

Press Release

Nour El Ain (العين نور)

Khalid Al Gharaballi
Sarah Benslimane
Azize Ferizi
Shamiran Istifan
Zeinab Saleh
Mina Squalli-Houssaïni

Curated by Mohamed Almusibli

06 February – 13 March 2021

Karma International is pleased to present *Nour el Ain*, a group exhibition curated by Mohamed Almusibli featuring works by Khalid al Gharaballi, Sarah Benslimane, Azize Ferizi, Shamiran Istifan, Zeinab Saleh and Mina Squalli-Houssaïni.

The title of the exhibition is taken from the 1997 album of Egyptian singer Amr Diab and his famous eponymous song *Nour el Ain* meaning "the apple of my eye" or "the glow in my eyes".

Habibi ya nour el ain, ya sakin khayali, My darling you are the glow in my eyes, you live in my imagination.

The same year as Diab's album release, 1997, another celebration of love took place in London. The wedding of artist Zeinab Saleh's close family, this private gathering can now be witnessed, with distance, through the artist's video piece *4 star wedding*. The video takes the form of a compilation of archive footage, self-shot from a family camcorder, with the addition of Mariah Carey's "The Impossible" now as the soundtrack. The video piece, much like Saleh's paintings, engages with senses of community. Inspired by VHS home-footage, Saleh's paintings translate this rich source. In a process of unearthing and translating, Saleh's work ends up as a pictorial conversation between whatever is most prominent in that particular moment: both within herself and the archive.

The gnosis of belonging in Saleh's practice is echoed in Mina Squalli-Houssaïni's sculptures *Our chimeras are meant to be*. Through her installations and soundtracks, Mina Squalli-Houssaïni uses symbols of intimacy, domesticity and nature. Here, three large scale insects dressed in traditional Algerian celebratory gowns seem to be talking to each other. The matrimonial figures of the mother, the aunty and the grandmother seem to carry a discussion we all can imagine too well. These sculptures exchanging and having an intimate discussion in the room evoke the unspoken societal rules of behaviors, the different codes and gestures that these gatherings hold.

Khalid al Gharaballi's large scale drawing entitled *Soft Image 1* are portraits of men from various Middle Eastern countries, where an often exaggerated performance of masculinity is the norm. In these drawings, the men are caught in a candid moment of vulnerability or open affection with their male friends, a fleeting moment where the performance of masculinity is forgotten. With protagonists participating in low stake scenarios, framed in well-defined geometric shapes against a blank background, in the shorthand manner of icons, stickers, hieroglyphs, or emojis.

Temporary physical spaces play a central role for Shamiran Istifan - and wedding gatherings signify the peak of it. Istifan's art practice focuses on the different layers of social dynamics, motivated by her personal experience. The cotton cloud with the tired swan, the pillow with the prayer written in Syriac and the sword, each revolve around the clash between community and expectations, intimacy and trust, dynamics and myths aiming toward the ultimate union - the wedding night.

Azize Ferizi's works delineate the gaps between what is considered a home and what is in reality a safe space. Her large-scale paintings in the exhibition such as *Lulija Jonë* and *Bedroom* are windows enabling the viewers to dive into these character's apprehensions and their family's expectations. Her sculpture *Djep*, an adult size cradle, resonates with the characters in her paintings, and questions the place we take in our surroundings. Her use of language and ubiquitous sayings in her new series of paintings "From Me To You" evoke a polite gift while keeping distance.

Sarah Benslimane's paintings question notions of truth and sincerity. In her pieces *Hope to hear from you soon* and *With love from Sarah*, the two monochromes, complimenting each other, navigate between affect and effect. Benslimane questions the reception of geometrical abstraction through a playful approach. Her flat, smooth and industrial-looking surfaces are in fact the result of a long artisanal process. This paradox between, on the one hand, the artist's physical, existential and manual involvement, and on the other hand, the artificial appearance of the objects she paints, is at the heart of her research. The writings become as much an ornamental motif as her pictural subjects. The paradox is seminal; converting geometric, authoritative forms into sensations, into feelings.

Mohamed Almusibli is based in Geneva where he co-founded and runs the art space Cherish together with James Bantone Ser Serpas and Thomas Liu Le Lann.