل ما شئت فإنك مجزي به.

Now, after nearly seventy years, I find it difficult to leave Jaffa, just yet. What about my naughty driving the car of my mother's doctor by just pushing the starter button (at the time that was how engines were started) till it went into a kind of swamp, driving the doctor to almost madness and making him determine not again to visit my mother,



telling her in his French pronunciation of the word عفریت (devil) as عفغيت in the sentence (ابنك عفریت!!)

What can I do with tens of episodes like that. They press for recognition and I find it difficult to ignore them. Here is another: Mother was asthmatic and the doctor "ordered" her to go back to Damascus for its dry weather which is unlike Jaffa's humid weather that was detrimental to her condition. So she left me at her sister's who was in Jaffa. My aunt's balcony overlooked the courtyard of a Sudanese group of singers and I used to watch them as they rehearsed their songs before going to the radio station known at the time as. إذاعة الشرق الأدنى. In time I got to learn these songs and they took me with them to the radio station. Those who heard the group reported that my voice was preponderant and since then they used to take me with them to sing at weddings and similar occasions and paid me for that (I was nearly eleven years at the time). Are such episodes worth reporting? Or take the case of mother going to my school مدرسة الفرير with a friend of hers who spoke French (mother, bless her soul, was illiterate) in order to complain to the School Director (Frere Directeur) about my boxing activities. He told her there was nothing wrong with that, specially as it did not affect my excellent academic performance, adding, "besides, yesterday your son had signed a contract with us for using our playground for a boxing match to be staged here!".

And how about my friends at the club? How can I leave them just like that without touching on several occurrences that are stuck in my memory, craving expression! My reluctance to leave Jaffa, just as yet, may be appreciated, I think, by a sympathetic audience. I hope I am right. If not, I would appreciate hearing anything to the contrary.

The background of the image is a dense, artistic composition of crumpled paper. The paper is rendered in a light gray color with a fine, grid-like texture, giving it a three-dimensional, tactile appearance. The crumpling is dynamic, with various folds, ripples, and curves. A large, clean white square is centered in the lower half of the image, serving as a focal point for the text.

Sawsan Al Bahar

# ARTWORKS



**Sawsan Al Bahar***Laundry Line, 2022*

Graphite, watercolor  
and charcoal on paper  
41 x 38 cm (framed)



**Sawsan Al Bahar**

*Chair, 2022*

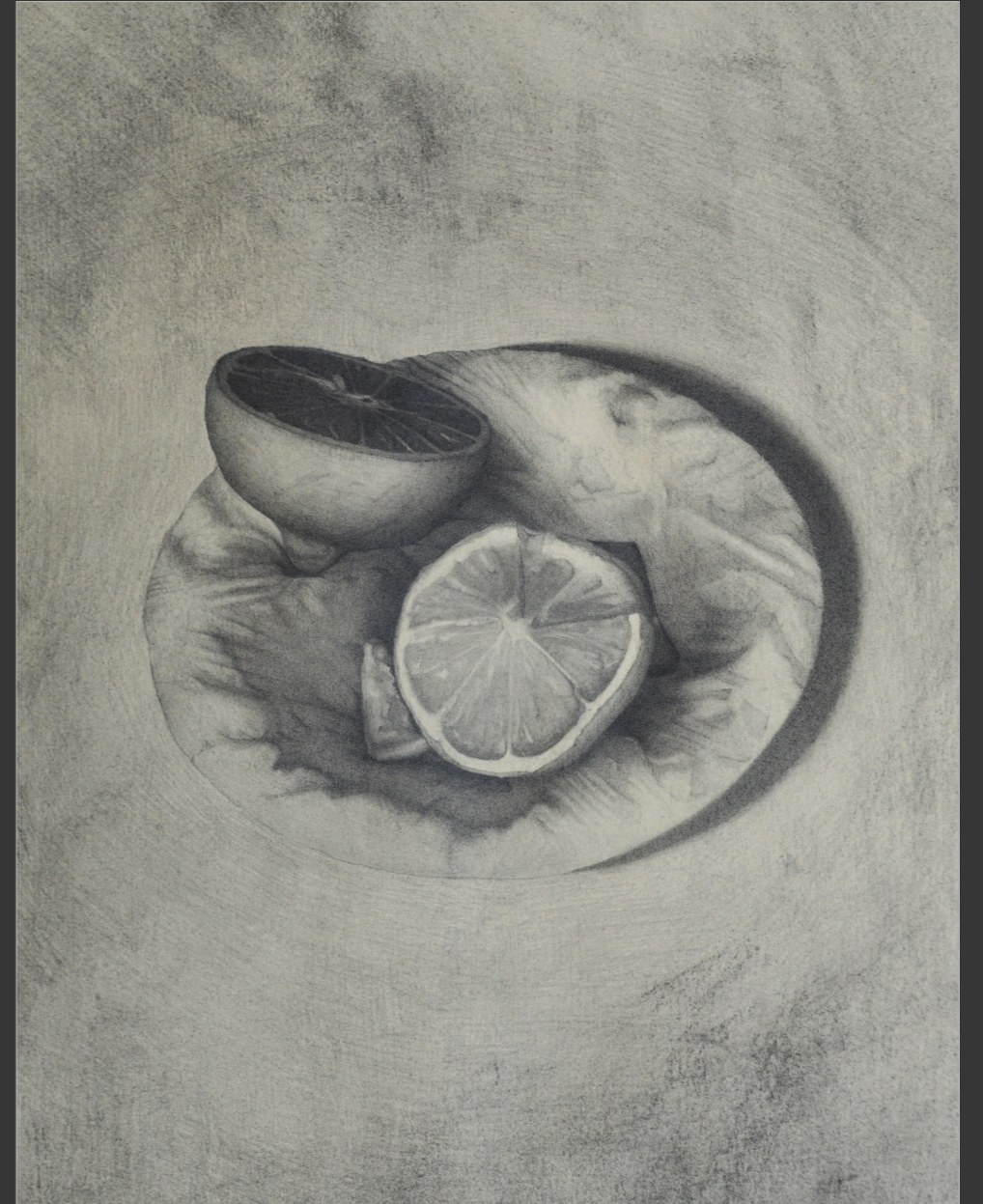
Graphite, watercolor  
and charcoal on paper  
41 x 38 cm (framed)



**Sawsan Al Bahar**

*Lemon, 2022*

Graphite, watercolor  
and charcoal on paper  
41 x 38 cm (framed)



**Sawsan Al Bahar**

*Jalabiya, 2022*

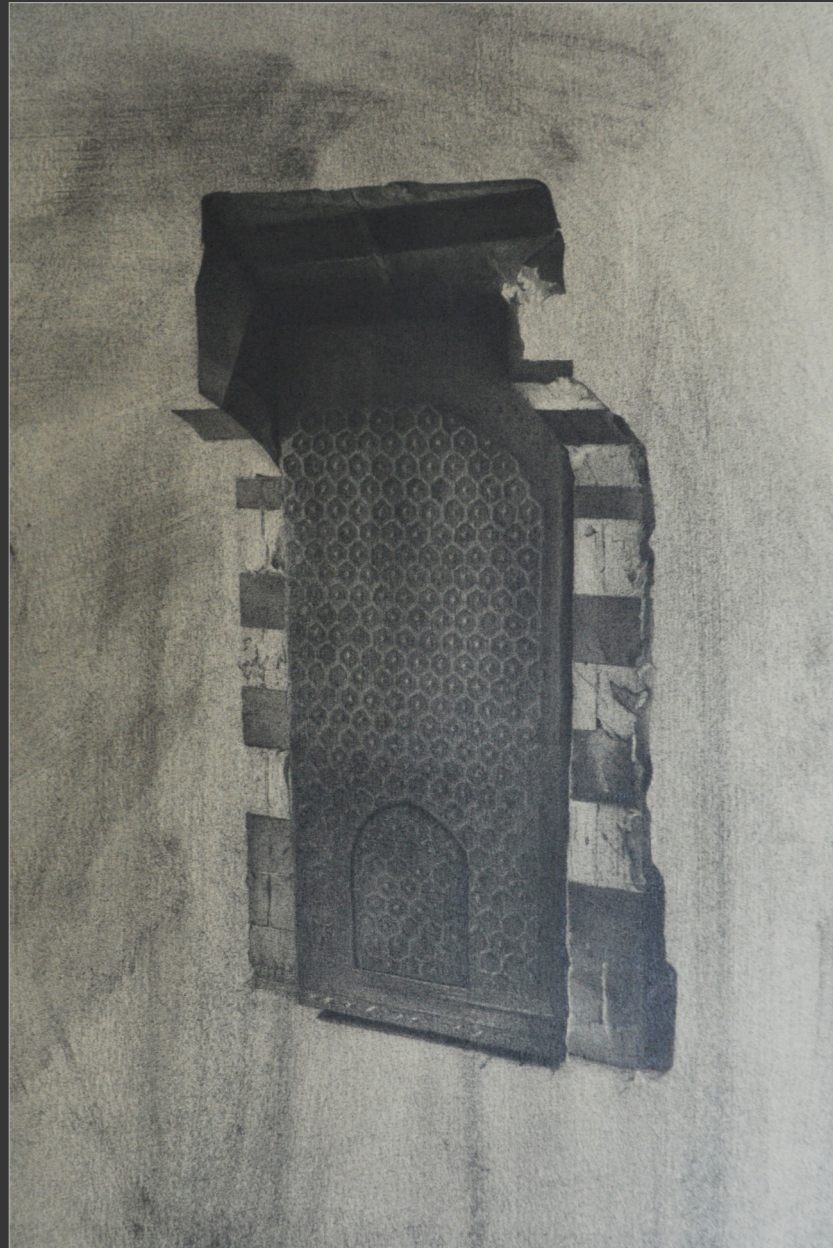
Graphite, watercolor  
and charcoal on paper  
41 x 38 cm (framed)



**Sawsan Al Bahar**

*Bab Khan Ass'ad Pasha, 2022*

Graphite, watercolor  
and charcoal on paper  
41 x 38 cm (framed)



**Sawsan Al Bahar**

*Forest Fire I, 2022*

Graphite on paper  
55 x 44 cm (framed)



**Sawsan Al Bahar**

*Forest Fire II, 2022*

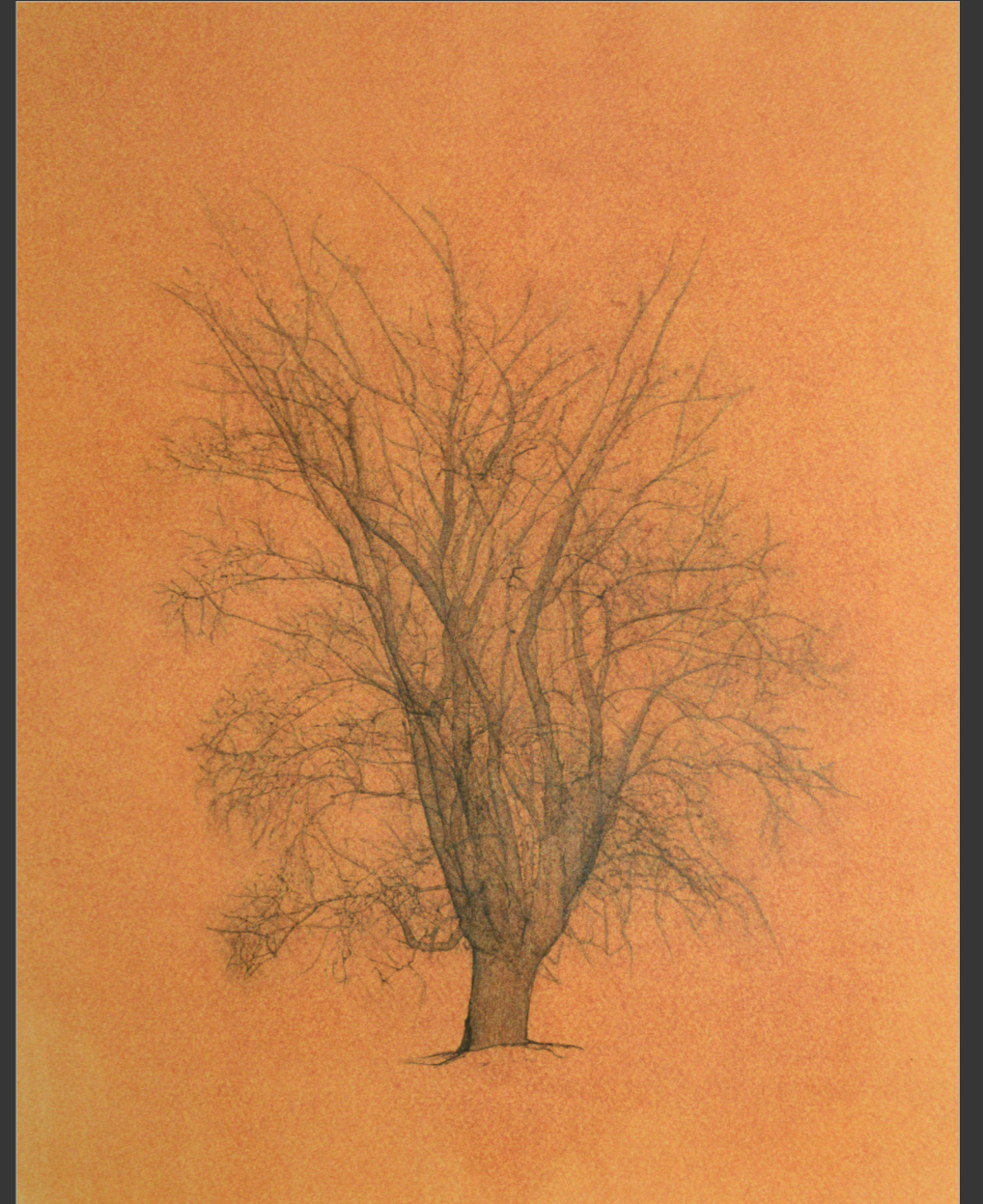
Graphite, ink, medium and oil  
on paper mounted on wood board  
95 x 65 cm (framed)



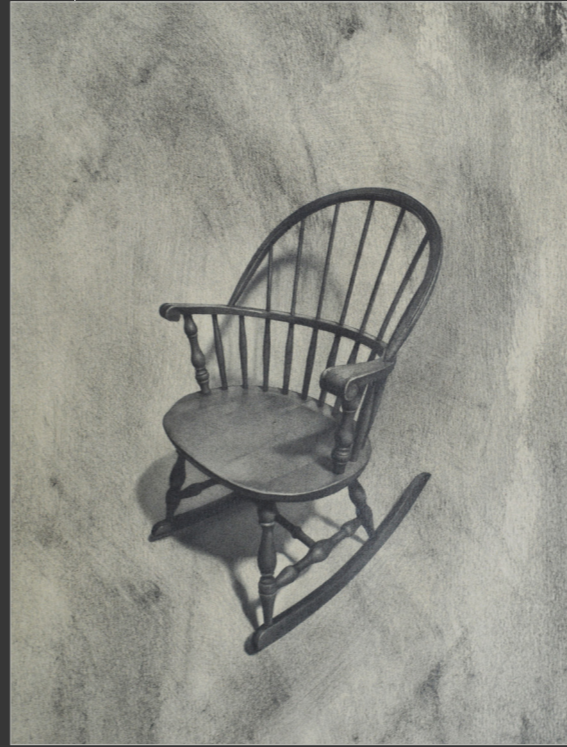
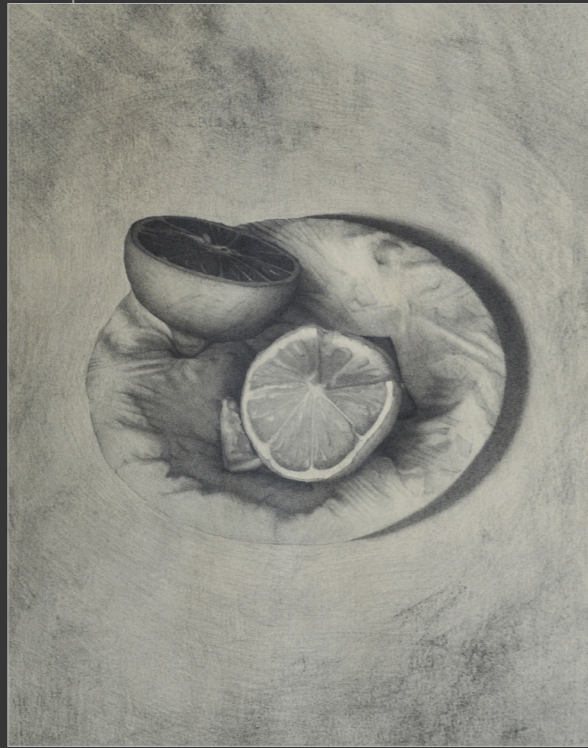
**Sawsan Al Bahar**

*Untitled Tree, 2022*

Graphite, ink and oil on paper  
55 x 44 cm (framed)



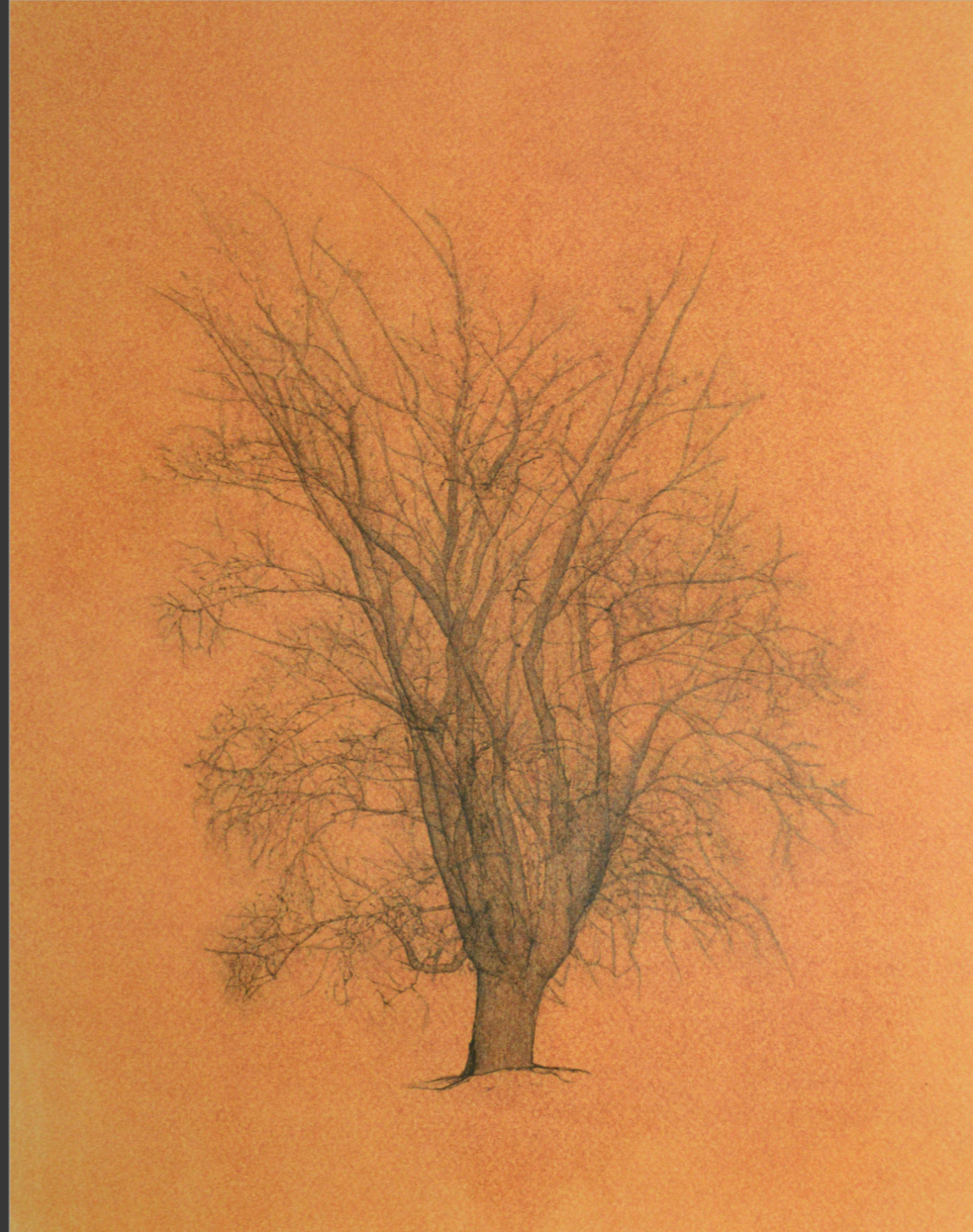




**Sawsan Al Bahar**  
*Graphics, 2022*  
 Graphite, watercolor  
 and charcoal on paper



**Sawsan Al Bahar**  
*Paintings, 2022*  
Graphite, ink, medium and oil





Sawsan Al Bahar

## STUDIO SHOTS

**Art Studio of Sawsan Al Bahar**  
*Work on Installation*



**Art Studio of Sawsan Al Bahar**  
3D Print









Sawsan Al Bahar  
**BIO**



# SAWSAN AL BAHAR | BIO



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, 2022), 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) and Made in Tashkeel (2015, Dubai).

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



Sawsan Al Bahar  
**CV**

**EDUCATION & FELLOWSHIPS**

2019 Angel Academy of Art, Florence

2015-2016 Salamah Emerging Artist Fellowship

(in partnership with Rhode Island School of Design),

Salamah bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation,

Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.

2013 American University of Sharjah, U.A.E.

Bachelor of Science in Architecture & Design

graduated Cum Laude, minor in Visual Art

**SOLO SHOWS**

2022 *Talaliya*, Firetti Contemporary, Dubai

2016 *LUZ II*, Dubai Design Week

2015 *Leaves of Time*, Abu Dhabi Music & Art Festival

**GROUP SHOWS**

2022 *Eyes Wide Shut*, Firetti Contemporary, Dubai

2022 *Speculative Links*, Warehouse 421, Art Dubai

2021 *Ghost Catcher*, Luxembourg Pavilion, Expo 2020

2020 *Covid Conversations*, Tashkeel Art Hub, Dubai

2019 *Convergence*, [collab with B. AlBahar] Stuttgart

2018 *The Figure in 4 Weeks*, Chiaro Scuro Studio, Florence

2017 *Dubai Design Week* [collab with B. AlBahar+R. Al Ghurair]

2017 *Greenpoint open studios*, Java Studios, Brooklyn, NY

2016 *Place & Unity*, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah

2016 *Community & Critique*, Warehouse 421, Art Abu Dhabi

2015 *Made in Tashkeel*, Tashkeel Art Hub, Dubai

2015 *Mobious Design House*, Sikka Art Fair, Dubai

2015 *Sheikha Manal Young Artist Award*, Dubai

2013 *6 Degrees*, American University of Sharjah, UAE

2012 *Sheikha Manal Young Artist Award*, Dubai

2011 *Sheikha Manal Young Artist Award*, Dubai

**PERMANENT COLLECTION**

2015 *Wra'a Al Zaman/Leaves of time*, Abu Dhabi

**AWARDS**

Sheikh Khalifa Scholarship Award, a full scholarship granted annually

to one student for academic excellence and creative achievement, Sharjah,

UAE Music & Art Foundation, Abu Dhabi

**SHORTLISTS**

2019 *Amsterdam Light Festival*

[collab with B. AlBahar]

2017 *M.E. Emerging Designer Prize*

[collab. with R. Al Ghurair]

2015 *Christo/Jeanne-Claude Award*

2014 *Abraaj RCA Innovation Scholarship*

**SELECTED PUBLICATIONS**

2016 *E11 | Gradient*, Centre for Architectural

Discourse, Abu Dhabi

2016 *Place & Unity: Works from the ADMAF Collection*, Sharjah

2014 *Alleyway 51*, WTD Magazine, Dubai

**WORKSHOPS**

2020 *Drawing it out*, Dagmara Genda, Berlin Art Institute [virtual]

2019 *Painting the figure from life*, Denis Sarazhin, Rome

2019 *Painting the portrait from life*, Denis Sarazhin, Rome

2019 *Drawing the Human Figure*, Sergio Chobirko, Florence

2018 *Constructive Anatomy*, Davide Barbini, Florence

2015 *Painting from life*, International Summer Academy of Fine Arts and Media, Venice

2011 *Shelters & settlement*, Amman

2011 *Beyond Entropy*, The AA, Venice

2010 *Drawing Umbria in 10 days*, Florence

2010 *Amman Lab*, Columbia University Middle Easter Research Centre, Amman



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