FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Palace of Desire

November 12, 2026 – February 20, 2027

TOLIA ASTAKHISHVILI, KAMROOZ ARAM, SULEMAN AQEEL KHILJI, JUSTIN CAGUIAT, THẢO NGUYÊN PHAN, SOPHIA AL-MARIA & LYDIA OURAHMANE, MARINA XENOFONTOS

Her image shines into your spirit and her dulcet tones send intoxicating delight through you. From the beloved emanates a light in which all things appear to be created afresh. After a long silence, the jasmine and the hyacinth beans begin to confide in each other. The minarets and domes fly up over the evening glow into the sky. The landmarks of the ancient district hand down the wisdom of past generations. The existential orchestra echoes the chirps of the crickets. The dens of wild beasts overflow with tenderness. Grace adorns the alleys and side streets. Sparrows of rapture chatter over the tombs. Inanimate objects are caught up in silent meditation. The rainbow appears in the woven mat over which your feet step.

— Kamal Abd al-Jawad in *Palace of Desire* by Naguib Mahfouz (1957)

Palace of Desire draws its title from the second book of the Cairo Trilogy, the magnum opus of highly acclaimed Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz. Although now one of the most lauded writers in modern Arab literature, Mahfouz did not gain widespread acceptance in Egypt nor recognition amongst Western audiences until after winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988. Demonstrating a mastery of literary realism and steeped in existentialism, Mahfouz painted deeply vivid and affecting portraits of Egyptian society during a period marked by monumental cultural upheaval. Extraordinarily prolific, he published thirty-four novels, twenty-six screenplays, seven plays, and more than three-hundred fifty short stories over the course of his impressive seventy-year career. As an ardent supporter of the freedom of speech, Mahfouz audaciously depicted how primeval forces shape individual consciousness, emotions, and desires, attracting criticism and threats from conservative religious groups for his perceived profanity.

Coming of age in Cairo at the height of British colonial rule, Mahfouz experienced the profound political and social transformation of Egypt from the beginning of World War I through the 1919 Egyptian Revolution and up to the end of World War II. In the Cairo Trilogy, set in the Gamaliya district of Mahfouz's childhood and youth, he scrupulously illustrates the vicissitudes of a formidable patriarch and his family across three generations, as they contend with modernization and the friction between Western ideology and Muslim tradition. These novels serve as poignant sociological mirrors of Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century, revealing how power is deployed, longing is navigated, and the past is reconciled in a rapidly changing world. Surveying domestic life molded by ancestral tension, the intimate relationships between men and women, and the search for faith and love, these stories demonstrate that desire is not rigid or contained but malleable: an entropic power that evolves across bodies, eras, and cultures.

Leveraging this saga's leitmotifs as a framework, *Palace of Desire* brings together eight artists, who each consider the distance between what is inherited, experienced, and imagined. Working across archives, the built environment, and charged landscapes, these artists uncover suppressed accounts and renegotiate hegemonic narratives, creating layered encounters that give material form to memory's vacillations. Through distinct examinations of the passage of time, their work allows history to emerge as something unstable and actively constructed, rather than objective and definitive. Spanning painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation, the exhibition traces modes of attachment that persist across time and geography, where chronicled fact, laying itself bare, shades into allegory and lived experience becomes spectral.

Individual and collective histories surface in fragments, transformed through repetition, translation, and compositing. These works do not seek to recover a singular origin but instead dissect the ambiguity between recollection and longing—that unpredictable terrain where one's past becomes inseparable from what is yearned for. If a palace is a structure assembled to house aspiration, then the one represented here remains unfinished: a shifting architecture of remembrance, displacement, and possibility.

Palace of Desire
November 12, 2026 – February 20, 2027
Ground Floor

Front Gallery:



Tolia Astakhishvili
the words are made in belly not in the mouth, 2020-24
Carved elm wood from the beam of an old house, paper, ink, museum glass
14 3/8 x 16 1/2 in (37 x 42 cm)
(TA.001)



Thảo Nguyên Phan
Opaque Fragile, 2026–ongoing
Watercolor, gouache, acrylic, pigment and graphite on double layered silk on wooden stretchers and stainless steel frame
31 1/2 x 31 1/2 x 2 1/2 in (80 x 80 x 7 cm)
(TNP.003)



Thảo Nguyên Phan
Opaque Fragile, 2026–ongoing
Vietnamese lacquer (Sơn mài) on wood panel; Lacquer, eggshell, mother of pearl, pigment, silver leaf, gold leaf, three panels
Each: 11 3/4 x 16 x 1 5/8 in (30 x 41 x 4 cm)
Overall: 11 3/4 x 48 x 1 5/8 in (30 x 122 x 4 cm)
(TNP.001)



Thảo Nguyên Phan
Opaque Fragile, 2026–ongoing
Watercolor, gouache, acrylic, pigment and graphite on double layered silk on wooden stretchers and stainless steel frame
47 1/4 x 31 1/2 x 2 1/2 in (120 x 80 x 6 cm)
(TNP.004)



Thảo Nguyên Phan
Opaque Fragile, 2026–ongoing
Vietnamese lacquer (Sơn mài) on wood panel; Lacquer, eggshell, mother of pearl, pigment, silver leaf, gold leaf
47 1/4 x 31 1/2 x 2 3/4 in (120 x 80 x 7 cm)
(TNP.006)



Marina Xenofontos
Hemisphere, 2026
Turned wood, modified lighting lift motor (135 rpm)
16 7/8 x 10 5/8 x 13 in (43 x 27 x 33 cm)
(MX.003)

Main Gallery, clockwise:



Suleman Aqeel Khilji
If not in my chest, then in yours, 2024–25
Oil, distemper, and pigments on linen
31 1/8 x 47 1/4 in (70 x 120 cm)
(SAK.002)



Justin Caguiat
Untitled, 2026
Oil, acrylic, and chalk on canvas
69 x 69 in (175 x 175 cm)
(JCA.095)



Suleman Aqeel Khilji
Elevation (Charghash), 2024–25
Oil, distemper and pigments on linen
63 x 86 5/8 in (160 x 220 cm)
(SAK.004)



Suleman Aqeel Khilji
2005–2025 (Mnemonic Spaces), 2024–25
Oil, distemper and pigments on linen
55 1/8 x 74 3/4 in (140 x 190 cm)
(SAK.003)



Justin Caguiat
The hour tethered by a foot, 2026
Oil, gouache, pencil, and paper on linen
11 1/2 x 14 in (29 x 36 cm)
(JCA.078)



Kamrooz Aram
Untitled (Tempered Arabesque), 2023
Oil, oil crayon, and pencil on linen
60 x 66 in (152 x 168 cm)
(KAR.001)



Kamrooz Aram
Tower, 2026
Ceramic, brass, marble, and lapis lazuli and cobalt oil paint on MDF
Object: 8 x 3 in (20 x 8 cm)
Base: 48 1/8 x 8 x 8 in (122 x 20 x 20 cm)
Overall: 56 1/8 x 11 x 8 in (143 x 28 x 20 cm)
(KAR.002)



Kamrooz Aram
Ornamental Composition, 2025
Oil, acrylic, and pencil on paper
Paper: 40 1/4 x 26 in (102 x 66 cm)
Frame: 42 5/8 x 28 5/8 in (108 x 73 cm)
(KAR.003)



Kamrooz Aram
Ornamental Composition, 2024
Oil, acrylic, and pencil on paper
Paper: 39 3/8 x 27 3/4 in (100 x 71 cm)
Frame: 42 5/8 x 28 5/8 in (108 x 73 cm)
(KAR.004)



Kamrooz Aram
Ornamental Composition, 2025
Oil, acrylic, and pencil on paper
Paper: 39 3/8 x 27 3/4 in (100 x 71 cm)
Frame: 42 5/8 x 28 5/8 in (108 x 73 cm)
(KAR.005)



Sophia Al-Maria & Lydia Ourahmane
Curtains, 2024
Velvet, brass
63 x 59 x 4 in (160 x 150 x 10 cm)
(SLO.001)

Rear Gallery:



Marina Xenofontos
Interior of a Nightclub, 2026
Suspended ceiling in fir and other reclaimed wood battens, mahogany veneer
Dimensions variable
Edition 2/3 + 2 APs
(MX.001)