

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Uman. Darling sweetie, sweetie darling

Hauser & Wirth London
30 January – 30 March 2024



Uman's first exhibition with Hauser & Wirth will take place in London, in equal partnership with Nicola Vassell Gallery, NY. Uman's ebullient visual vocabulary reflects her expansive cross-cultural experiences. An intuitive artist and voracious autodidact, Uman draws upon her memories of her East African childhood, rigorous education in traditional Arabic calligraphy, deep engagement with dreams and fascination with kaleidoscopic colour and design. With nods to self-portraiture and fictional topographies, Uman's paintings fluidly navigate in-between realms to explore both the physical and spiritual, intertwining abstraction, figuration, meditative patterning and a reverence for the natural world. This exhibition will display a selection of large-scale paintings with lavishly detailed and opulently coloured worlds, replete with gesture, geometry and evocations of the sublime, hovering between abstraction and figuration.

The element of self-portraiture permeates Uman's practice. As she says, 'I think everything I do now is a self-portrait in different ways. Even my abstract paintings, mythical in nature, are self-portraits. I love drama, and so I depict myself with several mouths, and several eyes, just like a creature.' This kind of autobiographical transfiguration is seen in the new work 'Untitled' (2023), an expressive painting depicting an abstracted figure with its mouth open surrounded by flowing trails of geometric patterning. Other more abstract paintings on display are still biographical, as Uman describes 'the paintings are an extension of who I am'; they are not planned or premeditated but born from dreams, intuition and rigorous discipline. This exhibition can be understood as a collective portrait of the artist herself, at this moment in time.

In addition to prolific iconography from her own memories and dreams, Uman uses geometric forms, dots and abstract patterning that resembles mycelial networks. These collide with anthropomorphic elements to culminate in depictions that are at once botanical and intergalactic. The recent painting 'BBC

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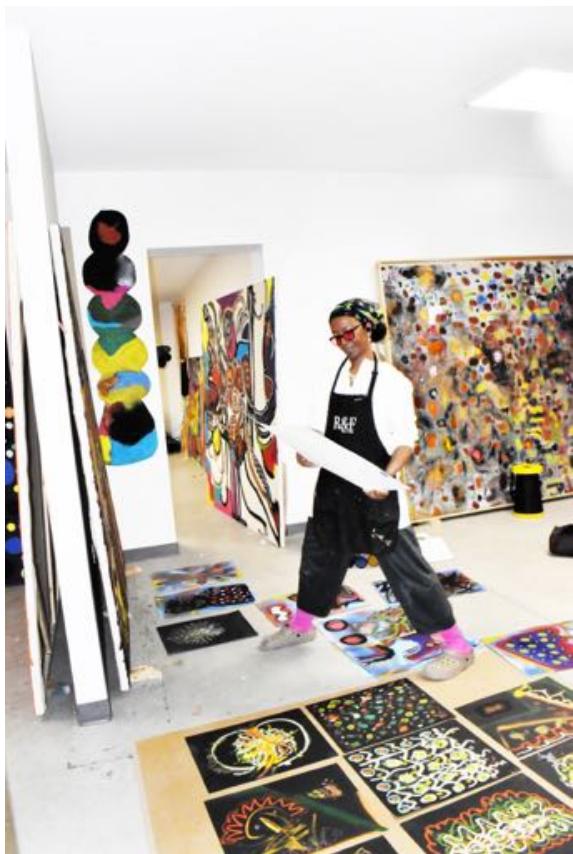
London In These Streets' (2023) features a grid of intricately patterned abstractions interspersed with triangulations that are each embellished with dots resembling eyes or spirals. These exuberant, seemingly freestyle markings recall Arabic calligraphy, which Uman studied as a child; the resulting marks coalesce into Uman's own highly distinctive language of symbols. Uman cites Louise Bourgeois as inspiration for the use of spirals in this selection of new paintings, such as 'Untitled' (2023) where floating circles in spiral formation contain smaller paintings within them, resulting in paintings that are bustling with miniature worlds.

In this exhibition, Uman privileges saturated colors, combining bright jewel tones alongside darker hues in surprising ways. The artist's process begins with the repeated layering of colours using acrylic paint, followed by an application of oil stick or oil paint via minimal but resolute gestures using a brush or her own hands. Applying thin, decisive layers of colour with purpose, this approach heightens the materiality of Uman's works and reinforces her minimalist approach. 'I find beauty in the canvas itself,' she has said about the practice of leaving some of her canvases unprimed. 'It's a beautiful strong material that sometimes needs to participate in the painting'. Other works, such as 'Samaki in the ocean' (2023), are primed with blue or black pigment, creating a powerful contrast between the dark background and bold effulgent tones that make up Uman's textural markings. Her mastery of pigments makes possible a trajectory between past and present. 'They come from my past,' she explains, 'I grew up with colorful women, a colorful culture. East African and Somali people love color more than anything. I've kept that in me, living here in the West, and I'm using that in my work to tell a story.'



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Accompanying the exhibition, a learning program will engage visitors with key themes from Uman's work. In October 2025, Uman's first US solo museum exhibition will open at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum CT, curated by Amy Smith-Stewart.



About the Artist

Uman was born in Somalia in 1980. She moved with her family to Kenya in 1989 as a result of the Somali Civil War, before relocating to Denmark at the age of 13. From an early age, Uman loved to draw and was fascinated by color and illustration. In the 2000s, when in her 20s, Uman moved to New York City. There, she met Swiss-born, Manhattan-based psychiatrist Annatina Miescher, who encouraged the artist's intuitive approach to painting and served as a mentor.

In 2015, Uman's first solo exhibition opened at White Columns, attracting significant attention for her paintings, sculptures and assemblage works that dazzled with their unorthodox and wholly original approach to layering cross-cultural, art historical and textile-based references. As poet and critic Ilka Scobie explained, '[Uman] embodies a fluidity that transcends borders, genders, abstraction, and figuration.'

Uman has been working in Roseboom and Albany in Upstate New York since 2010, places that together form the center of her life and work. The artist's work synthesizes the various cultures in which she has lived, with her experiences finding their way into recurring motifs: animals of the East African desert, patterns evoking Somalian hand-woven fabrics, Nordic environments from her time in Denmark, the urban landscape of Manhattan, the starry skies in upstate New York. The natural world continues to directly inform her art through the physical and psychological shifts of the landscape, contributing to her fictional topographies.

Uman has had solo exhibitions at Nicola Vassell, New York NY; Eleni Koroneou Gallery, Athens, Greece; Fierman, New York NY; Anne De Villepoix, Paris, France; and White Columns, New York NY. She has been featured in group exhibitions at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada; For-Site Foundation at

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Fort Mason Chapel, San Francisco CA; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, England; Karma, New York NY; and Ramiken Crucible, New York NY. In 2022, she was the recipient of the inaugural grant for The Cube at TRIADIC's FORMAT Festival in Bentonville AR.

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Gallery hours:

Tuesday to Saturday
10 am – 6 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

Caption and courtesy information:

All images:
Uman
Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth and Nicola
Vassell Gallery

Uman
Untitled
2023
Acrylic, oil and oil stick on canvas
212.1 x 212.7 x 3.8 cm / 83 1/2 x 83 3/4 x 1 1/2 in
Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Uman
Good Morning
2023
Acrylic, oil and oil stick on canvas
212.7 x 364.8 x 3.8 cm / 83 3/4 x 143 5/8 x 1 1/2 in
Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Uman
BBC London In These Streets
2023
Acrylic, oil and oil stick on canvas
243.5 x 243.8 x 3.8 cm / 95 7/8 x 96 x 1 1/2 in
Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Uman
Samaki in the ocean
2023
Acrylic, oil and oil stick on canvas
243.8 x 243.8 x 3.8 cm / 96 x 96 x 1 1/2 in
Photo: Sarah Muehlbauer

Uman in the studio, 2023. Photo: Luigi Cazzaniga