

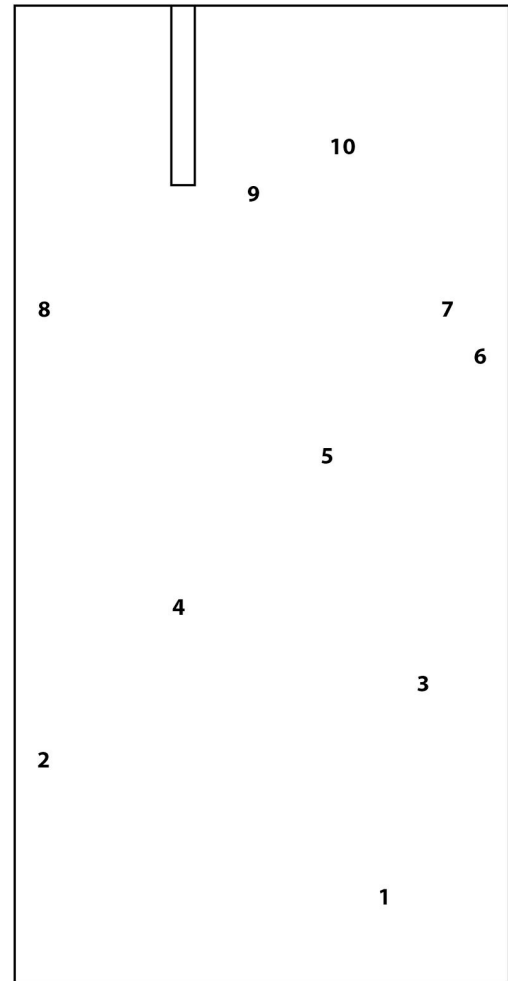


## Vow

Doaa Badran | Rahmi Hamzi | Suma Kaedan | Yara Qassem Mahajena

03.01.2019– 28.02.2019

1. Rahmi Hamzi, Misbaha #1  
2018, mixed media, variable sizes
2. Suma Kaedan, Untitled  
2018, epoxy dough, variable sizes
3. Suma Kaedan, Holy Thorns  
2018, mixed media, 80x190x24cm
4. Doaa Badran, Barren  
2018, air drying Clay, 95x70cm
5. Suma Kaedan, Limbo  
2018, wood, 2018, 130x240cm
6. Rahmi Hamzi, Misbaha #2  
2018, mixed media, variable sizes
7. Suma Kaedan, Festivity Cookies  
2018, mixed media, various sizes
8. Doaa Badran, Umbilical Cord  
2018, steel wool, various dimensions
9. Rahmi Hamzi, Crow Woman  
2018, mixed media, variable sizes
10. Doaa Badran, Vicious Circle  
2018, assemblage, 100x60x60cm





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The female goddess held essential roles in numerous pre-monotheistic creeds practiced in the Near East. Goddesses such as Innana, Asherah, Astarte, Anat, Ishtar, Sekhmet, Demeter and Isis, not only held roles commensurate to their male counterparts, but had qualities and characteristics which are nowadays stigmatized as masculine. Of course, ancient goddesses also maintained and exalted unique feminine features. Thus traits associated to them such as ambition, intellect, power, victory and wisdom, were accompanied by characteristics of creation, fertility and motherhood. Innana was at once the goddess of love, procreation, sensuality, fertility and war, Asherah was associated in different cultures with lions as well as trees (power as well as fertility), Anat was a goddess of war but occasionally referred to as a wet-nurse to human heroes, Isis was both a mother and wife, but afforded magical capacities which rendered her the most powerful deity in the Egyptian pantheon. Badran, Hamzi and Kaedan formulate their work around the assorted cultures female goddesses arose, touching upon legendary narratives and ritual practices related to the expression of godly sexuality, articulated via notions such as fertility and childbirth.

This exhibition bridges the ancient and contemporary features, suggesting continuity in the convergence of a wide-range of attributes pertaining to womanhood. Gender roles of power and creation are questioned and problematized via the displacement of natural and divine symbolism. Thus, via the synthesis of religious and sexual motifs embodied in the botanical references at the core of Rahmi Hamzi's work, bodily and domestic signification in Doaa Badran's creations, and through Suma Kaedan's associations to nature; complex links between practice and faith, religion and myth, womanhood and domesticity are examined. Ancient faiths and rituals, representations and interpretation of goddesses act as catalysts to reflect on women's present-day features, societal and religious roles, their symbolic and tangible power.

Doaa Badran inquires about the position of women from a mundane perspective; her environment and personal experience function as the axis to her work. Badran's creations are inherently connected to womanhood and domesticity, her works raising questions rather than providing definitive answers. What is the relation between religion and blind faith? How do myth and religion interact, and how do myths penetrate religious tradition and practice? How does the relationship between a woman and her offspring form? Why is it women feel the urge to create, and ultimately to bear children? To deal with these concerns, Badran proposes three objects, each one echoing questions of maternity via the combination of readymade and raw material. Steel wool exemplifying an umbilical cord and a wooden table with a single



white bean bifurcated by a metal fork, are cryptic allegorical signs, which Badran uses to raise associations with fertility. The statue of a deformed female figure further emphasizes these associations.

Rahmi Hamzi's works reflect symbols of pre-Islamic and contemporary Muslim tradition. The reproduction of a *misbaha*<sup>1</sup>— formed by ninety-nine breasts in the place of the conventional beads, with a white lily amid them—hangs on the wall. Another large scale *misbaha*, formed by fifty beads in the shape of female genitalia is laid on the floor of the gallery. By merging sexual and religious symbolism, one is left to reflect on the taboos of religion, such as the sexualization of gender, and reminded of the practical use of the object as an instrument of religion rather than a substantially holy item. Indeed, while *misbaha*'s are used as a means to keep count of the names of God (a form of *dhikr*<sup>2</sup>), they easily adapt to pleasant fiddling. Also, a black statue of a crow-woman, inspired by the Greek myth of Coronis, is placed on a Qu'ran reading stand (*rihal*).<sup>3</sup> The combination of a statue exemplifying a legendary tale fraught with sexual drive and revenge, and the ready-made object used for prayer books during recitation, generates new associations. Objects and narratives thus combined are reinvented, and contrasting motifs are consolidated and reconciled.

Mary thistle is a plant which owes its name to legend: as Mary was breastfeeding Jesus, some of her milk dropped on the thistle at her feet, forming the white mottling on the plant's leaves. With its notable reference to the Virgin Mary<sup>4</sup> this plant is associated with qualities of resilience, holiness and motherhood, sexuality and purity. These antithetical symbolisms are materialized by Kaedan, who presents us with a mattress and a door carpeted with thistle. The religious association dissipates as it is combined with domestic objects, as much as these objects become ascribed with doctrinal signification. Door and mattress embody an intimacy which cannot be attained, if not via the discomfort of a thorny contact. Kaedan also presents numerous cookies in the shape of a braided *ouroboros*,<sup>5</sup> an allusion to the triangle-shaped cakes offered to the goddess Ishtar in ancient Near Eastern rituals of fertility. Using a

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<sup>1</sup> *Misbaha*, beads held together with a string, used by Muslims to keep count for ritual purpose; the term can also be used to refer to the Christian rosary.

<sup>2</sup> *Dhikr* (literally “reminding oneself” or “mention” in Arabic) is a devotional act, consisting in the repetition of the names of god.

<sup>3</sup> Wooden book rests for recitation are commonly used by Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus.

<sup>4</sup> Mary's relevance as the mother of Jesus and her qualities of purity are significant in numerous religious traditions. Also, Mary is the only woman mentioned in the Quran several times, and with a chapter in her name (Suryat Maryam)

<sup>5</sup> The *ouroboros* (“tail-devourer” in Greek) is an ancient symbol: a snake eating its own tail, it has appeared in numerous cults as a symbol of cyclical time, eternity, divinity and earthliness.



family recipe, the contemporary domestic environment and symbols of ancient rituals are merged, the ouroboros cookies are both revitalized and reappropriated.

On opening night, a thought-provoking performance by Yaara Qassem Mahajena will awaken supernatural forces. The performance “Offering to the Gods” is inspired by ancient magical spells. Mahajena relocates and revisits these spells, also adding an imagined ceremonial act. A group of women cook a tribute to the god of fertility, pleading for fruitfulness and dynastic endurance, loudly reciting prayers as they use a pestle and mortar to shred leaves and salt, which are then spread on the ground and cooked in a pot as an offering. A humming sound and the recital of an ancient prayer pronounced prior to sexual intercourse is preceded by the production of a magical drawing on a wall, a sigil whose energy will symbolically linger in the gallery’s environment for the duration of the exhibition.

“Vow” offers a multilayered representation of the goddess, containing characteristics of intellectual and physical female power. Defying a monolithic conception of femininity, and devising a temporal and conceptual link between ancient goddesses and contemporary notions on gender, Badran, Hamzi and Kaedan, offer a sculptural visual archive, prompting us to reconsider deep-seated stereotypes. Religious and domestic objects are conferred new meaning, emptied of their purpose and utility, they are bestowed a new essence, materiality, title, position and association. The object’s newfound meaning allows the artists to convey aspects of female authority, the ritual and domestic arena, the natural and the supernatural. These objects become all-encompassing, containing in themselves opposites: creation and destruction, female *and male*. The Goddess thus represented, embodies the solution to contrasts, bringing to light a new universal balance.

–Livia Tagliacozzo, January 2019

*Do not be ignorant of me anywhere or any time. Be  
on your guard!  
Do not be ignorant of me.  
For I am the first and the last.  
I am the honored one and the scorned one.  
I am the whore and the holy one.  
I am the wife and the virgin.  
I am the mother and the daughter.  
I am the members of my mother.  
I am the barren one  
and many are her sons.  
I am she whose wedding is great,  
and I have not taken a husband.*

*I am the midwife and she who does not bear.  
I am the solace of my labor pains.  
I am the bride and the bridegroom,  
and it is my husband who begot me.  
I am the mother of my father  
and the sister of my husband  
and he is my offspring. [...]  
Give heed then, you hearers  
and you also, the angels and those who have been  
sent,  
and you spirits who have arisen from the dead.  
For I am the one who alone exists,  
and I have no one who will judge me...*

– *The Thunder, Perfect Mind*, Part of the Nag Hammadi Library, a collection of ancient codices discovered in Upper Egypt in 1945. [Translation to English by George W. MacRae]



**Doaa Badran** (b.1993, Kabul–Israel) lives and works in Haifa. She is a multidisciplinary artist, mainly engaged in sculpture and drawing. Her sculptures are produced by combining traditional materials such as plaster, metal, wood and clay, combined with mundane ready-made objects. She is currently a Wadi artist-in-residence at the Umm al-Fahem Gallery. Badran has received the Final Project High Achievement Award from the Department of Creative Arts at Haifa University. Badran held a solo exhibition at the library of Younes and Soraya Nazarian - University of Haifa, and participated in a group show at the Umm al-Fahem Art Gallery.

**Rahmi Hamzi** (b.1995, Bir al-Maksur) lives and works in Bir al-Maksur. She is a multidisciplinary artist, mainly engaged in oil painting and sculpture. Her latest paintings are born from her examination, deconstruction and reconstruction of botanical shapes, creating associations to female sexual organs. In addition Hamzi produces sculptural works, related to ritual objects and religious texts– which are physically and conceptually manipulated by the artist to evoke new signification. Hamzi has participated in a number of group exhibitions in Israel, including at the Umm al-Fahem Art Gallery.

**Suma Kaedan** (b.1993, Baka al-Gharbiyeh) lives and works in Haifa. She is a multidisciplinary artist, engaged in sculpture, art and expressive painting. Kaedan is the recipient of the High Achievement Award of Haifa University (2017) and the America-Israel Cultural Foundation Award (2017). In 2018 Kaedan participated in the Residence Program Nomad Curator in Cairo, Egypt and is currently a Wadi artist-in-residence at the Umm al-Fahem Art Gallery. Kaedan has participated in numerous exhibitions both in Israel and abroad, including at Beit HaGefen and Gate 3 Gallery in Haifa, and the Umm al-Fahem Art Gallery. She also participated in the Third International Film Festival in Tel Aviv.

**Yara Qassem Mahajena** (b.1993, Umm al-Fahm) lives and works in Haifa. She is a multidisciplinary artist producing video, photography, recordings, installations and performance works. She is a recipient of the (2017) America-Israel Cultural Foundation Award and of the Prize for A Young Artist at the Hecht Museum (2015). She has participated in numerous exhibitions in Israel, including at the Yanco Dada Museum in Ein Hod. In the past few years she has focused mainly on performance art, and was awarded a prize for her work "Kathiban Mahila" (trans. "Until Mountains Turn to Sand").

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