

REHAB EL SADEK

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*PATTERN LANGUAGE*

رحاب الصادق | لغه نمطيه



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WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 23 - DECEMBER 16, 2021

AUSTIN, TEXAS

## PATTERN LANGUAGE

With *Pattern Language*, Egyptian-born artist Rehab El Sadek challenges the hierarchy of social space by examining the relationships between institutions, urban planning, and one's own home. Through installations that invert the principles of architectural design, viewers are invited to question existing power dynamics and contemplate the role of individuals—especially marginalized individuals—within our systems and the built environment.

At the center of *Pattern Language*, literally and figuratively, El Sadek has placed a single chair beside the frame of a table—both situated neatly inside the frame of a suspended sculpture representing a house. Viewed from different angles, these nested forms create a tesseract of domestic solitude. The arrangement asks us to contemplate the loneliness of an immigrant in a city where they feel very little community. In Texas, where this exhibition takes place, El Sadek's native Arabic is rarely heard or spoken by the artist; something that is a challenge during the best of times and has only been amplified during the COVID-19 international health crisis.

Although *Pattern Language* is a deeply autobiographical group of works, the carefully considered gallery experience is both conscious of and respectful to the viewer. The first installation the visitor sees upon entry to the gallery is a set of suspended open doors with the rest of the exhibition visible beyond. Taken as a whole, these suspended elements—doors and three houses—create an exploded view of a small neighborhood. Live turf grass placed on the floor below, playfully blurs the line between the outdoors and gallery interior.

*Pattern Language* borrows its name from *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, a now classic book on architecture, urban design, and community livability by Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein of the Center for Environmental Structure (University of California, Berkeley). The volume, still innovative over 40 years after its initial publication, describes 253 patterns that can be joined together to create harmonious, livable spaces. As part of her creative process, El Sadek used the authors' toolkit to design a user experience for the gallery exhibition.



*Bird Kingdom*, 2021, mixed media (detail)

Patterns such as “Identifiable Neighborhood”, “Scattered Work”, and “Wall Membranes” work together to unify an arrangement of sculptures conceptualized over two years in five different cities. Although some of the sculptural elements of *Pattern Language* have individual names, they work together as a unified whole.

As major American cities age, city planners are tasked with envisioning creative reuse of buildings and urban spaces. Similarly, El Sadek's practice is defined by her reuse of common everyday objects. To create the architecture-inspired sculptural forms of *Pattern Language*, El Sadek has familiar common household objects such as salt and pepper shakers, shelves, food containers, packing material, meat skewers, and a colander.

One repurposed item with special historical significance is the aforementioned set of doors which previously served as the entry to the gallery in the early 20th century when the space served the neighborhood as a corner grocery store. In more recent years, the building was occupied by a landscape architecture firm—the inclusion of the turf grass nods to that period.



*Pattern Language*, 2021, mixed media installation





*Pattern Language, 2021, mixed media installation*

Cover Panel: *Pattern Language, 2021, mixed media installation*

During an artist residency in Corsicana, Texas, El Sadek created site-specific artwork in a space that for generations was a downtown clothing store. There, as here, she honors the history of the space by incorporating historical artifacts as part of the artwork. Most of the works in *Pattern Language* have a weathered quality. Each piece, whether authentic artifact or artistic construction, is characterized by layers of texture—built up and eroded. These rusticated objects are often draped with a sheer gauze. The repeated use of this material throughout the installation suggests both the ephemerality of life and the persistence of memory. The artist's heritage is also reflected in the material's ancient use in Egypt for healing, protection, and conservation.



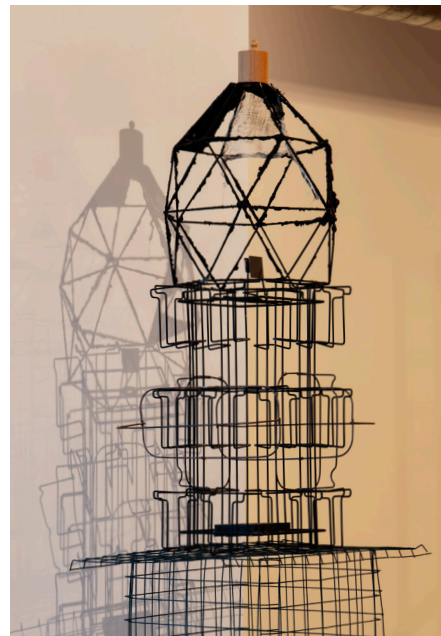
*Burj Alkanisa, 2021, mixed media (detail)*

One element of the installation that breaks from the earthy, sand-colored pallet is a ray of golden light that extends across the floor of the gallery space every late afternoon. Created with colored plexiglass attached to the west-facing set of windows, the beam of light offers a daily dose of optimism to those who time their visit appropriately. Throughout the exhibition, the artist uses shadow and light as material—part of her pattern language. El Sadek has carefully placed directional lighting to extend the volume of sculptural forms, underscoring their architectural elements. The careful observer will also notice that the shadow drawings at the front of the gallery mirror larger forms throughout the exhibition. The beginning point for this body of work was, in fact, a series of shadow studies of everyday objects and forms.

*Pattern Language* also critiques institutional authority—both religious and governmental. The most common architectural form in the exhibit is the tower, roughly a dozen of which are evenly scattered like sentries throughout the space (*Burj Hadid, Alamoud Alasuad, Burj Alkanisa, etc.*).

El Sadek has miniaturized to human-scale these symbols of scrutiny and surveillance, thus undermining their authority. Although it rises ten feet in height, *The Architect Sin*, the tallest tower of the bunch, tilts precariously and appears to be on the verge of falling over—a cautionary tale to outsized institutions.

Which brings us to another unifying characteristic of the sculptural forms in *Pattern Language*: their fragility. Unlike ancient sculptures carved from stone or marble, these works are created from non-durable materials: cardboard, sticks, and fabric. Along the back wall, a cityscape carved from light-weight foam alludes to the delicate nature of both 21st Century society and modern building techniques: solid on the surface but unable to withstand weight or stress.



*Burj Hadid, 2021, mixed media (detail)*

*Pattern Language* is the third and final exhibition in a series of interrelated works. The first, *Memory Palace* (Big Medium, 2019) converted the artist's personal memories, good and bad, to sculptural form and shadow. The second, *Transient* (Prizer Arts and Letters, 2019-2020), explored issues related to immigration and belonging. *Pattern Language* combines the methodology of both and serves as a capstone to a notable and productive period of El Sadek's artistic practice.

Curt Gettman is an arts professional based in Austin, Texas.

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# Rehab El Sadek

## EDUCATION

1994      BFA, Painting, Faculty of Fine Arts, Alexandria University (Egypt)

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2021      *Superposition*, Samuels, Corsicana, TX  
2019-2020    *Transient*, Prizer Arts & Letters, Austin, TX  
2019      *The Memory Palace*, Big Medium, Austin, TX  
2018      *Artist-in-Residence Exhibition*, 217 2nd Street, Austin, TX  
2014      *Heads or Tails*, Pixadot Imaging, Dallas, TX  
2004      *El Sadek & Simen Johan*, Lumen Travo, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
            *Viewings*, Thami Mnyele Studio, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
2000      *I Am*, Nairobi National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya  
1998      *Empty Shapes*, Gasworks Gallery, London, England  
            *Pages from Old Time*, Mashrabia Gallery, Cairo, Egypt

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2021      *We Know Who We Are. We Know What We Want.*, Women & Their Work, Austin, TX  
            *Spaces Between*, McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Charlotte, NC  
2020      *The Imminent Arrival*, The Immigrant Artist Biennial (TIAB), New York City, NY  
2019      *Intersections*, Presa House, San Antonio, TX  
            *Texas Art*, The Assistance League of Houston, TX  
2018      *The Fifth Annual Regional Juried Exhibition*, Artspace111, Fort Worth, TX  
            *Vignette Art Fair*, The Women's Museum, Dallas, TX  
2017      *African Amicitiae*, Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
            *Build Hope, Not Walls*, Big Medium, Austin, TX  
            *You Are Here*, Wild Basin Research Center, Austin, TX  
            *People's Gallery Exhibition*, Austin City Hall, Austin, TX  
            *Mix 'n' Mash*, Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, TX  
2016      *Not For Profit*, Bolm Studios, Austin, TX  
2012      *Amulets, Nazar & Evil eyes: Artists Looking Forward*, Queens College Art Center, Queens, NY  
2011      *Beyond the desert*, curated by Simon Njami, Darb1718, Cairo, Egypt  
2010      *African women*, Pan-African Art Festival, Algiers, Algeria  
2009      *Rashid & Rosetta*, Egyptian-Canadian internet art project, Canada  
            *Rebelle: Art & Feminism*, 1969-2009, curated by Mirjam Westen, Museum voor Moderne Kunst in Arnhem (MMKA), Arnhem, Netherlands  
2005      *Interview with Rehab El Sadek | Freewaves*, Geffen Contemporary Art at MOCA, Los Angeles, CA  
2004      *L.A. Freewaves 9th Celebration of Experimental Media Arts*, The Geffen Geffen Contemporary Art at MOCA, Los Angeles, CA  
            *Photography*, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB), Barcelona, Spain  
2003      *Photo Cairo*, The Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
            *International Residency, Open Studio Exhibition*, The Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt  
            *Les 5e Rencontres de la photographie africaine de Bamako*, Bamako, Mali  
2002      *Drawings Straight from the Artists Studio*, AUC, Cairo, Egypt  
            *Imagining the Book*, International Contemporary Art Encounter, Bibliotheca Alexandria, Egypt

*Squared Circle*, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut, Lebanon  
2001      *Cairo Modern Art in Holland*, Fortis Circustheater, The Hague, Netherlands  
            *Al Nitaq Festival of Art*, Cairo, Egypt  
            *Vasl Artists*, Gulgee Museum, Karachi, Pakistan  
2000      *3rd International Artists Residencies*, Kuona Artists Collective & Nairobi National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya  
1999      *Biennale Dei Giovanni Artisti*, Jannis Kounellis Pavilion, Rome, Italy  
            *Mediterranean Metaphors I*, Borusan Art Center, Istanbul, Turkey  
            *Sharjah Biennale 4*, United Arab Emirates  
            *Moderne Kunst Aus Agypten*, Galerie Xenois, Frankfurt, Germany  
1994      *Contemporary Egyptian Art*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

## AWARDS & HONORS

2021      The Gottlieb Foundation Individual Support Grant  
            Sustainable Arts Foundation Award  
            Texas Vignette Artist Grant  
2020      The Pollock-Krasner Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation Fellowship supporting MacDowell artist residency  
            Red Bull Arts Microgrant  
2019      Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant  
            Community Initiative and Capacity Building Award, City of Austin  
2017-2018    Artist-in-Residence, Austin Cultural Arts Division & Watershed Protection Department  
2002      The Department of State EGY, Five States' Travel Grant program  
1999      2nd Installation Prize, Sharjah Biennale 4  
1998      UNESCO-Sarvath El Hassen Bursaries for Culture and Art supporting Gasworks residency  
1997-1999    Merit Grant, The Ministry of Culture, Egypt

## RESIDENCIES

2022      Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE  
2021      McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Charlotte, NC  
            Corsicana Artist and Writer Residency, Corsicana, TX  
2020      MacDowell Artist Fellowship, Peterborough, NH  
            Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT  
            The Good Hart Residency, MI  
2019      Art Omi, Ghent, NY  
2004      Thami Mnyele Foundation Residency Award, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
2003      The Townhouse Gallery International Residency, Cairo, Egypt  
2001      Vasl Artists' Association Residency / Triangle Network, Karachi, Pakistan  
2000      3rd International Artists Residencies, Kuona Trust, Nairobi National Museum, Nairobi, Kenya  
1998      Gasworks Artists Studios, London, UK

## COMMUNITY PROJECTS

2021      *#carvershares*, Virtual Participatory Project, George Washington Carver Museum, Austin, TX  
2003      *Container*, Community Engagement Public Project, Wasla Contemporary Art Workshop, Nuweiba, Egypt  
2000      *I Am*, Participatory Public Art Project with 70 disadvantaged children organized by Kuona Trust, Nairobi National Museum



*Shadow Drawings, 2020-2021, mixed media on wood*

## WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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Photographs courtesy of Paul Bardagjy & Alexandra Vanderhider

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Women & Their Work is a visual and performing arts organization located in Austin that serves as a catalyst for new ideas in contemporary art. Since 1978, Women & Their Work has created significant opportunities for artists and audiences to experience contemporary art through ambitious exhibitions, commissions of new work, performances and programs that inform audiences of all ages. We have actively developed the careers of more than 1,900 women artists, presenting 328 visual art exhibitions, 155 music, dance and theater events, 30 spoken word and literary performances, 16 film festivals and 765 programs & education workshops. Women & Their Work helps meet an important need in Texas providing exhibition and performance opportunities and helping to attract critical attention to the work produced here; it is the only organization of its kind in the region and one of the few organizations in the United States that

dedicates itself to the work of women artists. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, The New York Times, ArtForum, and on National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2020, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art acquired the 43-year archive of Women & Their Work ensuring that our entire history of the work of women artists and our website will be preserved in perpetuity.



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