

PRESS RELEASE

Shaikha Al Mazrou
Dwelling in the Gap
14 Nov 2022 – 5 Jan 2023

Lawrie Shabibi is pleased to present *Dwelling in the Gap* by Shaikha Al Mazrou (b. 1988, UAE), her second solo at the gallery. The exhibition comes hot on the heels of her participation at Frieze Sculpture 2022 in Regents Park, London, with her major new artwork *Red Stack* (2022).

Al Mazrou's practice is an expression of tension, weight and space, borrowing from conceptual art and geometric abstraction, and formally from minimalism. Her work dwells and drifts in the spaces between substance, transmutation, and deception. In her latest sculptures and works on paper, materials appear to betray their functions and their fixed properties, shapes and angles connect and then release into mysteries. Al Mazrou pushes her materials to see what they will yield, but ultimately must also listen to their message and possibly even accept their secrecy. It is in this space of uncertainty and communion - between artist and material, between artwork and viewer - that one finds *the gap* that is central to the creative process.

In *Dwelling in the Gap* Al Mazrou presents seven new steel sculptures that are partially inspired by the properties and possibilities of folded and creased paper, transmuted into stainless steel. Inflated and folded, they resemble giant displays of origami, the shapes of which are drawn from actual A4 paper prototypes created by the artist. Al Mazrou's sculptures are expressions of materiality - articulations of tension and the interplay between form and content. Central to her practice is her irreverent use of material and its apparent contradictions, using durable materials that are made to resemble something soft, pliable or ephemeral.

Her complex sculptural explorations begin in the industrial zones throughout the Emirates that she has long frequented, spaces of machines spinning, grinding, and forming the materials for construction, spaces of sample books and scattered remnants. In these places, she locates the raw materials that will allow her to start anew, through laser cutting, welding, gluing, hammering, coating. This process entails a combination of chance encounter and rigorous labor, a balance that Al Mazrou reinforces through intuitive application of color, texture, and finish.

Equally deceptive and preoccupied with notions of tension and materiality, her recent works on paper are crafted from laser-cut laminate that pieces together wood-grained structural forms which float over or compress down upon the empty white surface, depending upon where one stands. The structures twist themselves together, interlocking, turning like mazes, some in eternal knots. Their hovering, epic presence and their beauty recall the geometrical drawings created by Leonardo Da Vinci to illustrate Luca Pacioli's mathematical study from 1509, *Divine Proportion*. But unlike Da Vinci's images, the structures in Al Mazrou's works are mainly forms that could not exist in three dimensions, they are imagined betrayals of our physical

realm. And the gap between their seeming solidity and their actual flatness as compressed laminates - a building material that allows for the illusion of substance and depth in furniture and architectural spaces – results in an unresolvable tension.

Al Mazrou's new sculptures and works on paper emerge from a similar action of laser-cutting and piecing shapes together. Yet they also contain opposing systems of compression and expansion: the works on paper utilize laminates created from flattening together multiple layers, while the sculptures ultimately result from a process of air pumped into the steel. And if the works on paper materialize solely from the imagination, the fabrication of the sculptures is only made possible through reference to their small-scale paper prototypes. Through the intermingling of flat and rounded surfaces, rising and descending folds, and empty spaces, Al Mazrou gives us an art of becoming. As we join her in the gap, we enter into connection with playful mysteries, and then emerge with our own possible re-formings.

NOTE: Text adapted from an original essay by Terri Geis, commissioned by Lawrie Shabibi. Geis is an art historian and independent curator who is currently Visiting Associate Professor of Art and Art History at New York University Abu Dhabi. To quote Geis, please refer to the full text enclosed in the Press Kit or kindly contact Lawrie Shabibi.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Shaikha Al Mazrou (b. 1988, UAE) received her MFA in 2014 at the Chelsea College of Fine Art, University of the Arts, London where she was awarded the prestigious MFA Student Prize. Prior to that she studied at the College of Fine Arts and Design, University of Sharjah where she later was a Sculpture Lecturer. Currently she is a Visiting Assistant Professor at NYU Abu Dhabi.

Al Mazrou's practice is anchored in the history of art, borrowing formally from minimalism and intellectually from conceptual art. Influenced by artists from the Modernist and Bauhaus Movements - such as Paul Klee, Carle Andre and Wassily Kandinsky - Al Mazrou uses the formal aspects of minimalism to engage with a current fascination with materiality in art. Often in her works she combines mass-produced materials - such as electronic waste or construction materials - with color and form, experimenting with these resources to create abstract geometric arrangements. Fascinated by notions of physical space, her sculptures and installations materialize as simple gestures that emphasize the representation of tension, weight and space.

Al Mazrou's sculptural experimentations and investigations are expressions of materiality—articulations of tension and the interplay between form and content as well as an intuitive, keenly felt understanding of materials and their physical properties. She combines and evolves ideas from contemporary artistic movements similarly preoccupied with formal and material elements, from color theory to geometric abstraction.

In October 2022, Al Mazrou's *Red Stack* (2022) - the largest single work by the artist to date – was presented at Frieze Sculpture 2022 in The English Garden, Regent's Park, London. The public art exhibition curated by Clare Lilley, runs alongside Frieze London and Frieze Masters.

Her most recent public commission *When Mountains are Domesticated*, 2022, is a two-part installation in resin for Al Ula International Airport's executive terminal, commissioned by Capsule Arts on behalf of the Royal Commission of Al Ula. Earlier in 2022 she presented a major public art installation entitled *Measuring Physicality of Void* for the second edition of Desert X AlUla, Saudi Arabia. Her large-scale sculpture *The Plinth*, 2021, was commissioned as part of the Expo 2020 Public Art Programme, curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh. In 2018 she was awarded the first Artist's Garden commission by the Jameel Arts Centre for her public piece *Green House: Interior yet Exterior, Manmade yet Natural* (2018). She has also been commissioned by Abu

Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation (ADMAF), Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority and The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC).

Recent solo exhibitions include *Dwelling in the Gap*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, 2022, Art Dubai, with Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2021), *Rearranging the Riddle*, Maraya Art Centre Sharjah, Sharjah (2020), *Expansion/Extension*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2019), Solo Projects, Abu Dhabi Art with Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2018).

She has participated in a number of group exhibitions including: *ICON. ICONIC.*, Art Here 2022 Richard Mille Art Prize, Louvre Abu Dhabi (2022), Art Dubai, with Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2022), *Blue*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2020), *Paulo Cunha e Silva Art Prize Finalist Exhibition*, Galeria Municipal do Porto, Porto (2020), *Upsurge: Waves, Colour And Illusion*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2020), *MATERIALIZE*, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2019), Artissima, Dialogue section, with Lawrie Shabibi, Torino (2018), *From Barcelona to Abu Dhabi: Works from the MACBA Art Collection in Dialogue with the Emirates*, organised by ADMAF, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi (2018), *Beyond: Emerging Artists*, Abu Dhabi Art (2017), *Art of Nature*, Abu Dhabi Festival, Umm Al Emarat Park, Abu Dhabi (2017), *Homage Without An Homage*, curated by Cristiana De Marchi, Art Dubai, Julius Baer Lounge, Dubai (2017), Faculty Show, Al Rewaq Gallery, College of Fine Art, University of Sharjah, Sharjah (2017), Abu Dhabi Art, with Lawrie Shabibi, Abu Dhabi (2016), *Past Forward: Contemporary Art from the Emirates*, Bolivar Art Gallery, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, USA (2016).

She is a winner of the Paulo Cunha e Silva Art Prize (2020).

Al Mazrou currently lives and works in Dubai.

ABOUT LAWRIE SHABIBI

Lawrie Shabibi is a contemporary art gallery housed in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. The gallery supports the long-term development of the careers of young international contemporary artists with a focus on those from the Middle East and North Africa. The gallery also organizes art historical exhibitions working with an older generation of artists from the region. Liaising with curators, institutions, museums and collectors the gallery has successfully introduced international artists to the region whilst at the same time presented Middle Eastern artists to the international contemporary arts community. By holding a regular program of exhibitions, screenings and talks, publishing catalogues and participating in international art fairs, Lawrie Shabibi has in the space of eleven years been a forerunner in the development of the contemporary art scene in Dubai.

For more information on Lawrie Shabibi please visit: <http://www.lawrieshabibi.com>

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