



Gauze

Hazem Harb Solo

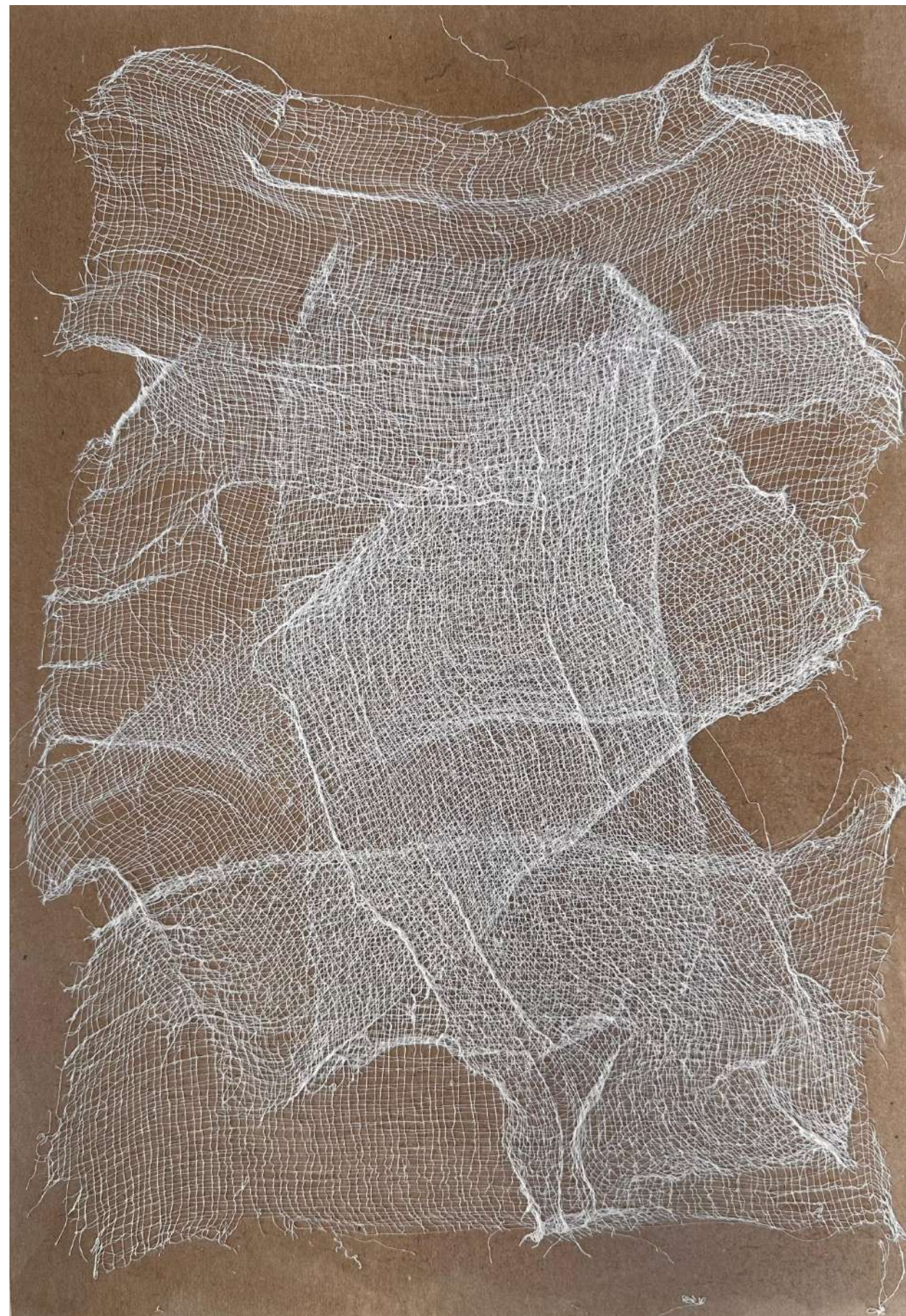
Curated by Munira Al Sayegh

22 January - 15 February 2024

Tabari Artspace, DIFC

Tabari Artspace is delighted to announce the solo exhibition of Palestinian visual artist Hazem Harb entitled Gauze. The exhibition curated by Munira Al Sayegh takes place as part of the gallery's programming dedicated to the milestone of its 20th anniversary as a gallery pioneering MENA art in the UAE.

The solo presentation offers insight into the multifaceted significance of the material "gauze" within Palestinian collective histories, particularly in the context of the corporeal. The exhibition invites viewers to explore the profound connections between material, the body, the context and the artist's personal journey as a Gazan native in exile.



The word "gauze" holds a powerful resonance with collective histories, inseparable from the corporeal experience. A material historically used in ancient and modern medicine for bodily envelopment, gauze signals the initiation of the act of repair. Serving as a visual announcement, it bears witness to injuries hidden from view. Known as "شاش" (shash) in Arabic, the English name "Gauze" finds its etymological roots in the city of Gaza, Palestine, where the material has been historically crafted and from where Harb originates.

Harb's early connection with the material dates back to his childhood in Gaza in 2004, where he employed gauze as an artistic medium, akin to canvas. Not originally intended for artistic purposes, gauze transformed into a creative outlet and an instrument of resistance for Harb amid the suffering of his people that characterised his formative years.

Throughout Harb's artistic career, gauze has emerged as a recurrent artistic resource. He utilised it for *Burned Bodies*, a video installation created during his art studies at Città dell'Altra Economia Roma, in Italy in 2008.

Decades later, Harb revisits gauze as a medium to excavate the untold stories from his city, shedding light on the genocide of his people. Informed by the global dissemination of real-time imagery on social media in 2023, this new body of work reexamines the original site and material, offering a fresh perspective. Harb reflects on his early works with gauze, exploring the transformative power of reflection and imagination in charting an emancipatory future.

The exhibition unfolds across two distinct spaces, each evoking a unique atmosphere. Along the back wall of the main room, a large-scale print featuring the Great Omari Mosque photograph serves as a poignant backdrop for Harb's art. Captured during his last visit to Gaza this summer, this photograph symbolises a final encounter with his city's oldest mosque before its tragic destruction in an Israeli strike.

Within this main room, a curated collection features both newly produced and retrospective works by Harb, spanning back to 1999. Notable additions include large-scale gestural charcoal sketches from the artist's 2023 series, *Dystopia Is Not A Noun*, a visceral response to the post-October 7th atrocities in Gaza. The circular acrylic collages, *Watermelon I and II* (2024), also reveal a new direction for Harb who remediated an image of a watermelon from a 1917 fresco found on a home in Nazareth. This recent work reflects orientalist codes, placing the watermelon as a powerful symbol of Palestine at the fore. *The Last Escape* (2024), a rectangular acrylic collage, overlays a photograph from Harb's family visit to Gaza with Arabic text reading: "The Last Escape." The piece captures a moment of serenity along the childhood coastline, a final escape into possibilities before departure.

In the back room, a contrasting, almost claustrophobic ambiance prevails. Framed installations focus on gauze, a material taking centre stage in Harb's compositions. These ethereal visions transcend the conventional and social media imagery since October 7th, offering a commentary on the wrapping of Palestinian children's corpses in Gaza. In this context, gauze becomes a precursor to the *kafan*, a white cloth that traditionally shrouds bodies before burial. Through this poignant work Harb transforms the medium into his message, bringing the distant into an intimate space, and compelling his audience to confront the harsh realities faced by Palestinians.



Significantly, alongside recent works, Harb introduces works from his archive into the curatorial narrative. During the summer, while at home, Harb expressed an interest in retrieving his archives from the family home, where they had been preserved for decades. Transporting these works back to the UAE, Harb faced the poignant reality that his childhood home, once the host of his archival works, was entirely destroyed months later. Consequently, he aptly labels these pieces the 'Saved' works.

This collection displayed in the main room, comprises expressive paintings and mixed-media compositions created by Harb between 1999 and 2003 while he lived in Gaza. These artworks offer a chronicle of the everyday realities he encountered – the architecture, refugee camps, family, marketplaces, and people that defined his existence there. The profound impact of erasure on the depicted scenes lends these works new significance, and their retrieval and current exhibition by the artist within this context imbue them with a heightened meaning. The exhibition seamlessly bridges the past and present, acting as a preserver of a vibrant history while defiantly standing against destruction.

-ENDS-

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Hazem Harb

B.1980

Visual artist Hazem Harb's trajectory, spanning several decades, maintains an unwavering dialogue with his symbolically charged homeland.

Moving from Gaza to Rome to receive his MFA at The European Institute of Design, and then on to the UAE, Harb has learnt to navigate life as a liminal. Knowing that his place of origin can never be just a 'land', the artist unleashes an ever-evolving repertoire of artistic techniques to negotiate a space which has been carved up and re-drawn many times. His art is at once subsumed in deep locality, fuelled by personal insight, and entangled in conversations that cannot be easily separated from the global arena. His practice is intended more as visual excavation than romanticisation of the Other, and through it, we can explore the paradoxical and pressured relations between people and places. Steering away from nostalgia and the fetishisation of displacement, he draws from academia, architecture, as well as European art traditions, to negotiate an axis of complex social and cultural relations; built and natural environments, longing and belonging.

Much like the artists of the early twentieth century who, through the deployment of collage, healed from the trauma of the first world war by binding together everyday and artistic experiences; Harb succeeds in materialising complex and unfamiliar terrain. Operating as a researcher, by collecting and synthesising archives of rarified ephemera including photographs, negatives and maps, Harb mediates his materials in a manner which dismantles them from a static space. Through a process of collage, layered down with geometric precision, he stitches visual artefacts together and forms fresh constructions that invite unheard discourses and a historical rethinking.



Munira Al Sayegh

Munira Al Sayegh is an independent curator and cultural instigator based in Abu Dhabi, UAE. She is the founder of Dirwaza Curatorial Lab, a UAE based curatorial incubator and cultural advisory. She is a published author and prominent public voice in the region, highlighting the importance of grassroots initiatives, language and narrative reclamation with regards to the Gulf. Her contributions can be traced back to NYU Abu Dhabi's FIND project (2012), and she currently sits on the advisory board for the university's art gallery. As a part of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi team she collaboratively curated Guggenheim Abu Dhabi's *The Creative Act: Performance, Process, Presence* (2017); her curatorial solo debut was *Bayn: The In-Between* (2017), the third edition of UAE Unlimited. Later, she curated the Talks Program in Abu Dhabi Art. In parallel, since 2014 she has joined and pioneered curatorial initiatives across Art Dubai, where she curated the Residents section (2019) and started the Now series, looking at non-government-funded creative platforms in the region. In 2020, she premiered *The Cup and The Saucer*, commissioned by 421 (Sheikha Salama bint Hamdan Foundation). In 2021 Al Sayegh debuted her first exhibition outside of the region *Between the Sky and Earth*, organized and hosted by the Middle East Institute in partnership with the NYUAD gallery. Since the launch of Dirwaza Curatorial Lab, Al Sayegh has led on the curation of various exhibitions including Leadership Pavilion Project (Expo2020, Dubai, 2020), *Zemanna* (Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, 2022), *Hair Mapping Body; Body Mapping Land* (ICD Brookfield, Dubai, 2021), *In Process | In Progress* (421, Abu Dhabi, 2022), *While the Coffee Grounds Settle* (Fathom Gallery, Washington D.C., 2022) and *Evaporating Suns* (KBH.G, Basel, 2023). Al Sayegh is also part of the Dubai Collection's Steering and Curatorial Committee.

ABOUT TABARI ARTSPACE

In 2003, at a time when the UAE art scene was still nascent, Tabari Artspace gallery was founded by Maliha Tabari in Dubai. With a twofold aim of preserving histories of craft emerging from the MENA region, while elevating young artists in the Gulf on a global stage, Tabari Artspace's forward-looking vision situates itself in the contemporary art world's dynamic moment. Tabari, who was trained as an artist herself, has re-envisioned the gallery since 2017 to bridge the storied past with an ever-changing present, with a program that juxtaposes the breadth of Arab heritage with the promise emerging artists hold for the future.

The foundations for this international outlook began with the realization that artists from the Arab region were noticeably absent in the West. Tabari's approach was to represent artists who were creating unique visual vocabularies in their medium and particular contexts. In Egypt, this included the late Adam Henein in sculpture and Omar El-Nagdi in abstract expressionism. In Lebanon, she worked with Hussein Madi before he became hailed for his talent of melding Cubism with Islamic abstraction. Tabari has also launched the careers of artists such as Saudi Arabian artist Ahmed Mater, Iranian artist Farhad Moshiri, Syrian artist Louay Kayyali, and Egyptian artists Mohamed Abla and Adel Siwi, before they became influential. By bridging mid-career artists with emerging talent, Tabari Artspace has succeeded in building an international collector base interested in the region's evolving artistic production across generations.

Moving fluidly between a platform for exhibition-making and artist mentorship, Tabari Artspace has taken an in-depth focus on GCC-specific, female-centered narratives, increasingly working with Kuwaiti, Emirati and Saudi artists such as Alymamah Rashed, Maitha Abdalla, Maha Aljarallah and Lulwah Al Homoud. Tabari Artspace's communal spirit extends to its all-women team, which nurtures and elevates artists who are overlooked at home, placing them in a broader historical context.

Now in its second decade of operation, the artists shown at Tabari Artspace offer a living visual archive of social change, contested borders and aesthetic movements in the region at large. Grounded in the cosmopolitan city of Dubai with a branch in Cromwell Place in London since 2015, the gallery lends visibility to its artists through international shows and residencies, as well as creative collaborations with other spaces. In line with its research-driven approach of enabling artists to grow, Tabari Artspace also functions as an incubator. It has recently partnered with the revamped boutique hotel La Serena in Forte Dei Marmi, launching an artist residency that serves as part-creative sanctuary, part-maker's studio. Located near neighboring marble and stone foundries, this art space offers sites of material exploration that resonate with the gallery's emphasis on contemporary craft.

Constantly embracing new discourses and amplifying the voices of women and youth, Tabari Artspace is committed to documenting and showcasing art practices in MENA, positioning them on a par with those on the international art scene. Its roster of artists have been exhibited in institutions and biennials including but not limited to: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Institut du Monde Arabe, Sharjah Art Museum, Venice Biennale, Sharjah Biennial, São Paulo Biennial, and are part of collections such as the Barjeel Art Foundation, British Museum, Dalloul Art Foundation, The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Lyon Biennale, The Khalid Shoman Collection, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art and Yale University Art Gallery.

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