



The Quest

Alia Hussain Lootah, Majd Alloush, Sara Ahli, Zeina Al Kattan

Curated by Nasser Abdullah

12 January – 26 February 2022

[Dubai, 10 January 2022] Aisha Alabbar Gallery is pleased to present *The Quest*, a group exhibition curated by Nasser Abdullah that features four UAE-based artists: Alia Hussain Lootah, Majd Alloush, Sara Ahli, and Zeina Al Kattan.

Taking inspiration from Amin Maalouf's 2004 novel *Origins*, the exhibition explores life experiences that set forth an artist's path. While these experiences are met on the search for answers about the meaning of life and its purpose, those who create through the lens of these accumulated experiences are the ones we call "artists."

The quest to understand the purpose of this life varies across people and interests. Art appears to be an attempt to understand the contexts of the ever-changing reality in which we live, forcing the artist to experience several adventures, and follow history, news and anecdotes to obtain answers and come to realisations that would allow them to start a new artistic experience. This leads them to deeper, more profound questions, once again prompting a never-ending journey of reflection.

The path on which an individual sets out to seek an experience starts from the day one decides to become an artist. In these pivotal moments, an artist finds the courage to decide that whatever they produce henceforth will now be a "work of art." This decision requires them to develop an educated path that is compatible with the course of their lives and the issues they face. Topics that draw their attention and inspire their artistic direction expand with time and knowledge until it matures.

Artists take time to develop their artistic tools as they experiment with materials and methods and try to understand their creative and personal capabilities. The latter becomes more apparent the more they produce. A period of awareness mixed with an understanding of the self and the ability to ask more profound philosophical questions about the meaning of art and its purpose follows. During this period of the artist's life, the right, artistic tools and questions come together, leading to a more mature, defined, logical and sustained experience that produces a forward-thinking vision, rich with experience, paving the way for further enlightened quests.

The experience of the youth, usually marked by a rush to experiment with ideas and materials and a confrontation of audiences with the various forms of art, are all-natural. These experiences hone the artists' skills and make them capable of setting off on their explorations.

Considering the world's change in the past two years, Alia Hussain Lootah chose to show the personal side of human experience during the pandemic. Using pen and paper, the artist's drawings show chaotic paths but reflect the shape of disturbances that we experienced during that period at the personal and societal levels. These paths were turned into mini sculptures that embodied the turbulent lines. However, these lines are now at peace. Experiences become diverse and turn glossy black to reflect the effect of the darkness left by the pandemic.



Sara Ahli's plaster-filled balloons recollect feelings of pain and suffering due to the various forms of continued pressure applied to them. Sara tests the balloon's endurance and fragile rubbery structure by exerting forms of tension using pliers, stones, and building blocks. She reveals the limits of this structure in standing force and the changes it experiences until it reaches its final shape becoming attuned to its surroundings. The artist likens her process to how human experiences mark people as they become part of their physical, intellectual, and psychological formation, arguing that success in moving forward can be attained by achieving stability amid circumstances we were unable to resist.

Majd Alloush draws his geography by tracing the changes faced by cities worldwide due to wars and displacement. His creative practice challenges the notion of boundaries in concept, content, and medium by exploring psychology, geopolitics, society and environment to paint a more realistic picture of a world undergoing fast and radical changes. In *Untitled Landmarks* (2018), a silkscreen print series and *Con-figuring* (2020), a collection of 100 cubes of raw material experimentation such as cement – remnants of destruction – Majd unveils the reality of several global cities that suffered great devastation because of war.

Zeina Al Kattan went on a life-changing journey as she settled in the UAE after leaving her home country, Syria – a land witnessing fluctuation as transmitted to us through blurred images from unreliable media sources. She draws dark and ironic scenarios of the intertwined conditions of life. She assembles pictures of stories and from events that vaguely affected her. Her unique touch within her practice is how she uses advanced realistic drawing technologies, abstraction and symbolism to create a scenario that combines an alternate reality from dislocated feelings and memories.

The Quest presents a collection of young artistic experiences. Each artist chose their path in the local art scene and sheds light on the various aspects of life to reach their *quest*- to leave a mark on the artistic and human experience.

About the artists

Alia Hussain Lootah (Dubai, 1987) is an Emirati artist, a mother of four, and the co-founder of Medaf Studio in Dubai. Lootah's current work focuses on bodies of art with the theme of understanding the interpersonal relationship between mother and child in today's modern world. *Uncertainty* stems from both external and internal factors of unrest.

Lootah started her art career in 2011, participating in her first exhibition at Dubai-based ARA gallery. She has participated in *Metamorphoses*, Tashkeel, Dubai (2013); *Mawtini*, Tashkeel, Dubai (2013); and Sikka Art Fair (2011, 2012, and 2013). Alia participated as one of the first artists in the Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artist Fellowship Program (SEAF), graduating in 2014. Her SEAF thesis focused on exploring motherhood through different forms of sculptures. In 2017, Lootah co-founded the Medaf Studio in Dubai, an art centre aimed at introducing children and adults to art as a form of self-expression and creativity.

Majd Alloush (b. Dubai, 1996) is a Syrian artist based in Dubai. He works with printmaking, moving images, sculpture, photography and installation to radically re-think his outlook on various subjects. His documentation style of art complements his vision towards the subjects he adopts, while politics,



self-exploration and psychology drive him. The human psyche against nature, politics against conscience, and time against space are contradictions that Majd sees as central to human existence through art.

Majd is currently pursuing an MFA in Art and Media at NYUAD. He graduated from the University of Sharjah in 2018, majoring in Fine Arts. His work has been a part of several exhibitions both in the UAE and internationally, including *Pressure*, Beit Al Mamzar, Dubai (2021); *Made in the Emirates*, Sotheby's, Dubai (2021); the Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival, Sharjah Art Museum (2021), *Intimaa: Belonging*, curated by UAE Unlimited at NYUAD Art Gallery, Abu Dhabi (2020); Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial (2020); Vantage Point Sharjah (2018 and 2019); the *35th Emirates Fine Arts Society Annual Exhibition*, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah (2018); *Kunst im Dialogue*, Landshut, Germany (2018); and *Rent's Due*, Unit 5 Gallery, London, UK. In addition, his works are found in prominent public and private collections in the UAE, including Abu Dhabi Executive Office in Abu Dhabi; and the collection of Mr. Abdulmonem Alserkal, the owner of Alserkal Avenue in Dubai.

Sara Ahli (b. Alabama, 1993) is an artist and fashion designer living and working in Dubai, UAE. Having led personal projects in fashion, Sara has transitioned to sculpture as a new branch of her artistic practice. Her sculptural work explores themes of discomfort and pressure while incorporating a sense of play. Sara stages situations of tension, testing the limitations of materials in reference to the body.

Sara held her first solo exhibition, *A Placeless Place*, in 2021 at The Foundry, Dubai, UAE. Additionally, her work has been exhibited locally at *Made in the Emirates*, Sotheby's, Dubai (2021) and *Community & Critique*, Warehouse 421, Abu Dhabi (2020). In 2020, she completed the Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artists Fellowship (SEAF) in partnership with the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Sara holds a BFA from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco. Her works are in private collections.

Zeina Al Kattan (b. Damascus, 1994) studies human conditions in her work. She is interested in specific behaviours triggered by various circumstances, whereby memory and society's impact on one's growing up play central roles. In her most recent work, Zeina examines her memories in the form of flashbacks and emotions to formulate an understanding of these conditions. Through collaging images, she creates scenarios and atmospheres overshadowed by dark sarcasm that speaks to issues faced in daily life, whether because of gender, nationality, or even beliefs that are not commonly celebrated. Zeina's works are held in numerous private collections.

Zeina's work has been featured in several group exhibitions in the UAE and internationally, including *Community & Critique*, Warehouse 421, Abu Dhabi (2019); *Corrective Connection*, NOISE project, Bloomington, IN (2018); Vantage Point Sharjah 6, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah (2018); *Exit 13 Extension*, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah (2018), *Exit 13*, University of Sharjah, Sharjah (2018) and the *35th Annual Exhibition, Emirates Fine Art Society*, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah (2017). In addition, she completed a residency at The Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artists Fellowship (SEAF) in partnership with the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Cohort 6 (2019). She is presently working at Sharjah Art Foundation as a Curatorial Assistant. Zeina graduated with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at the University of Sharjah (2018). Her works are in private collections.



About the curator

Nasser Abdullah is an Emirati curator and UAE arts researcher who aims to increase awareness of fine art in the UAE, enriching the art scene and helping develop the abilities of young artists. He has curated several exhibitions, including an *Intima'a* an Exhibition by *UAE Unlimited* in NYU Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2020), *From Barcelona to Abu Dhabi* an exhibition by ADMAF, and the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2018), and the 25th and the 35th Emirates Fine Art Society's annual exhibition at the Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE (2006 and 2018). Nasser is a former Chairman of the Board of the Emirates Fine Art Society, a position he held from 2014 to 2018. He has also contributed, significantly, to several publications focusing on the pioneers of the Emirati Arts movement, besides being the Chief Editor of *AITashkeel Magazine*.

About Aisha Alabbar Gallery

Aisha Alabbar Gallery is one of the first Emirati-led gallery in Dubai focused on contemporary and modern art by Emirati, local, and regional artists. Founded in November 2018 and located in Al Quoz, the gallery seeks to further the practices of emerging and established artists, who are the inspiration for the gallery's diverse range of programming.

Dedicated to locally-based artists and producing five innovative exhibitions per year, Aisha Alabbar Gallery has built a reputation not only for rigorous exhibition presentation but also for collaborations with renowned curators, investing considerable resources in bringing the practices of pioneering artists to the contemporary stage.

A commitment to education and community strengthens the gallery's exhibition programme. Each show is accompanied by workshops and seminars with the purpose of engaging diverse audiences. The gallery seeks to contribute to a lasting, evolving UAE arts ecosystem through its exhibitions, accompanying programming and commissioned, in-depth publications.

Editor's note

Exhibition title: The Quest

Artists: Alia Hussain Lootah, Majd Alloush, Sara Ahli, Zeina Al Kattan

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Exhibition opening: 12 January, 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Private Viewing Booking: email to info@aishaalabbar.art or call +971 (0) 4 344 7747

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