

Yumna Al-Arashi



ZHDK MFA 2022

Yumna Al-Arashi (1988) is an Arab-American artist currently living in Zürich. She received her BA at The New School in New York City and is currently completing her MFA at the Zurich University of the Arts.

Al-Arashi's practice is rooted in photography, filmmaking, and installation. Her works engage with notions of bodies in diaspora, often using subtle nuances to comment on the ways we consume images.

13769 / ملح (*degree work*)

2-Channel Video, Ceramic, Salt

In 2017, Al-Arashi's father was banned from entering the United States as a result of Executive Order 13769. As the migration crisis escalated, his ability to move freely dwindled simply for holding a Yemeni passport. Unable to travel to both the US and Europe, Al-Arashi began requesting her father mail her ceramic vessels, creating a physical exchange between two places and two people only possible by post.

13769 is an actively growing sculpture of a conversation between Al-Arashi and her father over distance and time. Upon receiving the handmade clay vessels, Al-Arashi activates and cleanses the porous objects with salt water, and with time, the objects transform. Since childhood, salt has played an important role in their family life, praised for its ability to cleanse negative energy. The action of her father sending the body-like objects becomes a protest of movement, and Al-Arashi's receiving, an act of care.

The pieces are accompanied by a two-channel film work which explores the movement of a body in a constant state of diaspora. The speculatively poetic film delicately traces notions which lead to a desired projection of oneself into an image.



Monograph (in progress)

Published by Edition Patrick Frey in 2023

Over the last year, I have been working on a project which reflects on my career as an image maker, stemming from a previous work, *Face*, in which I set out to document the last generation of women with facial tattoos in the Middle East and North Africa. While working on the project in 2017, my family was banned from the country I grew up in as part of a wave of xenophobic border controls throughout the Western world. The project travels through time, weaving my personal experiences post-9/11 together with my family's history. It departs from a traditional documentary project to critically reflect on imperialist translations of history, as well as the decolonization of my own gaze. I reflect on the loss of indigenous traditions within my lineage, as well as within the region and diaspora at large.

The book is set to be published in 2023 by Edition Patrick Frey.



Locusts, 2021 (in progress)

3D Printed Drones, Metal Structure, 235 x 350cm

Alexander Calder's mobile structures represent an icon of the art world, found in almost every major art institution worldwide. Another icon, arms manufacturing, is far less known or spoken about. Al-Arashi confronts the tension between a young Arab artist's ambitions of inclusivity while simultaneously holding knowledge of the blood money behind it which continuously fuels war efforts in her ancestral homelands.

Using 3-D printed scale models of the MQ-9 Reaper, an American combat drone often used for combat and surveillance in Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia, Al-Arashi replicates the dreamy and iconic flying works of Calder to remind viewers of the problematic ties behind the arts industry and arms productions.

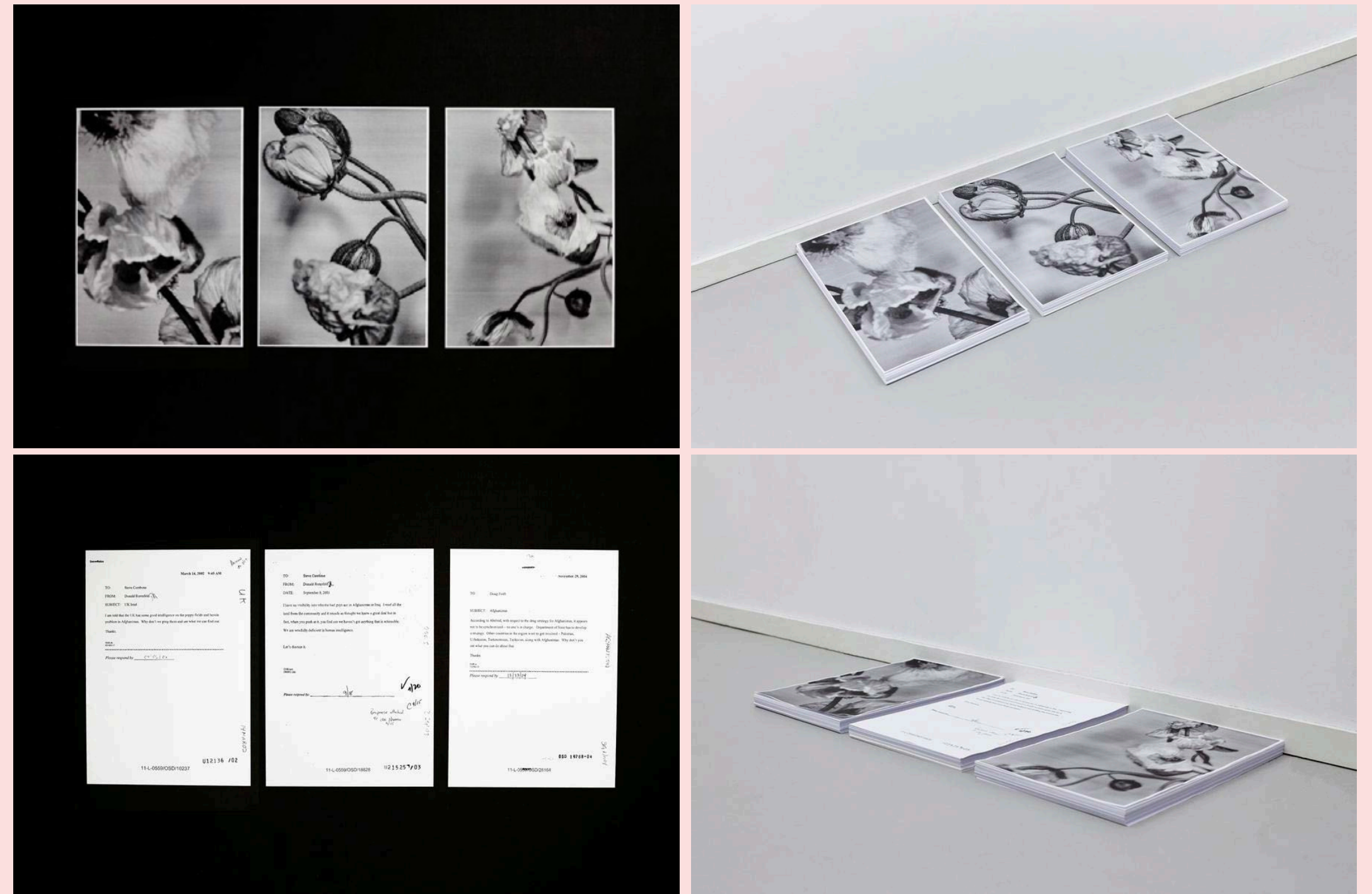


Lessons Learned, 2021

A3 Xerox Copy Paper

Lessons Learned is part of an on-going investigation into the United States' involvement in the so-called 'War on Terror'. Correspondence from Donald Rumsfeld's desk in The White House during the early years of the US-led Afghan invasion are printed on the back of photographs of poppy flowers printed on A3 copy paper. The papers are printed in stacks and are free for viewers to take with them.

As the world's largest exporter of Opium, Afghanistan's poppy fields are often an illusive symbol of the war. The artist questions the credibility of the US government's motives for war, unravelling the deception and illusion used to deter public outcry in an on-going conflict, and the extent to which players concealed the true severity of their irresponsibility within decades of on going wars.



Opacity, 2021

Digital HD video (bw, no sound, loop)

20:50 min

In 1990, Édouard Glissant published the monumental text, *Poetics of Relation*, where he explored the concept of opacity. Glissant, born in French-occupied Martinique and raised in France, demands the right to opacity; the right to difference, and the right to not conform to singularity in identity. Glissant states: *The oppressed—which have historically been constructed as the Other—can and should be allowed to be opaque, to not be completely understood, and to simply exist as different.*

Relating heavily to the words of Glissant, I filmed a performance where the viewer is an active participant and the work is opaque enough for the flexibility of opacity to inhibit them. I paint a barrier between myself and the viewer, a means to create privacy and protection, which I then immediately dissolve. The performance lasts 20 minutes, eventually getting so messy between building barriers and desiring clarity that opacity becomes the only option.

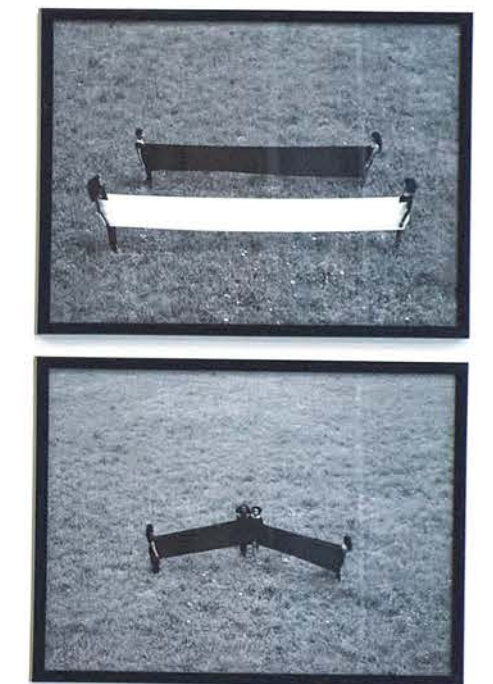
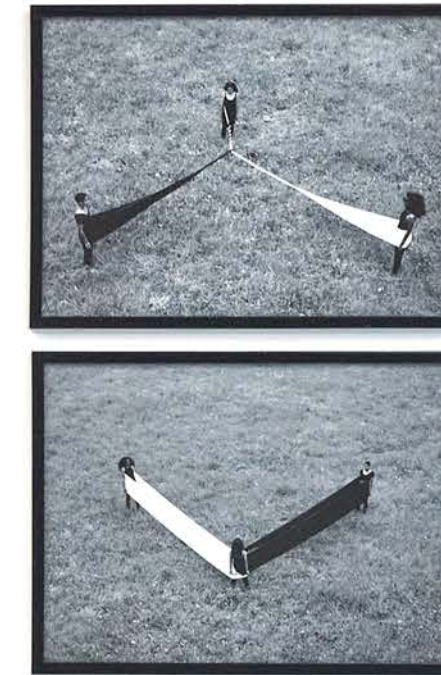
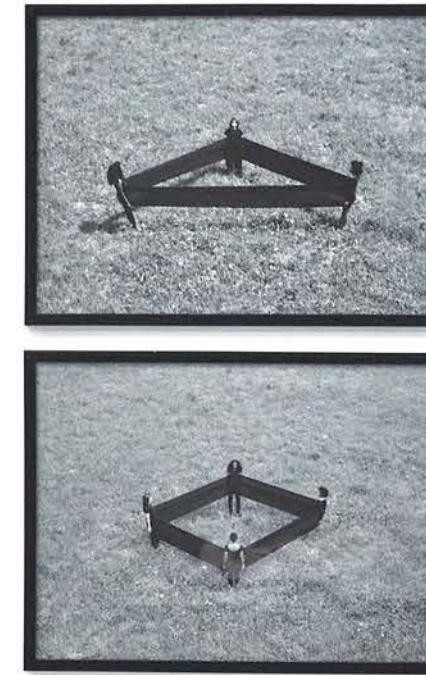
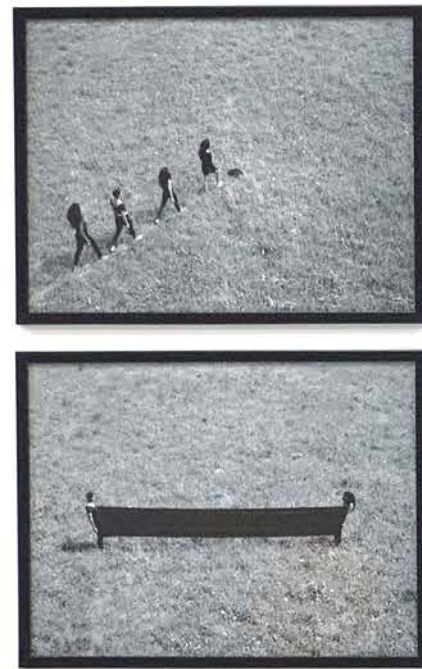
The physical projection of the film acts as a portal or a window, allowing the viewer to become a part of the performance itself as a voyeur, a spectator. The lack of sound emphasizes space between myself and the viewer.



Ad Infinitum, 2021

C-Print Photographs

A re-imagining and appropriation of works by Franz Erhard Walther using women of colour in various formations of solidarity.



Proof of Life, 2021

Commissioned by The Slow Factory

Video, 4:20 min

A poem tracing the notions of time and movement within the discomforts of the digital age.



Thread, 2020

Twenty-Five Hand-Printed Photographs on Archival Paper

This work was made shortly after moving to Switzerland during the pandemic. It became a meditative practice to find familiarity within an unfamiliar landscape.



Yumna Al-Arashi (b. 1988) is an artist currently residing in Zürich.

EDUCATION

2020-2022 MFA, Zürich University of the Arts, Switzerland

2011 Bachelor of Liberal Arts, The New School, New York City

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2020 I Am Who I Am Who Am I, Anahita Contemporary, Berlin

2017 Shedding Skin, The Hole Gallery, New York City

2017 Shedding Skin, Jason Vass Gallery, Los Angeles

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS / SCREENINGS

2022 The Revolution Is A School, MoMA PS1, New York

2021 Library of Alexandria, Rindermarkt, Zürich

2021 The Calm Before The Storm, NEST Gallery, Zürich

2021 Capture Photography Festival, Mount Pleasant Art Screen, Vancouver

2020 European Month of Photography, Studio 4, Berlin

2019 Women in Windows, Shedding Skin, Chung King Gallery, Los Angeles

2018 Tribeca Film Festival, Rituals: The 99 Names of God, New York City

2018 Face, Arab Women Artists Now, Rich Mix, London

2017 Women In Film, Shedding Skin, The Roxy Cinema, New York City

2017 Identiad, Shedding Skin, Squash 73, Mexico City

2017 ICP - International Center of Photography, Projected: Face, New York City
2017 Behind The Portrait, Face, Gulf Photo Plus, Dubai

2017 Feminisms x Arab Muslim Diaspora, Protein Studios, London

2016 Annenberg Space For Photography, GirlGaze, Los Angeles

2016 Her Room, Junior High, Los Angeles

2015 Permanent Collection, US Embassy in Sana'a, Yemen

2015 Signed for Syria, Protein Studios, London

2015 Permanent Collection, Visual Supply Co., Oakland, California

2015 I Am Not A Machine, VSCO, Photoville, New York City

2014 Northern Yemen, Los Angeles Art Book Fair, Los Angeles

2013 Milk Studios, Milk Made, New York City

2013 Discovering Yemen, Gulf Photo Plus, Dubai

SELECTED WRITING

2020 Why Do We Judge Creative Decisions as Simply Good or Bad? It's Nice That

2019 The Image of The Woman, Mixed Feelings, Naomi Shimada + Sarah Raphael, Quadrille Books

2019 On Racism And Revenge, I Will Not Be Erased, Gal-Dem, Walker Books

2018 Finding Home, Lindsay Magazine, Issue No. 1

SELECTED AWARDS, GRANTS, RESIDENCIES

2020 MONTAÑAS, AICP Shortlist

2019 Decelerator Program @ Strange Found, Artist in Residence, Catskills, New York

2018 N.O.W. Award, The 99 Names of God, Tribeca Film Festival, New York City

2017 Magnum Foundation Fund Nominee

2017 Shortlist, London National Portrait Gallery, Taylor Wessing Portrait Prize

2017 ASOS Supports Talent Grant

2017 International Women's Media Foundation, Women's Stories Grant

2016 Arab Fund for Arts and Culture Grant

2016 30 Under 30 Women Photographers, Photo Boîte

2015 VSCO Artist Initiative Grant

2014 US Department of State, Art In Embassies

PUBLIC SPEAKING / TEACHING

2019 - 2020 Lecturer, University of the Arts, London

2020 Visiting Lecturer, Falmouth University, United Kingdom

2019 International Photography Festival, Olten, Switzerland

2019 NOWNESS panel discussion, Somerset House, London

2019 Censorship in the Arts, The Space, Birmingham

2019 Visiting Lecturer, University of Creative Arts, Rochester, United Kingdom

2019 Study Hall - The Slow Factory, Central Saint Martins, London

2019 On Representation, It's Nice That, London

2019 Documentary and Citizenship, University of South Wales and National Museum of Cardiff:

The European Centre for Documentary Research Conference, United Kingdom

2018 IN FOCUS: Women in Photography, ICP/ Reuter's, London

2018 Art in the Digital Age, AAMPE, Google Headquarters London

2018 Photography's MeToo Movement, Frontline Club, London

2017 Today at Apple, Apple, London

2015 VSCO's Artist Initiative conference, San Francisco

2013 Gulf Photo Plus Slidefest IX "Discovering Yemen"

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

US Embassy in Sana'a, Yemen

Visual Supply Co., Oakland, California

SELECTED PRESS

Yumna Al-Arashi Is Upending the Stereotypes

That Shackle Muslim Women, Artsy

Seeking Action — Not Just Talk — About

Diversity in Photojournalism, New York Times

Yumna Al-Arashi, Künstlerin, RBB Kultur Radio

Parting Shots, CNN

Northern Yemen Under The Veil, Fisheye Magazine

Shedding Skin, Vogue Magazine

Voices of Change - The All Women Issue,

Huck Magazine

Fading tradition of female facial tattoos in

Middle East and North Africa, CNN

I Am Who I Am Who Am I, Zeit Magazin

A Photographer Honors Her Great-

Grandmother And The Traditional Art Of Face

Tattoos, HuffPost

Matriarchal Lines In Muslim Communities

Explored By Yumna Al-Arashi, Ignant

Yumna Al-Arashi captures the last generation

of Muslim women with facial tattoos, It's Nice

That

These Photographs Are Preserving the

Vanishing Tradition of Female Facial Tattoos,

Artsy

Projected, International Centre For

Photography

Shedding Skin, Index

Yumna Al-Arashi talks identity, art and the

importance of the female gaze, Azeema

Magazine

😊 *thank you* 😊
