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Rand Abdul Jabbar

Molding Anew

Curated by Meitha Almazrooei

Exhibition Designed by Alejandro Stein

Opening Reception

Thursday, 31 October 2024 | 6 – 9 PM

On view: 1 November – 4 December 2024

[Dubai, 7 October 2024] – Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, is pleased to present *Molding Anew*, Rand Abdul Jabbar's (b. 1990, Baghdad) first solo exhibition at the gallery. The exhibition builds on her recent commission for Desert X Alula, *where myths are born of mud and desire* (2024), staging an interplay between narrative and sculpture to explore myth-making as a method of preservation and transformation. *Molding Anew* reflects Abdul Jabbar's process of arriving at her mode of artistic expression, weaving ancient Mesopotamian mythology with contemporary narratives and drawing on multiple mediums to reclaim, preserve, and transform the cultural legacy of her motherland by bringing it to life anew.

The design and organization of the exhibition are grounded on notions of seriality and multiplicity, inherent qualities in the work. The exhibition opens with *Tracing Origins* (2022), a series of foil imprints of miniature ceramic reliefs collected from Iraq by the artist's mother. The transplanted palms and cultural motifs served as objects of childhood play and imagination, latent with meaning as they helped her construct an image of a home that was inaccessible to her, establishing her vocation of intertwining object, memory, and place.

Abdul Jabbar's work slices through thousands of years of history to reveal the often dormant narratives that resurface over time. For someone whose practice collapses time, working with clay is particularly significant because of its malleability, memory, and links to material culture and history. The exhibition will feature twenty ceramic sculptures from her *Earthy Wonders, Celestial Beings* (2019-ongoing) body of work, which was awarded the Richard Mille Art Prize in 2022. The existing works will be shown alongside thirty new sculptures produced for this exhibition, through which Abdul Jabbar highlights and expands on three sculptural groupings - fertility, eye idols, and crowns - symbolizing acts of living, seeing, and knowing. The representations of female figures and the palm tree compose her fertility series, gesturing at notions of birth, renewal, and abundance. Her eye idols, which recall artifacts exhumed from the ancient Mesopotamian Eye Temple at Tell Brak in 1937, hold the memory of all they have observed as they gaze out across the exhibition floor. Meanwhile, the crowns that she has molded represent for her the wisdom derived from the accumulated knowledge gathered from across the centuries.

The exhibition also features *ليكن مذكوراً (may it be remembered)* (2023), a work in which Abdul Jabbar draws on her research into the ancient city of Hatra to set the stage for describing our cyclical and multilayered relationship to land and its legacies of remembrance. Revealing glimpses into seismic moments and events that shaped the place into being, the nine mud sculptures that comprise that series serve as dual agents, performing as witnesses of history and actors within it.

From this expansive vocabulary of sculptural objects emerges her latest series, *Alphabet* (2024), in which she presents the iconography of her forms as an evolving language of signs and symbols. She has produced five varying compositions printed on linen using eighty individual blocks, each correlating to one of her sculptures. The panels correspond to the five chapters of the narrative text she wrote to accompany *where myths are born of mud and desire*, which also served as the central organizing narrative for this exhibition. One may perceive Abdul Jabbar's body of work unfolded into these five chapters, but also begin to form new readings as they are traversed.

Facing this vast set of protagonists, *Inanna's Descent* (2020-2024), a diptych carved in yellow limestone, stands as an ode to wayfinding and the search for belonging; for an arrival home—a sentiment that reverberates in every corner of the gallery.

RAND ABDUL JABBAR

Rand Abdul Jabbar (b. Baghdad, 1990) borrows from the vestiges and ephemera of history to produce reconstructions of its records, events and experiences. She contends with personal and collective memory while engaging in research around the resounding legacies of imperialism, archaeology, mythology and material culture. Employing sculpture, writing, video and installation as primary mediums, her work unfolds through an experiential dialogue between recollection and re-imagination, devising anchors that facilitate the retelling and adaptation of the past into a space for the reclamation of agency and affirmation of identity. Abdul Jabbar was awarded the Richard Mille Art Prize by Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2022. She received a Master of Architecture from Columbia University in 2014.

Recent exhibitions include *In The Presence of Absence, Desert X Alula* (2024), *A Permanent Nostalgia for Departure: A Rehearsal on Legacy with Zaha Hadid*, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (2023); *And the Mirrors Are Many, 421*, Abu Dhabi (2023); *Icon. Iconic: Richard Mille Art Prize*, Louvre Abu Dhabi (2022); *For the Phoenix to find its form in us. On Restitution, Rehabilitation and Reparation*, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2021); *Phantom Limb*, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai (2019); *This Land's Unknown*, Biennale d'Architecture d'Orleans (2019); and *An Instant Before the World*, Biennale d'art contemporain de Rabat (2019).

Her work and writing has been published in numerous publications including *In Plain Sight: Scenes from Aridly Abundant Landscapes* (Kaph Books), *Monumental Shadows* (Kaph Books), *Architecture of Culture* (Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council), *Architecture of the Territory: Constructing National Narratives in the Arab World* (Kaph Books), *Woman Made: Great Women Designers* (Phaidon), *Between East and West: A Gulf* (Actar Publishers), and WTD Magazine.

She lives and works in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

MEITHA ALMAZROOEI

Meitha Almazrooei's work has included public programming for Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (2014-2016), publications for The National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates in Venice (2014, 2017, 2023), and the establishment of WTD Magazine, an architecture and design publication (2012). She has co-edited the anthologies *In Plain Sight: Scenes from Aridly Abundant Landscapes* (2023) and *On Foraging – Food Knowledge and Environmental Imaginaries in the UAE's Landscape* (2023). Al Mazrooei is a PhD candidate in History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She received her MS in Critical, Curatorial & Conceptual Practices in Architecture from Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation (2018).

ALEJANDRO STEIN

Alejandro Stein is an architect and creative director focused on museological environments and exhibition making. Through his practice, he is interested in creating holistic experiences structured by the integration of art, architecture and design. This integral approach is exemplified in his collaborations with the work of artists such as Siah Armajani and Mrinalini Mukherjee at The Met Breuer, Betye Saar at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, or the group exhibition of textile artists, "Narrative Threads," at the Moody Center for the Arts.

Alejandro is currently the Director of Exhibition Design at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and also a founding partner of *world*, an architecture and graphic design studio focusing on exhibitions and publications. He previously worked as Senior Exhibition Designer for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he designed several major exhibitions and contributed to the redesign of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas.

Alejandro holds a Masters of Architecture from Columbia University, where he also taught courses on architectural design and representation. He was born in Caracas, Venezuela.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Lawrie Shabibi was founded in 2010 and opened its doors in early 2011 in Alserkal Avenue, located within the light industrial warehouse district of Al Quoz in Dubai. Following the relocation of several renowned galleries, this quickly became the hub of contemporary art in the region, and we have been a forerunner in the development of this contemporary art scene. The gallery's initial focus was on the practices of emerging contemporary artists from the Middle East and North Africa (the "Global South"), and in the last five years we introduced artists from other regions and generations, yet with the same focus on the "underrepresented". A major focus remains the support of artists from the diaspora who create work in all media to explore issues such as identity, memory, history and socio-political issues specific to the diasporic experience.

Another part of the programme is to organise art historical exhibitions, working with an older generation of artists. Of note are the historic shows presented for the Moroccan pioneer Mohamed Melehi (1936-2020) and most recently Iraqi/French Mehdi Moutashar (b.1943) and Mona Saudi (1945-2022) – at fairs that include Frieze Masters in London, Abu Dhabi Art and Artissima in Turin, showing works from the 1950s – 1980s. We also work closely with museums and have successfully placed works with The Guggenheim, Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, The British Museum, Dallas Museum of Art, LACMA and the Cincinnati Art Museum. By integrating older (and less discovered) artists with younger artists we create a context and depth to the programme which we consider important when working with underrepresented regions.

For more information on Lawrie Shabibi please visit: www.lawrieshabibi.com

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