

HIBA ALI

LULLABIES FOR THE STARS IN OUR EYES



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

SEPTEMBER 28 - NOVEMBER 17, 2024

AUSTIN, TEXAS

LULLABIES FOR THE STARS IN OUR EYES

“There was this cosmic dust that fell at our feet; we watched it surround us, on our bodies and minds, until we began to glow ourselves.”

— Hiba Ali

In *An Inventory of Shimmers*, Melissa Gregg writes that “affect is born in the in-between-ness and resides as cumulative beside-ness”. It’s our innate capacity to feel and be felt and to shift those feelings into action. It’s both sensation and sensibility, corporeal and incorporeal, force and lingering resonance. Hiba Ali’s multi-installation exhibition takes a long, slow look at our personal and collective affective accumulations, at, as Gregg would say, “the ordinary and its extra”. These forces that move us, and that we in turn move, happen within and out of our bodies, and thus require a different understanding of the body. One where the body is not merely, as Gregg puts it, “an outer skin-envelope or outer surface boundary”, but, rather, a body whose definition is



Lullabies for tears, 2024

Oculus Quest 2, vinyl, ceramics, bakhoor incense, 07:07 looped, dimensions variable

necessitated by its “potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passage of affect”.

We can see this expansive understanding of the affecting body in the duo-channel video *Songs of the h’s*, located along the entire back wall of the gallery. Here, as with other works in the exhibition, we witness open-ended dancing bodies that exist as both multifarious entities and as chimeric avatars. These bodies—with flesh-borders porous enough to allow solid-seeming three-dimensional letters to rise out of their skin—collapse the separation between out and in, between this and that. They are bodies that can shift their outward appearance and don new guises, such as the avatar of the star which appears in golden-suited human form in *Songs of the h’s* and in pictorial form in *Lullabies for tears*. The mutable and permeable skins of these bodies visualizes what Erin Mannings terms “the complex inter-relational matrix of being and wording” and the subsequent “co-participat[ion] in the passage of affect” between word and flesh.

One such “complex inter-relational matrix of being and wording” that Ali traces in *Songs of the h’s* is through the languages of their matrilineal lineage, specifically Arabic, Urdu and Arwi. If we use Gregg’s definition of a body as the “potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passage of affect” then language is itself a body and in *Songs of the h’s*, this language has its own concrete and corporeal form. It inhabits the same space-place as the human forms: it enters and exits, it moves and passes through and across the visual planes of the video. Like with human bodies, language too is not a monolithic and fixed entity that we all encounter in precisely the same way. Instead, there are infinite iterations for the ways our individual encounter with language co-produces a back-and-forth “passage of affects” at any given time.

By corporealising language, Ali offers us a way to visually see language as the fluxing entity it really is; an entity whose particular body is shaped by the singular *ways* it encounters as



Re-membering through movement the songs they sang, 2024
HD video, sand and stardust, 01:48 looped, dimensions variable

much as by *what* it encounters. This enfleshment of language also allows us to consider the lingering after-affects of having ones’ ability to “co-participate in the passage of affect” with ones’ ancestral languages reduced or severed by colonialism, cultural genocide, and diasporic migration. When we lose the ability to encounter these languages, we lose not only the ability to communicate but also all the sediment accumulation of linguistic affective encounters that have baked ancestral and cultural knowledge into language.

In *Re-membering through movement the songs they sang*—a video work projected into one of the mirrored pools on the floor of the gallery—Ali uses a motion capture bodysuit to create a dancing figure that is composed of the letter “h” in their matrilineal languages. This literal animation of language not only corporealizes language once more but also helps to further establish a recurrent notion within the exhibition; namely that bodies - and by extension we ourselves - are neither singular



Songs of the h's, 2019-2024,
Duo-projection, HD video, 18:33 looped, dimensions variable
Cover Panel: *Lullabies for the stars in our eyes*, 2024, installation view

nor fixed. By giving these languages not only a corporeal form, but specifically one that is dancing, Ali offers us a way to side-step one of the potential linguistic barriers to accessing these languages. While the traumatic rupture of intergenerational linguistic and ancestral knowledge-transfer remains an ongoing global phenomena—particularly within diasporic communities—using movement and gesture as the means for engaging with these languages allows us to visually derive meaning from these written languages in ways that do not require either proficiency or fluency in the languages as a prerequisite.



Co-creating landscape: invitation to rake, 2024
Sand, stardust, miniature rake, dimensions variable

Re-membering through movement the songs they sang, and the sister works, *Stardust flowing through our eyes*, and *Butterflies at the back of my throat*, act as speculative portals for the healing potential of affect. By gazing at the video works reflected in the pools, or lingering at their banks and listening to the installation's sonic reverberations, or even by stepping into acts of co-creation by raking the surrounding sand and changing the geographic outlines of the pools, one can find an entry into experiencing our bodies' innate capacity to heal *through* and *within* the richly sensate experiences of our bodies themselves. We can see this too in *Lullabies for tears*—a VR work housed in a black and burnt-gold coloured alcove to the immediate left as one enters the gallery—where visitors are guided by the star, Ali's avatar, on a somatic body-processing journey. This somatic journey into our sensorial body brings with it an awareness of the primordial nature of our senses as our first means for understanding and mediating our experience of the world, but, more importantly, it also shows us avenues for coming back to ourselves, and consequently, back to the world.

This return through the senses is even visceral in *Re-membering through movement the songs they sang*; *Stardust flowing through our eyes*; and *Butterflies at the back of my throat*. The metallic pools are visual and aural and tactile all at once and their multisensorial nature allows us—both literally and metaphorically—to touch

and be touched, to feel and be felt, to hold and be held. Similarly, by offering up multiple ways a body may engage with the work, including the option to exist in restful aloneness, the pools create liminal and emotio-psychic spaces for both healing and unknotting the historic—and ongoing—efforts to tether black and brown bodies to the yoke of ceaseless labour. Instead the body at rest is reconfigured out of this linear relationality to labour, use and utility. At the edges of these pools, the body is allowed to sink into postures of repose, repair and regeneration, or rather, the body within the public arena of the gallery space is allowed to simply be a body in space.

In all the works, affect—and its world-building capacity for emergence and *potential*—offers us an ontological pathway for making, unmaking and remaking the thread clusters that make up our cognizant and unconscious sense of self. These are works that invite the viewers to connect to their somatic-sensing bodies, and potentially, to start imagining our bodies as larger and more complex than the categories created to contain us. When one straddles multiple categories or categorisation, one is often led to believe that self-naming

necessitates a disavowing of one thing in order to choose another. Yet, the ways in which even conflicting things are able to coexist within Ali's cosmology offers us another way to think about what it means to be complicated beings living within, against and alongside multiple, and oftentimes contradictory, inheritances. Their pluralistic world-building allows the work in the exhibition to be both complicated and comprehensible, to have meanings and possible interpretations that change, slip and—rather like the human spirit—refuse to sit still as any one single thing.

Nura Ali is a visual artist, writer, and curator living and working in Calgary, Alberta.

To learn more about the research Hiba Ali conducted for this exhibition, scan the QR code below:



Hiba Ali CV

EDUCATION

- 2024 PhD, Cultural Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada
2018 MFA, Studio Art and Transmedia, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX
2013 BA, Visual and Critical Studies, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2012 BFA, Film Video, New Media and Animation, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

SOLO & TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *oceans we carry: rough as silk*, Squeaky Wheel, Buffalo, NY
the beauty that is our excitement: a meditation, Memory Card: New Art City Festival 2023, online, curated by Olivia Alonso Gough
2022 *courses*, Chicago Artists Coalition, Chicago, IL, curated by Courtney Cintron
rough as silk, Modern Fuel, Kingston, ON, Canada
courses, The "It's NOT" Fair, Fusebox Festival, Austin, TX, curated by Michael Anthony García
2021 *in the weeds*, Roman Susan Art Foundation, Chicago Architecture Biennial, Chicago, IL
2020 *Abra*, Xpace Cultural Centre, Toronto, ON, Canada
Abra: digital exhibition, LEFT Contemporary, Windsor, ON, Canada
courses, Artist Project Contemporary Art Fair, Toronto, ON, Canada
2018 *Alien ate d Rhythm: Hiba Ali and Jonathan Chacón*, Ori Gallery, Portland, OR, curated by Yun Yu Chiu
THINKING OUTSIDE THE NET: THE BOX THAT COULD TALK, Museum of Human Achievement, Austin, TX
2017 *Satellites*, Whippersnapper Gallery, Toronto, ON, Canada
Satellites, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
2013 *SCII TV Installation*, ExTV, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), Chicago, IL

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 *shape of your error*, 5533, Istanbul, Turkey, curated by Melih Aydemir
2022 *i gently place my brain in cold rice*, Oregon Contemporary, Portland, OR, curated by home school
Terms & Expectations, InterAccess, Toronto, ON, Canada, curated by Barbara Cueto and Bas Hendrikx
Vanishing Act, Centre A: Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Queer Arts Festival, Vancouver, BC, Canada, curated by Adwait Singh
warming the tones of our heart and spirit, Hypercity Augmented Reality Art Exhibition, Long Winter, Toronto, ON, Canada, curated by Mitra Fakhrahrافی
2021 *Not Your Family Whatsapp*, Coaxial Arts, Los Angeles, CA
On Power, in 20 Parts, Center for Artist Research and Tropical Contemporary, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
The Symbolists: Les Fleurs du Mal, HESSE FLATOW, New York, NY
The Algorithm and the Park, Pedion tou Areos, Ars Electronica Festival, Athens, Greece

- You and AI: Through the Algorithmic Lens*, Onassis Stegi, Athens, Greece
Your Flex-Friend, Danbo, YouAR Sculpture Shop, Museum of You, Toronto, ON, Canada, curated by Jeremy Bailey
2020 *Alquimia Rítmica/Rhythmic Alchemy*, Ruido/Noise, Austin, TX, curated by Vladimir Mejia
Moving Ether Way, Trinity Square Video, Toronto, ON, Canada
The Struggle for Change, Murmurs, Los Angeles, CA
zoonautic_crystal12!, Tropical Contemporary, Eugene, OR
2019 *On the Tip of My Tongue*, Carnation Contemporary, Portland, OR
2017 *An Elsewhere Within Here*, ACRE, Chicago, IL
The New Normal, The Hangar, UMAM Documentation & Research, Beirut, Lebanon
2016 *code/switch*, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL
Take this Gum And Stick It, Ellis King, Dublin, Ireland
2014 *Everything All At Once*, 15Folds, London, UK
DRONES, Ann Arbor Art Center, Ann Arbor, MI
Streetlight, Roman Susan Art Foundation, Chicago, IL
Systema, Zhulong Gallery, Dallas, TX
2013 *DRONES*, Eastern Market, Detroit, MI, curated by Gallery Project
Shura City, Murmuration: A Festival of Drone Culture, The State, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

PRESS

- 2023 Lewis-Joseph, Taelor. "This digital artform can bring dreams to life in no time flat". *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, May 17, 2023.
2022 Beard, Rowan. "How It's Made: Abra by Hiba Ali". *School of the Art Institute of Chicago*, Jan 12, 2022.
2021 Chan, Jennifer. "On Language, Technology, and Power". *Hyperallergic*, March 3, 2021.
Mendoza, Czarina. "Making the invisible visible in an Amazonified World: A conversation with artist Hiba Ali and Czarina Mendoza during a time of lockdown". *off centre*, October 22, 2021.
2020 Gomez, Mariana Muñoz. "Cluster XI Digital Edition – Online Festival". *Akimbo*, May 14, 2020.
Bielski, Annie. "Artist and educator Hiba Ali on reframing productivity". *The Creative Independent*, July 13, 2020.
2019 Dongus, Ariana. "Your Eyes Don't Lie". *NXS World*, April 2019.
Rozansky, Chelsea. "Autotheory". *C Magazine*, March 15, 2019.
McCracken, Henry. "Meet Peccy, the bizarre, beloved mascot you didn't know Amazon had". *Fast Company*, April 12, 2019.
2018 Hawbaker, KT. "Femme new media cause for 'Palpitations'". *Chicago Tribune*, January 18, 2018.
Fidler, Luke. "Between the Body and the Touchscreen: A Review of 'Murmurs and Palpitations: Her Environment #7' at TCC Gallery". *Newcity Art*, January 19, 2018.
Zeiba, Drew. "Hiba Ali Worked at an Amazon Fulfillment Center and Makes Art About it". *Vulture*, November 16, 2018.
2014 Stone, Mee-Lai. "Quick as a flash: the pioneers of animated art – in gifs". *The Guardian*, May 23, 2014.



Lullabies for tears, 2024, VR view, 07:07 looped

WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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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 inspire audiences of all ages. We have actively developed the careers of more than 2,000 women artists, presenting 343 visual art exhibitions, 166 music, dance and theater events, 31 spoken word and literary performances, 16 film festivals and 881 programs & education workshops with the goal of ensuring that diverse women artists are equitably represented in all forms of art. 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 42-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. In 2024, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired all 160 catalogs (digital and physical) produced by Women & Their Work to date. These publications, as well as all future catalogs, will be housed at their Thomas J. Watson Library, one of the largest art research libraries in the world.



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