

Body, Loss, Memory and Healing: Three Emerging Emirati Women Artists

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ABSTRACT

The UAE is rapidly transforming into a global cultural hub with the establishment of prominent institutions such as the Sheikh Zayed National Museum, the Louvre, and the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi. Sharjah hosts the Exposure International Photo Festival and an art biennale, with a historic district featuring numerous museums and galleries. Dubai is home to Art Dubai, a leading international art fair in the Middle East, and recently hosted the World Expo and COP28. These developments not only highlight the UAE as a dynamic business hub driven by the petroleum and energy sectors but also position it as an attractive destination for arts and culture. Such rapid changes prompt artists to contemplate issues beyond the visible in the progressing world around them. This paper argues that there is a process of internalization of thoughts and feelings occurring within young artists of the region and transfiguration to art due to such built environment alternation within a bourgeoning social and cultural landscape. More specifically, it elucidates the trajectory of the UAE's artistic development by analysing recent art projects by Aysha Al Dhaheri, Mariam Al Mansoori, and Sara Alqardaei. The objective is to analyse the conceptual and contextual frameworks and approaches employed by these emerging artists as they navigate 'intangible places,' tackling concepts of the body, loss, memory, and healing within the evolving social and cultural landscape of the region.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The status of the UAE as an international cultural centre has been evolving rapidly. Saadiyat Cultural District in Abu Dhabi has become a cornerstone of the expanded art and culture scene after the realisation of the Sheikh Zayed National Museum, the Louvre Abu Dhabi and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. The Manarat Al Saadiyat and the UAE Pavilion currently showcase a wide-ranging series of exhibitions, special events, art fairs (such as the world-renowned Abu Dhabi Art Fair), public programs and educational initiatives. In Dubai, there are more than 200 local and international galleries. Dubai is home to Art Dubai, a leading international art fair in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, and the current World Expo and COP28 host. Sharjah hosts Exposure Sharjah, an art biennale in a historic district with several museums and galleries adding to the burgeoning art scene. These facts make the UAE not just a booming, business-orientated place fuelled by the growth of petrol and energy industries, but also a very attractive destination for the arts and cultural education. There are several art colleges in the region, and there is a growing demand across disciplines for graduates with an arts background, both practical and analytical.

In what follows, the article seeks to illustrate what concept and context formations and practices young artists and recent graduates in the UAE use through artworks to navigate themselves through growing up, understanding body, mind and self, healing and memory. What are their artistic drivers, especially when the meaning of loss, place, and identity has shifted in our current times due to new remote technologies? Rapid change in one's surroundings leads artists to consider issues beyond



the visible world. This paper argues that a process of internalisation of thoughts and feelings is occurring within young artists of the region, leading to their transformation into art due to the evolving built environment within a burgeoning social and cultural landscape. More specifically, it elucidates the trajectory of the UAE's artistic development by analysing the creations of Aysha Al Dhaheri, Mariam Al Mansoori, and Sara Alqardaeai. The objective is to analyse the conceptual and contextual frameworks and approaches and their artworks *Ishrah*, *Mersal* and *Parasomnia* (Zayed University, 2024) as they navigate 'intangible', 'esoteric places' within the evolving landscape of the region and practice within art, social and cultural studies, psychology and neuroscience.

Spanning various mediums from painting to photography, mixed media, and installation, these emerging artists draw inspiration from contemporary themes such as the body and mind, trauma, memory and healing. Aysha Al Dhaheri's work reflects the intersection of stuttering as a physiological condition, the human body and mind, trauma, blending personal spirituality and the transformative power of visuals and sound. Mariam Al Mansoori focuses on memory, family institutions, ritualistic art, and healing from the loss of loved ones. Executed through a mixed media installation, featuring handmade letters, photos, and symbolic representations of migratory birds, she conveys a perpetual sense of subtle mourning or refusal to forget. Sara Alqardaeai's artwork investigates parasomnia, exploring its ties to mental health and how both she and others experience it. Utilising an expanded and large-scale painting approach, her work highlights the interplay between spatial awareness, the subconscious mind, and parasomnia, expressing the complexities of human existence in a swiftly evolving society (Schuman, 2012).

The analysis includes a detailed exploration of their methodologies, the symbolic meanings embedded in their artworks, and how they address the intangible aspects of their environment and personal experience. This study not only highlights the unique contributions of these artists to the UAE's intangible landscape but also situates their work within the broader context of contemporary art practices in the region, demonstrating that the artistic evolution in the UAE is not merely a reflection of physical changes but also a profound commentary on the internal transformations experienced by its inhabitants. Through their art, Al Dhaheri, Al Mansoori, and Alqardaeai shed light on how young artists in the region internalise their thoughts and emotions and express them through their artworks. Through their art, Al Dhaheri, Al Mansoori, and Alqardaeai provide valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between the internalisation of thoughts and feelings among young artists in the region and their transformation into art. Their work offers a nuanced perspective on the ongoing dialogue between the past and the future in the UAE's social and cultural narrative. The paper invites readers to explore the profound impact of visual arts in provoking thought, evoking emotion, and inspiring change in the region, as alongside progress, there is also a search for the self and human condition. A trope to humanist thought, artistic, social and psychological search for what is through and felt.

2. "ISHRAH" BY AYSHA AL DHAHERI

2.1. Description, Questions, Methods, and Aims

Stuttering "is a speech disorder characterized by repetition of sounds, syllables, or words; prolongation of sounds; and interruptions in speech known as blocks" (NIDCD, n.d.). Aysha Al Dhaheri's project explores the intersection of stuttering, the human body, personal spirituality, and the transformative power of visuals and sound. The installation aims to unravel the symbolic significance of material, light, and stuttering echoes within the intricate network of the body and human experience (Fig. 1).

The project uniquely blends sound, scripture, and visual art to explore the therapeutic impact of Surah Taha verses 25–35, chosen for their messages of peace. Integrating her personal experience of overcoming speech impediments with a quest for spiritual clarity, the artist develops a series of 10

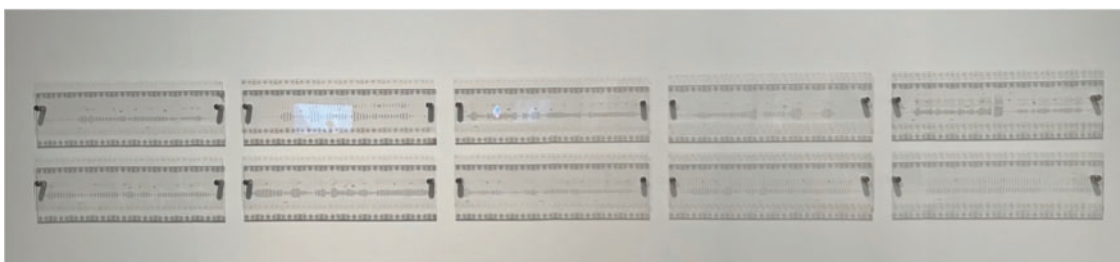


Fig. 1. Aysha Al Dhaheri, *Ishrah*, 2024, 10 acrylic panels (18 × 64 cm each). Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

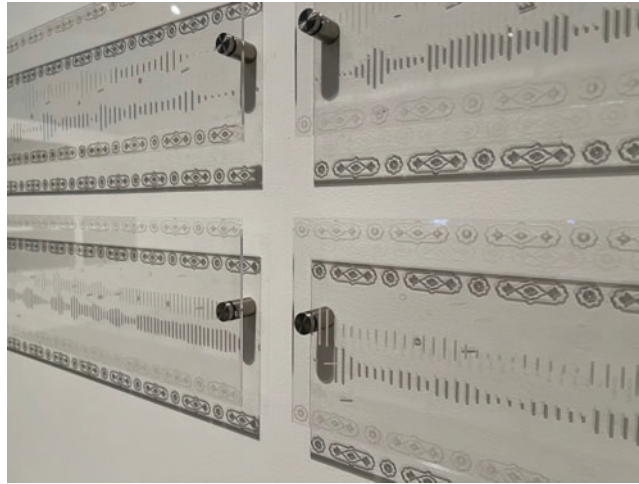


Fig. 2. Aysha Al Dhaheri, Detail from “Ishrah,” 2024, 10 acrylic panels (18 × 64 cm each). Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

immersive artworks. Each piece features sound waves derived from her recitations of these verses, visually depicted through intricate acrylic engravings (Fig. 2). Audio playbacks of the recitations enhance viewer engagement, crafting a compelling narrative about the transformative power of spirituality in overcoming obstacles and fostering personal growth.

The practice is driven by two main questions: How do individual experiences of stuttering intersect with artistic elements like acrylic material, light, and stuttering echoes? And what are the significant tensions and connections within this interplay? The project explores how stuttering is represented and communicated through personal narratives, artistic expression, and societal perceptions. Furthermore, it examines how integrating acrylic material, text transfer, light, and stuttering echoes in a sound and art installation enhances our understanding of the lived experience of stuttering. This inquiry focuses on the artistic mediums’ potential to convey the emotional and cognitive dimensions of stuttering, providing a unique perspective on this complex condition.

The project utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating artistic analysis, neuroscientific inquiry, and cultural examination to explore the intricate interplay between stuttering, the body, sound, and art installations comprehensively. This methodology facilitates a holistic understanding of the topic, bridging the gap between the subjective experiences of individuals grappling with stuttering and broader cultural, artistic, and scientific contexts.

The choice of mixed-methods research acknowledges the complexity of stuttering, recognizing it as more than just a physiological condition but as a phenomenon deeply embedded in cultural, social, and personal dimensions. By incorporating comparative research analysis, the project harnesses the expressive power of art installations to convey the emotional and cognitive aspects of stuttering, complementing traditional research methods.

The project holds a personal dimension for the artist. Her exploration of stuttering through art installations stems from a deep personal connection to the topic, which holds significant meaning in her life and environment. The transformative nature of art installations provides Aysha with a unique platform for expression and exploration, allowing her to engage with the subject matter in a deeply personal and meaningful way.

On a societal level, Aysha’s project addresses stigmatization and misunderstandings associated with stuttering. By intertwining artistic expression, neuroscientific inquiry, and cultural examination, the research aims to challenge preconceived notions and promote empathy and understanding. The use of acrylic material, text transformed into sound waves, light, and stuttering echoes within the art installation symbolizes the multifaceted experience of those who stutter, offering a tangible and experiential perspective that transcends clinical or academic discourse.

The artist’s motivation in choosing to visually translate this topic lies in her desire to contribute to the ongoing societal dialogue on body, mind, and trauma and on the impact of stuttering on human perception, emotion, and cultural exchange. By employing mixed media practices and synthesizing artistic analysis, neuroscientific inquiry, and cultural examination, Aysha’s *Ishrah* aims to illuminate the intricate connections between stuttering and the expressive power of art. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the profound implications of stuttering on the human experience.

2.2. Materials, Processes, Installation Practices

Acrylic sheets, chosen for their durability and visual clarity, serve as the primary medium for the artist. They provide a transparent and versatile surface ideal for engraving visual representations of

sound waves. High-quality audio recording equipment is used to capture the artist's recitations of selected verses from Surah Taha. The recordings are conducted in a controlled environment to ensure clarity.

For sound visualization, the artist utilizes Audacity software coupled with Adobe Illustrator to convert the recordings into visual sound waves. A high-precision laser engraver is employed to etch these visual representations precisely onto the acrylic sheets, preserving the intricate patterns of each verse and the detailed reproduction of the sound waves. Compact audio systems integrated into the installation space offer high-quality playback of the recitations. The sound installation component is a poignant exploration of the intersection between the human body, stuttering, trauma, personal spirituality, and the transformative power of visuals and sound. Focused on reciting verses from *Surah Taha* of the *Quran* the installation captures the essence of a daily ritual that serves as both solace and a means of addressing the challenges of stuttering. These verses express a heartfelt plea for divine assistance in overcoming speech impediments, resonating universally with those facing similar struggles.

Central to the installation is the translation of the recorded sound waves of Quranic recitation into visually striking representations on transparent acrylic sheets. Intricately weaving the sound waves with white markings, the visual aesthetic mirrors the purity and beauty inherent in the act of stuttering. The interplay of transparency and white serves as a metaphor for the nuanced experience of navigating speech impediments—a journey marked by both struggles and moments of clarity.

To enrich the immersive experience of the installation, a QR code link to the sound is integrated, allowing visitors to engage with the auditory component. By enveloping participants in the recitation accompanied by visual representations of sound waves, the installation becomes a multisensory experience. This intentional fusion of listening, seeing, and feeling aims to cultivate empathy and foster a deeper understanding of the emotional weight and resilience associated with stuttering. Through this unique approach, the installation encourages collective reflection on the shared human experience of seeking strength, clarity, and connection in the face of personal challenges. Thus, exploring the interplay between the human body, stuttering, personal spirituality, and the transformative power of art installation encompasses a broader theme that intersects with cultural, psychological, and personal dimensions. Stuttering, as a physiological condition, is not merely an individual challenge but also a social and cultural phenomenon. The research delves into the societal dialogue surrounding stuttering, contributing to our understanding of its impact on human perception, emotion, and cultural exchange.

Each acrylic piece is showcased in a well-lit display area, complemented by strategically positioned audio playback devices for viewers to listen to the recitation alongside the artwork. The artist conducted experiments with various engraving depths and line densities to achieve the optimal representation of sound waves on acrylic sheets. She determined that the ideal spatial arrangement ensures an uninterrupted and immersive experience for viewers. The entire series is arranged chronologically, guiding viewers through an experience that mirrors the unfolding of the verses themselves.

2.3. Context of Research and Practice

Aysha's work draws heavily from both literature and practice, particularly in the realms of art therapy and speech and language pathology (Fig. 3). The therapeutic use of visualizations to improve communication profoundly influences her work. Additionally, the longstanding tradition of Islamic art, especially its calligraphy and geometric designs, guides her aesthetic direction, transforming words into powerful visual symbols.

Aysha's interdisciplinary exploration of stuttering is underpinned by comparative scholarly research. Drawing insights from Kraft and Yairi (2011), which examines the genetic aspects of stuttering, she enriches her project's scientific perspective. This approach allows the sound component to present a comprehensive view of stuttering's origins, integrating genetic components into the artistic installation.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA, n.d.) serves as a pivotal resource, influencing Aysha's research with its thorough examination of stuttering, including origins and treatment methods. This foundation incorporates genetic and neurological factors, aligning with the project's goal to merge scientific and artistic elements effectively. Aysha also extensively researched the Stuttering Foundation (n.d.-a, n.d.-b), which provided valuable insights into the causes of stuttering, including genetic predisposition and neurological aspects. Her project uses the installation as a means to explore early intervention and treatment options, aligning with educational and awareness goals. By exploring the connection between brain function, stuttering, and art, Aysha illustrates how neurological factors contribute to speech disruptions, fostering empathy and self-acceptance.

Additionally, Aysha's practice is influenced by contemporary multimedia artists like Christian Marclay (Marclay, n.d.), Lawrence Weiner (Lisson Gallery, n.d.), Lawrence Abu Hamdan (Abu Hamdan, n.d.), Janet Cardiff (Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, n.d.), and Susan Philipsz (Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, n.d.). Christian Marclay's innovative work in sound art and visual art serves as

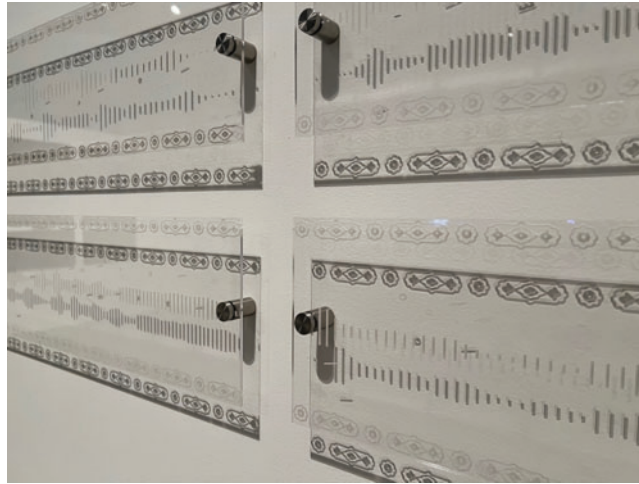


Fig. 3. Aysha Al Dhaheri, Detail from “Ishrah,” 2024, 10 acrylic panels (18 × 64 cm each). Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

inspiration for Aysha’s project, which uses sound and sensory elements to convey the complexities of stuttering and promote understanding and empathy.

Lawrence Weiner’s exploration of language and communication challenges traditional art forms, resonating with Aysha’s concise and direct approach to expressing stuttering and associated emotions through installation art. Lawrence Abu Hamdan focuses on sound’s role in uncovering sociopolitical facets, which informs Aysha’s exploration of vocal characteristics like stuttering in identity and discrimination contexts.

Christine Sun Kim’s art (Kim, n.d.), addressing sound, communication barriers, and the deaf experience, inspires Aysha’s installation by bridging gaps between hearing and deaf audiences, emphasizing the importance of embracing communication differences.

Janet Cardiff’s work, known for its immersive audio walks and installations, creates a powerful narrative through sound that transcends visual art, allowing audiences to experience space and memory in profound ways (Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller, n.d.). This resonates with Aysha’s aim to use sound and mixed media to evoke emotional and spiritual reflections, aligning with her installation’s inspiration from *Surah Taha*. Similarly, Susan Philipsz’s exploration of sound and its impact on perception and space (Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, n.d.) complements Aysha’s approach. Philipsz’s use of voice and ambient soundscapes to alter the listener’s experience of their environment parallels Aysha’s intent to highlight the nuances of vocal characteristics like stuttering, bringing attention to identity and discrimination through auditory means.

These diverse influences inform Aysha’s project, providing a robust foundation for understanding stuttering’s causes and complexities within an immersive artistic context. The synthesis of scientific information from authoritative sources enhances the project’s credibility and enriches the social and cultural impact conveyed through acrylic material, light, and stuttering echoes. From the scientific underpinnings to practical insights, the thinking-through-practice method the artist uses informs the installation, ensuring a well-rounded representation of stuttering. Through this interdisciplinary approach, *Ishrah* illuminates the intricate connections between stuttering and the expressive power of art and contributes a deeper understanding of the profound implications of stuttering on the human experience.

3. “MERSAL” BY MARIAM AL MANSOORI

Mariam Bayat’s project, Fig. 4 explores memory, family institutions, ritualistic art, and the process of healing from the loss of loved ones. Executed through a mixed media installation featuring handmade letters arranged in a circular shape and using the symbolic representation of carrier pigeons or migratory birds, the installation conveys a perpetual sense of subtle, constant mourning or refusal to forget. Maryam’s installation entails the creation of a way to communicate with her deceased parents through art. This immersive installation aims to heal and convey messages of hope, bridging the gap between the physical and spiritual worlds.

3.1. Description, Questions, Methods, and Aims

The project uniquely blends handmade letters and symbolic representations of carrier pigeons to explore the therapeutic impact of memory, family, and ritual in healing from the loss of loved

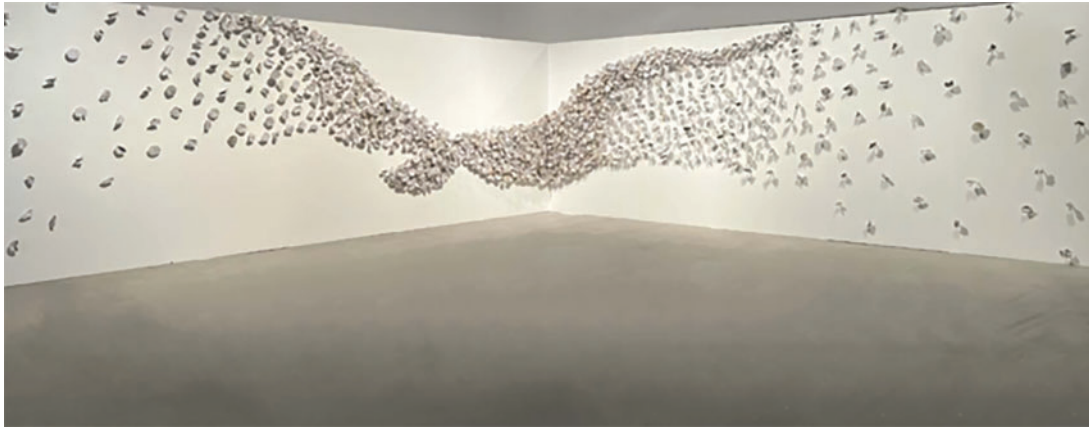


Fig. 4. Mersal by Maryam Bayat. Handmade papers, acrylic colors, and mediums, 2024. Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

ones. Integrating her personal experience of mourning and remembrance, the artist develops an immersive installation. Each piece, created over approximately 1,500 days, features intricate designs and motifs that symbolize communication with her deceased parents. The installation enhances viewer engagement with a compelling narrative about the transformative power of art in overcoming grief and fostering personal growth. Through written correspondence and symbolic imagery, the project invites contemplation on the complexities of memory, loss, and the resilience of the human spirit.

This practice is driven by two main questions: How can ritualistic installation art represent loss and the act of retaining memory, inventing a language of healing? How can the impossible communication with the deceased be represented? The project explores ways to convey feelings of loss and the refusal to forget, aiming to create an imaginative language of communication around these themes. The practice leaps into various aspects of this exploration, such as representing the seemingly impossible communication with the deceased and fostering internal dialogues that facilitate this communication.

The project utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating artistic expression, personal narratives, and cultural rituals to explore the intricate interplay between memory, loss, and healing through immersive art installations. This methodology facilitates a holistic understanding of the topic, bridging the gap between the subjective experiences of individuals grappling with grief and broader cultural, artistic, and personal contexts.

The artist redefines the role of paper, transforming it from a conventional writing medium into a canvas for expressing emotions and ideas through intricate folds and shapes. This evolution turned paper into a medium for creating an unreadable yet deeply personal form of expressing loss, trauma, body, and healing. By continuously writing without pausing, she crafted lines of both legible and illegible text that hold meanings known only to her, inviting curiosity and exploration into the depths of her thoughts and feelings within an act of shared but hopeful mourning. That said, the project holds profound personal significance for Mariam, serving as a means to express emotions that were otherwise difficult to convey. Recognizing the therapeutic potential of art, she employs a unique mixed-media approach aiming at serving as a testament to art, family rituals, remembrance, and healing.

3.2. *Materials, Processes, and Installation Practices*

The name “Mersal,” meaning “message,” is intricately tied to the materials used in the artwork. The artist experimented with an array of materials. Initially, she created handmade papers, incorporating threads from her parents’ clothes, but then settled on recycled paper collected from [Zayed University’s \(2024\)](#) designated printing rooms. The paper is reformulated and transformed into a work of art instead of being disposed of. This element is a core component of the piece, aiming at salvaging memory through objects and subtly encouraging sustainability among other artists and the community.

The work focuses on using handmade paper letters as a core element, shaping them to express grief and loss. The shape of the papers signifies constant rumination and metaphorically reflects the lack of access to deceased people, representing another world, and the belief that incorporating the birds would somehow deliver the messages.

The diverse media used in this artwork encompass recycled paper, acrylic colors, medium gel, and writing. Additionally, non-traditional tools such as kitchen utensils and cooking machines are employed to shape and texture the materials, adding unique dimensions to the piece. This eclectic mix of elements not only enhances the visual and tactile quality of the artwork but also underscores the innovative and resourceful approach in creating meaningful artistic expressions. The materials used



Fig. 5. Detail from *Mersal* by Maryam Bayat. Handmade papers, acrylic colors, and mediums, 2024. Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

were all white or of white hues, metallic, and transparent colors, making the writings appear invisible, Fig. 5.

Maryam's difficult and uncanny communication with her deceased parents still necessitates the presence of a sender and receiver and encompasses unseen and untold thoughts and feelings. The circular letters symbolize unspoken messages to her parents. The handmade paper is crafted into shapes that represent emotions experienced over a period of 1,500 days, with each day taking on a unique form. No two pieces of paper in this artwork are identical, reflecting the varied and distinct feelings encountered each day. Additional artistic media, such as polishing and coloring, are used to enhance these emotions, adding depth and value. Techniques like medium gel create a thick, glass-like layer on the surface, symbolizing the fragile and sensitive nature of these feelings, Fig. 6. Among the difficulties she faced was initially using a heavy wooden board to attach the papers, which she later replaced with a canvas board due to concerns about weight. Additionally, the circular leaves took a very long time to dry, demanding significant time and effort.

In addition, the phrase "I wish I had a letter sent to you" - ليتني مرسل جداكم, was continuously written on the papers in Arabic, reflecting an unending desire for communication. This repeated inscription signifies the persistent longing to connect and the enduring nature of these emotions.

Another of her experiments entailed writing combining two languages: Arabic and English. She used Adobe Illustrator to erase the letters that were not connected and kept the connected parts. Some of the writing formed legible phrases, and some did not.

Mariam's installation, Fig. 7 acts as a timeline, gathering from the right side to the left and gradually fading away. Each piece in Maryam's installation is displayed in a well-lit area, with leaves arranged on the walls to form the shape of a bird in flight, adding a dynamic and sensory dimension to the artwork.

The artist conducted extensive experiments with various shapes and textures of paper to achieve the optimal representation of emotions and memories. She determined that the ideal spatial arrangement

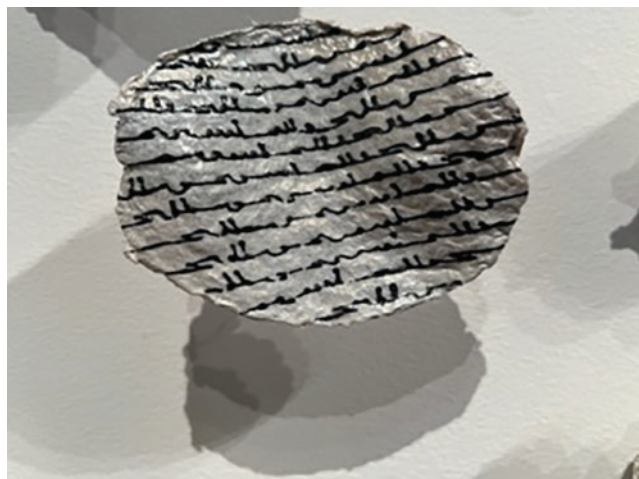


Fig. 6. Detail from *Mersal* by Maryam Bayat. Handmade papers, acrylic colors, and mediums, 2024. Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

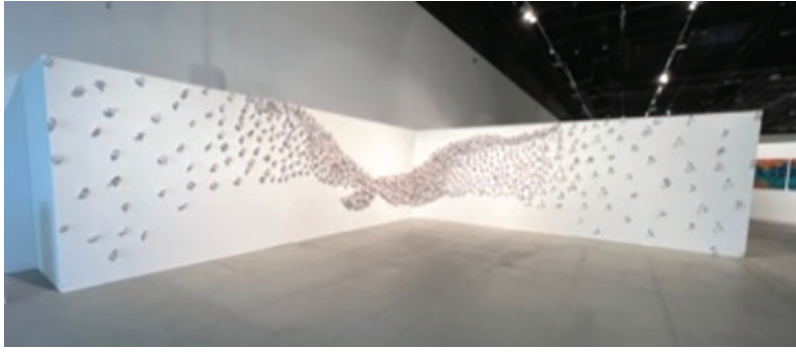


Fig. 7. Mersal by Maryam Bayat. Handmade papers, acrylic colors, and mediums, 2024. Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

ensures an immersive and uninterrupted experience for viewers. The entire installation is designed to guide viewers through an experience that mirrors the emotional journey and healing process.

This inventive approach to wall installation within the realm of ritualistic art aims to establish communication not only between the artist and her deceased parents but also between the audience, blurring boundaries between the living and the dead and between the gallery space and beyond. Conceptually informed by complexities such as impossible communication, memory lapses, and intermedia practices, the installation offers a visceral exploration of grief and remembrance. This exploration is effectively articulated through its thematic focus, artistic methodology, and conceptual framework.

The finished piece, Fig. 8, admirably upholds professional standards, standing out as the most expansive and intricate among her works and of CACE's senior show. This distinction is evident in both the variety of materials utilized and its presentation on the first wall at the entrance of the exhibition. Combining handmade paper, writing, and coloring within a single piece represents a significant accomplishment and a testament to her inventiveness. Moreover, the choice of tools for hanging the artwork demonstrates a simple but innovative approach. By employing canvas boards and thick, custom-made wooden nail support, she ensured the paper's shape remained intact when mounted and removed, preserving its final form. The installation's composition, featuring circular folded leaves resembling birds in flight, coupled with strategic lighting to cast shadows, adds depth and intrigue to her work. This visual effect captivates viewers, compelling them to pause and absorb the artwork.

Through the intricate interplay of memory, family dynamics, ritualistic art and installation. Mariam created a space where emotions are safeguarded, expressed, and shared. Her inventive approach within the realm of ritualistic art serves as a conduit for healing and is conceptually informed by the complexities of an impossible, almost uncanny communication, memory lapses, intermedia practices, and the experience of grappling with loss. The project has the potential to inspire others grappling with loss to explore avenues of healing, whether through art or alternative means. The emotive nature of the installation deeply resonates with viewers, and observers are visibly moved when the story behind the work is narrated, reflecting the profound impact of the themes explored.



Fig. 8. Detail from Mersal by Maryam Bayat. Handmade papers, acrylic colors, and mediums, 2024. Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

3.3. Context of Research and Practice

Maryam's work relies heavily on artistic practices and therapeutic approaches through art. She uses elements of writing and personal symbols to convey complex emotions that are often difficult to express. Maryam's interdisciplinary exploration of loss and memory is underpinned by comprehensive research. Drawing insights from Archetti (2023), which examines the symbolic meanings of colors in art, Maryam enriches her project's conceptual framework. Archetti's color theory reveals that white is often used to symbolise purity and spiritual connections, though it can also represent death and new beginnings, while black and white share meanings of infinity, purity, and mourning. This understanding led Maryam to incorporate white and black in her work, along with transparent colors, to symbolise the invisible aspects of communication.

The influence of Robert Ryman's views on the use of white in his paintings (Ryman, n.d.) significantly shapes Maryam's artistic approach, Fig. 9. Ryman's focus on white's ability to make elements visible and reveal nuances has left a lasting impression on Maryam, guiding her material choices and the incorporation of color in her art. Further to that, Ryman's approach, which blurs the lines between object and surface, sculpture and painting, emphasizes the role of perception and context in art. His focus on experimentation, process, and materials has significantly impacted Maryam's work. The choice of colors was pivotal, drawing from the research's exploration of color symbolism and significance. The use of metallic acrylic hues on each circular leaf aimed at imbuing the artwork's messages with added depth and value, depending on the light and angle, Fig. 10.

Further inspiration comes from Guadalupe Maravilla's "Disease Throwers" (New York Close Up, 2021), where the artist uses sound as a healing tool. Maravilla's integration of sound treatments in his art resonates with Maryam's idea of using sounds, such as birds' calls, to symbolize messages and the journey of communication, enhancing the healing aspect of her installation. This method, however,



Fig. 9. Detail from Mersal by Maryam Bayat. Handmade papers, acrylic colors, and mediums, 2024. Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

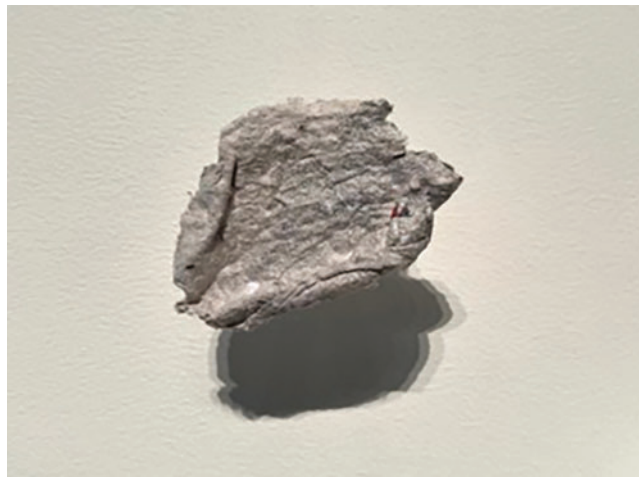


Fig. 10. Detail from Mersal by Maryam Bayat. Handmade papers, acrylic colors, and mediums, 2024. Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

is to be used at different iterations of the installation and was not used at the Manarat Al Saadiyat exhibition.

Maryam's practice is also informed by the works of Ann Hamilton ([Ann Hamilton Studio, n.d.](#)), [Dolven \(n.d.\)](#), and Xu Bing ([Bing, n.d.](#)). These artists, particularly Xu Bing, with his use of language and found materials, motivated Maryam to incorporate elements from her parents' belongings, reflecting a deeply personal and evocative artistic expression ([Bing, n.d.](#)). Hamilton's use of fabrics and movement in her installations ([Ann Hamilton Studio, n.d.](#)) parallels Maryam's thematic focus on motion, symbolizing the flight of birds carrying messages. Additionally, the integration of non-traditional materials, such as kitchen utensils and grinding machines, aligns with Timo Nasser's abstract approach ([Nasser, n.d.](#)), enriching the textural and conceptual depth of Maryam's work. Her meticulous process of shaping recycled paper into circular forms over four months underscores her commitment to sustainability and the continuous nature of communication.

The research directly informs the installation, intertwining all explored concepts with the creative process. Maryam's project ultimately creates a visceral experience of healing through art, blending personal narratives, cultural rituals, and a profound understanding of color symbolism and materiality to explore the complexities of loss, memory, and communication.

4. "PARASOMNIA" BY SARA ALQARDAEAI

Sara Al Qardaei's project concerns the phenomenon of parasomnia ([Fig. 11](#)), examining its associations with mental health and the intricate relationship between representation and human experience in the context of parasomnia ([Marques, 2021](#); [Miranda & Bustamante, 2015](#)). "Lack of sleep is often treated as an individual, isolating problem instead of one that requires social attention and care" ([McGill University, 2023](#)). Sara Al Qardaei's creative based research encompasses historical and contemporary artistic depictions of parasomnia, highlighting how artists engage with, interpret, and identify with this condition through their work ([Hiller, n.d.](#); [Sassen, n.d.](#)). Through a serial painting, the project elucidates the connection between the subconscious mind and parasomnia, offering a profound exploration of this enigmatic sleep disorder.

4.1. Description, Questions, Methods, and Aims

The project holds significant importance as it endeavors to illuminate the impact of parasomnia on individuals' mental health and overall well-being. The artist undertook a large-scale serial acrylic painting to evoke the disorientation and blurred perception associated with the condition, aiming to enhance awareness and deepen understanding of parasomnia. Through studio practices, artistic representation, and drawing from personal experience, the project seeks to elicit empathy, foster understanding, and engage participants more profoundly in the experiences of those affected by parasomnia. Furthermore, the project's implications extend to the broader community, facilitating dialogue and contemplation at the intersection of art, mental health, and human experiences.

This research investigates how artistic depictions of living with parasomnia contribute to discussions on the perception, experience, and management of this mental disorder from the perspective of those affected. It explores the correlation between parasomnia and external factors such as stress, work-related pressures, and socioeconomic conditions. The artist aims to uncover how these factors influence the occurrence and severity of parasomnia symptoms.

The project explores the representation of parasomnia in art as well as its implications for art and mental health. It seeks to elucidate the symbolic significance of parasomnia, the relationship between artistic representation and the human experience of the disorder, and the impact of parasomnia on mental health and society. Key objectives include advancing understanding of sleep behaviors, fostering

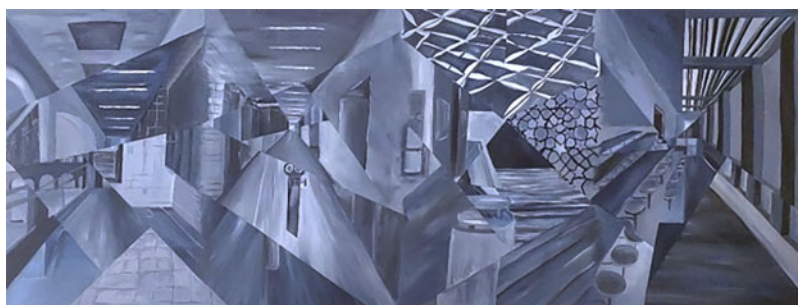


Fig. 11. Parasomnia, 2024 (400 cm). Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

empathy and support for individuals with sleep disorders, and raising awareness of potential strategies for managing and treating parasomnia.

The project employs a multidisciplinary methodology that integrates personal occurrences, artistic analysis, psychological insights, literary exploration, and studio art practices to provide a comprehensive understanding of parasomnia and its lived experience. By merging these diverse approaches, the outcome of the practice illuminates and communicates the complexities of the topic, offering a holistic perspective on the relationship between parasomnia, mental health, and artistic representation.

A central aspect of the project involves a creative allegiance and an in-depth analysis of artworks by artists such as Viviane Sassen (Sassen, n.d.), Ana Mazzei (Green Art Gallery, n.d.), Michelle Darwin (Darwin, n.d.), and Susan Hiller (Hiller, n.d.), who have explored parasomnia in their works. Through examining how these artists depict parasomnia across various mediums, the research gains insights into the emotional and psychological dimensions of the disorder and into different modes of practice. This artistic analysis facilitates an understanding of the visual language and symbolism used to convey the experiences associated with parasomnia. Additionally, the project is informed by a comprehensive literary review spanning sociology, psychology, and art history to contextualize the representation of parasomnia in art over time, including contemporary practices. By exploring how parasomnia is portrayed in literature and its intersections with other disciplines, the research develops a broader perspective on the cultural and societal influences shaping perceptions of sleep disorders.

Through studio art practices, particularly focusing on painting, the project aims to capture the vulnerability and lack of control experienced during parasomnia episodes. Through such practices, the research endeavors to convey the subjective experiences of living with parasomnia, fostering empathy and prompting reflection among viewers. This hands-on and thinking-through-practice approach enables a deeper exploration of the emotional and sensory dimensions of the disorder.

By integrating these diverse approaches, the project offers a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of parasomnia, bridging the gap between art, psychology, and literature.

The interdisciplinary methodology facilitates a rich exploration of the topic, highlighting the intricate interplay between artistic expression, psychological processes, and the lived experiences associated with parasomnia.

4.2. Materials and Processes

Through studio art practices, in particular painting, photography, collaging, deconstructing, and color coding in monochrome, Fig. 12. the artist highlights the interplay between spatial awareness, the subconscious mind, and parasomnia, expressing the complexities of human existence in a swiftly evolving society.

During the artwork creation process, the artist utilized photography to capture visual elements associated with parasomnia, such as dream-like imagery, surreal landscapes, and symbolic representations of the subconscious mind. Photographs served as both inspiration and reference for her artworks. Beginning with an exploration of photography, Sara sought images that encapsulated the essence of parasomnia: blurred visions, distorted perspectives, and ethereal atmospheres. These photographs formed the foundational inspiration for her artistic endeavors.

In planning her artworks, the artist probed personal memories, reflecting on places from her nightmares and the sensations experienced during parasomnia episodes. This introspection led her back to her elementary school, where she captured locations remembered from her nightmares. Each spot was meticulously analyzed and metaphorically depicted to convey the essence of the



Fig. 12. Collage experiments for Parasomnia before and after deconstructing.

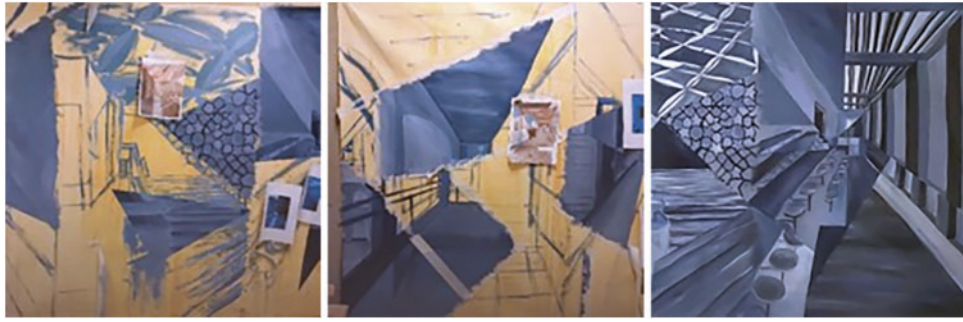


Fig. 13. Work in progress for Parasomnia.

nightmare in a large-scale painting. After compiling a series of photographs, she created multiple collages from her captures. Experimenting with textures, colors, and shapes, she aimed to convey the disorientation and confusion inherent in parasomnia. These initial collages were then deconstructed into fragmented pieces, symbolizing the fragmented nature of sleep experiences during parasomnia. Through meticulous reassembly, new compositions were formed, offering diverse perspectives and interpretations.

The project employed mixed media techniques, blending photography, painting, and collage to craft a multi-dimensional artwork that blurred the boundaries between reality and dreams. By integrating different mediums, Sara explored the interplay of visual elements and textures to evoke the sensations associated with parasomnia.

Sara realised her creative process by exploring various materials and techniques through experimentation and sketching, developing initial concepts related to parasomnia. Layering techniques were employed to add depth and complexity to the artworks, creating visual narratives that invited viewers to delve into intricate details and textures within the compositions. Through the process of deconstructing and reconstructing collages, Fig. 13, she crafted narratives that unfolded through multiple scenes, inviting viewers to engage with fragmented storytelling and interpret the artworks through their own unique perspectives.

4.3. Installation Practices

The artist's installation practice involves creating an immersive environment on the painted surface that evokes the experience of parasomnia. By utilizing elements such as lighting, shadow, textures, and spatial arrangements in the painting, the artist aims to induce confusion and vulnerability in the audience, offering a glimpse into the unsettling realm of nightmares. Through the manipulation of physical space and practice elements, the artist seeks to engage viewers in a participatory experience that encourages introspection and empathy toward individuals dealing with sleep disorders. Symbolism and metaphor convey the psychological and emotional aspects of parasomnia, while narrative exploration guides viewers through a process of discovery and reflection within the exhibition space, Fig. 14.

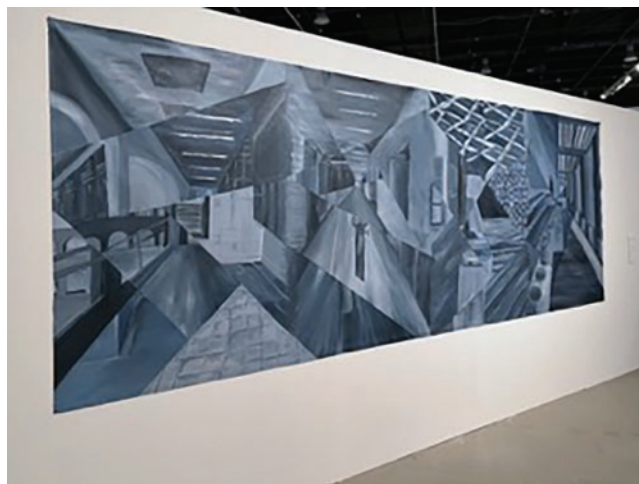


Fig. 14. Parasomnia, 2024 (400 cm). Exhibited in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi.

4.4. Context of Research and Practice

The artist's research addresses parasomnia, its correlation with mental health, and the interplay between representation and the human experience of parasomnia. It investigates how parasomnia has been historically and contemporarily depicted in art, as well as how artists engage with, interpret, and identify with parasomnia through their artistic creations. The study is informed by psychological, literary, and artistic practices, aiming to understand how both artists and other individuals experience, manage, and communicate parasomnia.

The outcome of the artwork on parasomnia is intricately connected to this research, as it seeks to unveil a serial painting that highlights the connection between spatial awareness, the subconscious mind, and parasomnia. Drawing inspiration from Viviane Sassen's work (Sassen, n.d.), the artwork aims to evoke the sensations and emotions associated with parasomnia, shedding light on this often-overlooked issue from a unique perspective. Through the use of color tone, size, and studio practices, the artwork endeavors to immerse the audience in the vulnerable state experienced during parasomnia, fostering a better understanding of the condition and raising awareness of potential solutions. The research, as mentioned, is further informed by practices from artists Ana Mazzei, and Susan Hiller, who depict parasomnia in their artworks, highlighting the fusion between memories and dreams, the performative aspects of sleep experiences, and the connection between parasomnia and mental health. These artists, alongside Sara Alqardaei, contribute to a better understanding of parasomnia and help create awareness and empathy for individuals dealing with sleep disorders.

By examining the relationship between representation and the human experience of parasomnia and how artists engage with, interpret, and identify with parasomnia through their art, Sara expands her practice to psychological, literary, and artistic references. Various sources explore how artists have depicted parasomnia, highlighting examples like de Cervantes (1992) *Don Quixote*, Kramskoi's (1871) *the Somnambulant* and Sir John Everett Millais' *The Sleepwalker*, 1829–1896 (Christies, n.d.) These references shed light on the intersection of parasomnia, dreams, and mental health, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena in fields such as psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, and the law and in the present. Furthermore, Sara's practice underscores the importance of recognizing parasomnia as a still current subject of artistic representation and its implications for broader societal discourse.

Viviane Sassen's work serves as a significant case study in the creative-based research project, showcasing how childhood experiences can influence the subconscious and shape dreams. Sassen's photographs capture the sense of ambiguity often experienced in the state between waking and sleep, resonating with the vulnerability and lack of control experienced during parasomnia. Through her staged scenes using shadows, figures, and other elements, Sassen evokes a sense of quiet creepiness, capturing the essence of sleep crises and nightmares. This concept aligns with Sara's aim to depict the vulnerability and lack of control experienced during parasomnia through a series of paintings, showcasing how the subconscious mind influences and shapes our experiences during sleep.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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