

## Watch Before You Fall

Sabrina Amrani Gallery is pleased to present *Watch Before You Fall*, a solo show by Manal AIDowayan. This is AIDowayan's highly anticipated, second solo presentation with the gallery in Madrid, following her 2016 exhibition *And I, Will I Forget?*

AIDowayan is a prolific artist who works in multiple mediums and large-scale installations that address invisibility and the status of women in her country of birth, Saudi Arabia. In this exhibition, AIDowayan widens her scope and looks at symbolism found in books written about women's bodies, using soft sculpture, ceramics, and fabric.

AIDowayan describes this exhibition as "a space that stands between fear and activism; the artworks are symbols of the resilience and fragility of both the context and the artist." In *Watch Before You Fall*, AIDowayan attempts to fragment these symbols and reconstruct them to create a new form, a room full of 'healing totems' that alter perceptions and corrects memory. AIDowayan explains, "Women have created very powerful structures in the private spaces that they had occupied in the past. The 'women only' spaces may seem to encompass only weakness to the outside observer, but in reality, these spaces have allowed women to maneuver their bodies, voices and identities in a safe environment. Something they now need to re-asses as they enter the public sphere today".

The exhibition strives to document a moment of transition and change, in both the status of women in the artist's country and in the world. AIDowayan proclaims, "We have no choice but to move forward! But first we must resolve the past by recognizing its problems". The artist offers the viewer a room full of healing totems in the form of cylindrical shaped soft sculptures made of natural linen. These sculptures carry images of religious book covers printed on them. The totem shapes invite the viewer to walk around them and physically engage with their size and softness. The images on the totems can either be seen clearly or, when necessary, the images can be obscured by simply changing the order of the stacked cushions.

The totems are surrounded by multiple "offerings" that the artist has used to address the past and the present. AIDowayan places small stacks of delicate rolls of porcelain paper on top of the cushions. Contrasting the delicate porcelain against the resilient soft surfaces of the totems. The rolls of papers carry the contents of religious books that speak about a woman's body, voice, and the space she occupies in the public sphere. 'Just Paper' is an attempt to remove the power of these documents by the simple gesture of changing their medium.

The totems are also flanked with a series of Hanging Palms, an artwork that compromises of a suspended loom woven linen fabric that hangs from a set of Brass Palm trees. The Brass trees are a reference to the artist's relationship

to Spain where she developed this project and an ode to the poet and founder of the Arab dynasty in Spain, Abdulrahman Ibn Mu'awiya, who wrote a historical melancholic poem about the tree that represented his heritage, his home and his loss. The intricate woven pieces of natural Hemp linen carry small fragments of porcelain paper with nothing but page numbers and singular commanding words taken from religious books, representing the quantity and volume of such writings and the uniqueness of the language used by the authors of these texts.

The exhibition is anchored by a large hanging silk fabric sculpture, carrying the title of the collection, Watch Before You Fall. Inspired from the organically sexual shape of the Desert Rose, the artist describes the crystalized sand formation as "an intentional contrast to the constant use of a delicate flower to represent women". AIDowayan goes on to describe the Desert Rose as an "ephemeral geological phenomena that has never existed long enough to be documented by geologist, yet it has existed since the beginning of time". The hanging sculpture carries layers of text printed on the surface of its folds and crevasses, words that shout out commands, punctuated with exclamation marks that instruct women to beware of the predator male, always violent, always waiting to attack. The artist uses the soft medium of silk to contrast the hardness of the text. She emphasizes the delicate structure of the sculpture and its temporary suspension. She invites the viewer to move the fabric and engage with the flaps and folds, to be consumed by its form that is meant to overpower the content.

The Desert Rose appears again in the form of a limited edition of oxidized metal sculpture, placed around the soft sculptures throughout the exhibition. AIDowayan in her tradition of playing on Arabic words uses these small formations to revisit the ideas behind visibility and invisibility, where she has engraved the Desert Roses with the words "I wonder, do you see me?" and the response "I am here!".

Framing the entire exhibition are paintings and fired black clay ceramic legs called The Emerging, these works float on their retrospective surfaces, Linen canvases or the floor of the gallery, in a state of submersion or emersion, referencing the visible and invisible in the debate around feminism in the context of religion, politics, and media today.

Manal AIDowayan has consistently created works that question the current status of her experience, while striving to capture the moment as it moves towards the inevitable motions of change. Sabrina Amrani Gallery is excited to present these new works in the context of our programming in Spain and to our friends, clients and art patrons around the world.

