

SAMAH SHIHADI

BERLIN DIARY



VANSPIJK

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Van Spijk Art Books



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BERLIN DIARY

LAURA CHERRIE BEANEY

Tabari Artspace Art Gallery, Dubai

WERNER VAN DEN BELT

Artistic Director Stedelijk Museum Vianen

Her work intertwines collective concerns relating to land, belonging, nostalgia, and tradition with issues of gender, the body, feminism, and assimilation that tend to arise in contemporary critical discourse.

An individual lodged between worlds, Samah Shihadi's art transcends boundaries, speaking from a multitude of places. As a Palestinian residing in Haifa, Samah embodies dual marginality, belonging to the Arab minority in Israel – a community of Israeli citizens rooted in Palestinian heritage, characterised by their diverse affiliations and social identities.

Her art is inseparable from the historical narrative of her ancestors, who were displaced from the western Galilee village of Mi'ar, razed in 1948. Her family found refuge in neighbouring villages, with her mother's side settling temporarily in Sakhnin and her father's family relocating to the Galilee town of Sha'ab. Samah was later born and raised in Sha'ab; she went on to study at Oranim Academic College of Education and then at Haifa University. She continues to live and work in Haifa today.

Manoeuvring between cultures and contexts, Samah's drawings occupy a liminal space. She operates a space between classical-figurative realism, compelled to document and preserve, and surrealism, which is both personal and fantastical. It's work that reflects her quest to make sense of the world while harbouring a sense of exile within her own country.

Equally inseparable from her art is her personal experience as a Palestinian woman existing in Israel. Her work intertwines collective concerns relating to land, belonging, nostalgia, and tradition with issues of gender, the body, feminism, and assimilation that tend to arise in contemporary critical discourse. Her compositions, then, derail straightforward assumptions about identity.

We could be heroes*

In 2023 Samah received an invitation from Jeroen Dijkstra at the Livingstone Gallery in The Hague to take up a three-month residency at the Livingstone Projects studio in Berlin.

During this period, she produced a new body of work that unfolded much like a diary. Her earlier memories – the familiar landscapes portraying the land of origin of her grandparents in Mi'ar – were blended with new ones. The residency prompted a new series capturing the essence of other villages in the Mi'ar region, which had faced destruction in 1948 – Khirbat Jiddah, Al Bassa, and Dair Al-Qassi. The landscapes are recognisable and the ruins offer a reminder of turmoil on once fertile land. There is, however, no overt activism or confrontation here. Instead, Samah opts for a different path – that of empathy and communication.

One can almost smell her delicately rendered fruit, vegetables, and herbs; the aroma of the thyme and fig leaves that have risen amidst the wreckage. For those existing in exile, the connection to the land is an intimate one. Through her depictions, Samah keeps alive the existences, customs, and culture of her ancestors revived against the backdrop of the disappearing villages of Palestine.

Collapsing past into present, Samah's artistic diary concludes with a farewell to Berlin, sketching herself on the historically significant Bösebrücke bridge. Liminal spaces, whether

borders or bridges hold significance. In this instance, it is evoked by the fact that this particular bridge was the first to open when the Berlin Wall fell, forming a metaphor for transition and connection.

AGERE. AVT. PATI. FORTIORA

At the studio in Berlin, Samah was able to broaden her horizons and, at the same time, make her work more personal, less ambivalent. Later, her work arrived at the right place, presented at Stedelijk Museum in Vianen. At the time when the Netherlands was overtaken by the occupying Spanish army, Vianen represented a stronghold of freedom and tolerance. The (Latin) motto of Hendrik van Brederode, the first freedom fighter of The Netherlands, illustrates that freedom is never self-evident. It literally means: 'one must act or endure worse.'

Hendrik tied the development of a sovereign state to the principle of separation of church and state and made it independent of the automatic succession to the throne. He was tolerant towards immigrants and followers of other religions. Unfortunately, understanding and rapprochement did not lead to the envisioned results. Due to the dogmatic implementation of religious differences, conflicts were provoked.

The intersection of art, religion, and power is characterised by opposing agendas. While art seeks unity, religion and power tend to divide.



How difficult it must be for Samah then, to develop a visual language that is not dismissed as a compromise but interpreted as her path, one that is often subject to opposing forces. Her Berlin diary formed a personal quest towards common ground.

The bridge that appears in Samah's final work from Berlin serves as a metaphor – a site of

transition and in-betweenness, yet also a unifying force capable of bridging opposing ideologies. Rather than relying upon grand narratives, Samah shares small, intimate stories – capturing the essence of being human with desires, doubts, wishes, and shortcomings. The recognisable imagery she constructs is abstract enough that it might resonate across borders.

* We could be heroes. David Bowie wrote 'Heroes' in 1977 for his eponymous album. He recorded the song at the Hansa Studios which were less than five hundred meters from the Berlin Wall. This wall was the result of the Cold War which divided Berlin in a Western European and an Eastern European part. The song is about love being stronger than political differences: I can remember / Standing by the wall / And the guns shot above our heads / And we kissed as though nothing could fall / And the shame was on the other side / Oh we can beat them for ever and ever / Then we can be "Heroes" / Just for one day





SAMANTH 2023





18 **Mi'ar**, 2023, charcoal on paper, 70 x 100 cm

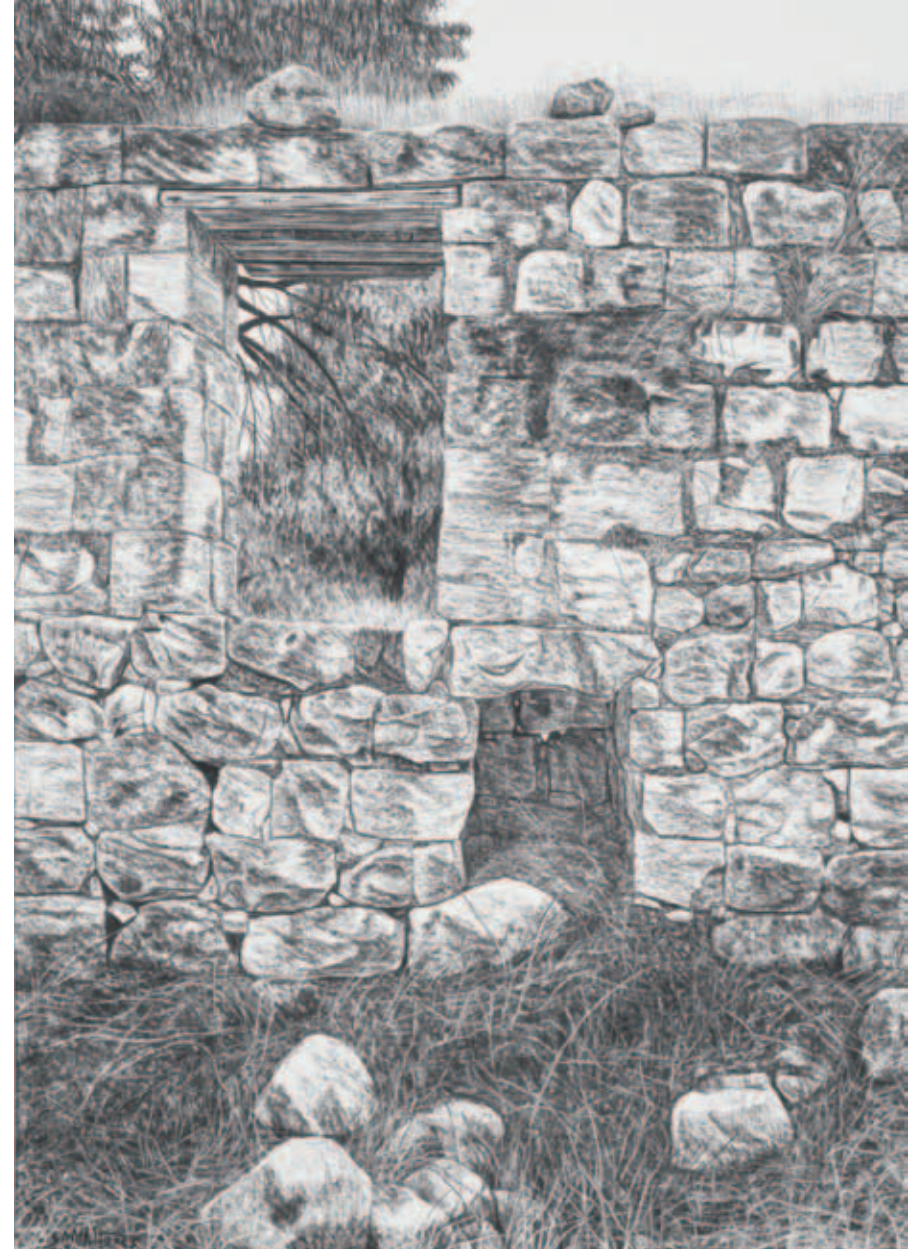
<< **Mi'ar** (p.10-17) detail























ROOTS

AUTHOR

Curator

Homesickness, or perhaps more a yearning for a lost home, is a significant theme in the burgeoning oeuvre of Samah Shihadi.

She uses graphite and charcoal to paint subjects including vegetables, fruit and herbs. Motifs such as thyme and fig leaves are not selected by chance: these are common products in Palestine. At first glance, the works appear to be exquisite botanical renderings. But closer inspection is accompanied by a rising sense of nostalgia. This sensation is intensified by Shihadi's sombre use of colour, which is reminiscent of old black-and-white photographs. And with photographic precision, Shihadi raises cooking and eating together to ritual heights. The dinner table serves as an anchor for families as they reminisce, using food, fragrances and tastes to keep their history alive. Away from the kitchen, Shihadi also draws narratives of the present and past.

Shihadi's landscapes pay homage to birthplaces of generations ago. The artist took photographs of what she encountered as she travelled through deserted regions, and these images are transformed into monumental drawings, occasionally featuring members of her family.



Mansaf, 2018, charcoal on paper, 40 x 33 cm

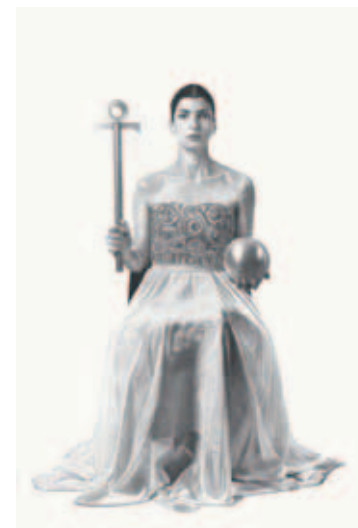
And sometimes only stony ruins, relics of old buildings. Shihadi's (grand)parents were from Mi'ar, and could never return to their village after it was destroyed in circa 1948. The native cactus, prickly but strong, is a recurring subject in Shihadi's work. The plant grows where the houses once stood of a community now scattered around the world. And for many Palestinians, the cactus is linked to their identity; symbolic of patience and resistance.

Nevertheless, Palestinian traditions are at risk of being forgotten in the diaspora. Shihadi appears to want to use her art to enrich the collective memory. She preserves cultural customs for the



future, reserving a lead role for women as bearers of family traditions and cultural heritage. In some of her works, Shihadi portrays her mother and sister in the domestic domain, sovereign in a patriarchal society controlled by men. These women's activities appear practical and earthly, guided by the everyday.

There is also a feminist slant to Shihadi's drawings. She uses metaphorical symbols to enshroud other – visibly independent – female figures in her work in surreal atmospheres. In part inspired by classical tarot cards and astrology, Shihadi mythologises the woman in a series of mystical self-portraits. The artist portrays herself as Lady Justice, a high priestess or an empress. Stately and powerful. With attributes such as a sword and scales, borrowed from Western legal symbology dating back to Roman times. Or with a Coptic cross, the sign of life stemming from Ancient Egypt. The woman here has an inviolable, almost supernatural status. She has a magical identity, which transcends religion and background. Which transcends history itself. Without a home, suspended in an empty universe, she was always destined to assume her rightful position.



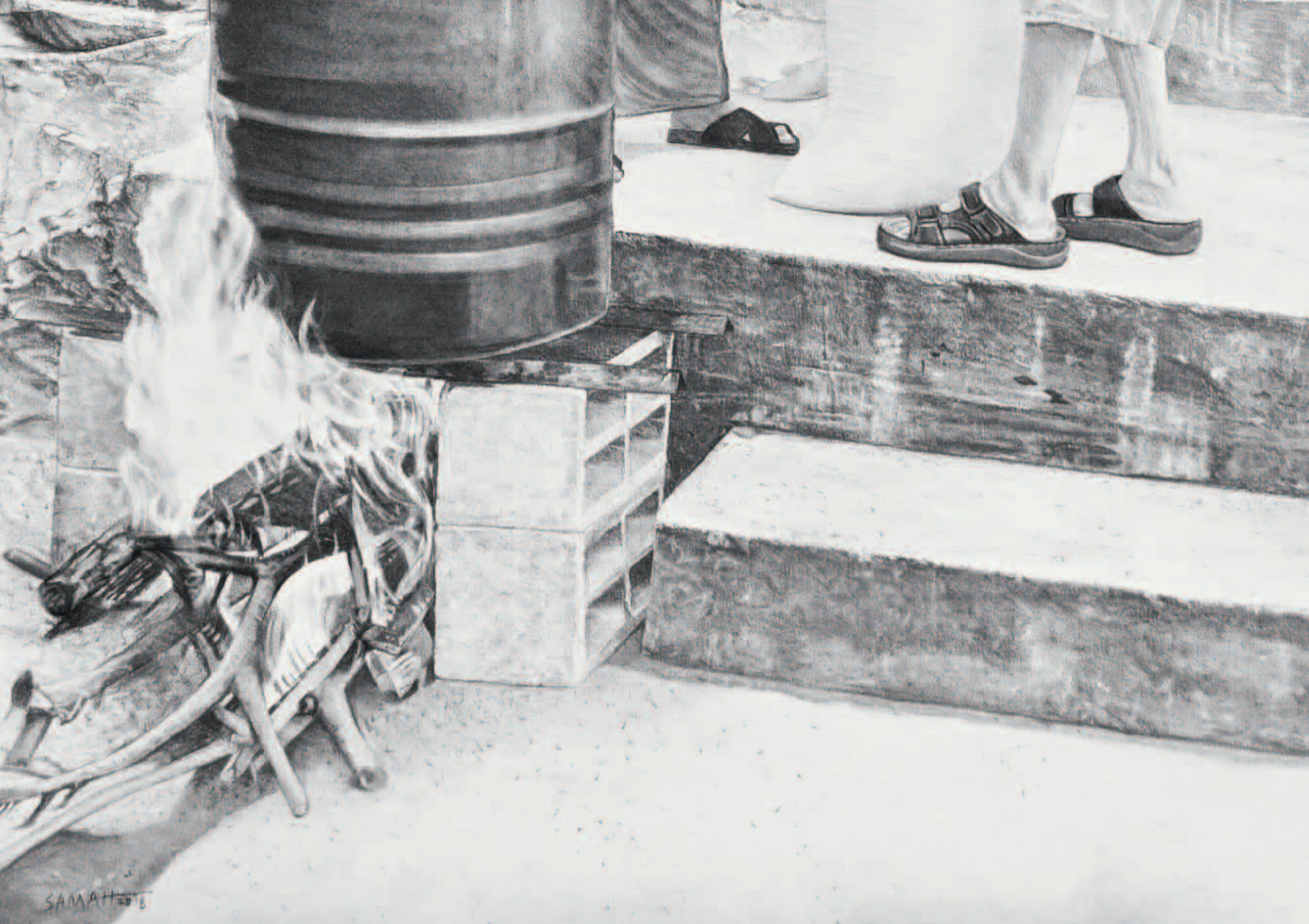


46 **Titel I**, 2022, charcoal on paper, ? x ? cm

<< **Titel I**, (p.44-45) detail







SAMAH 2018



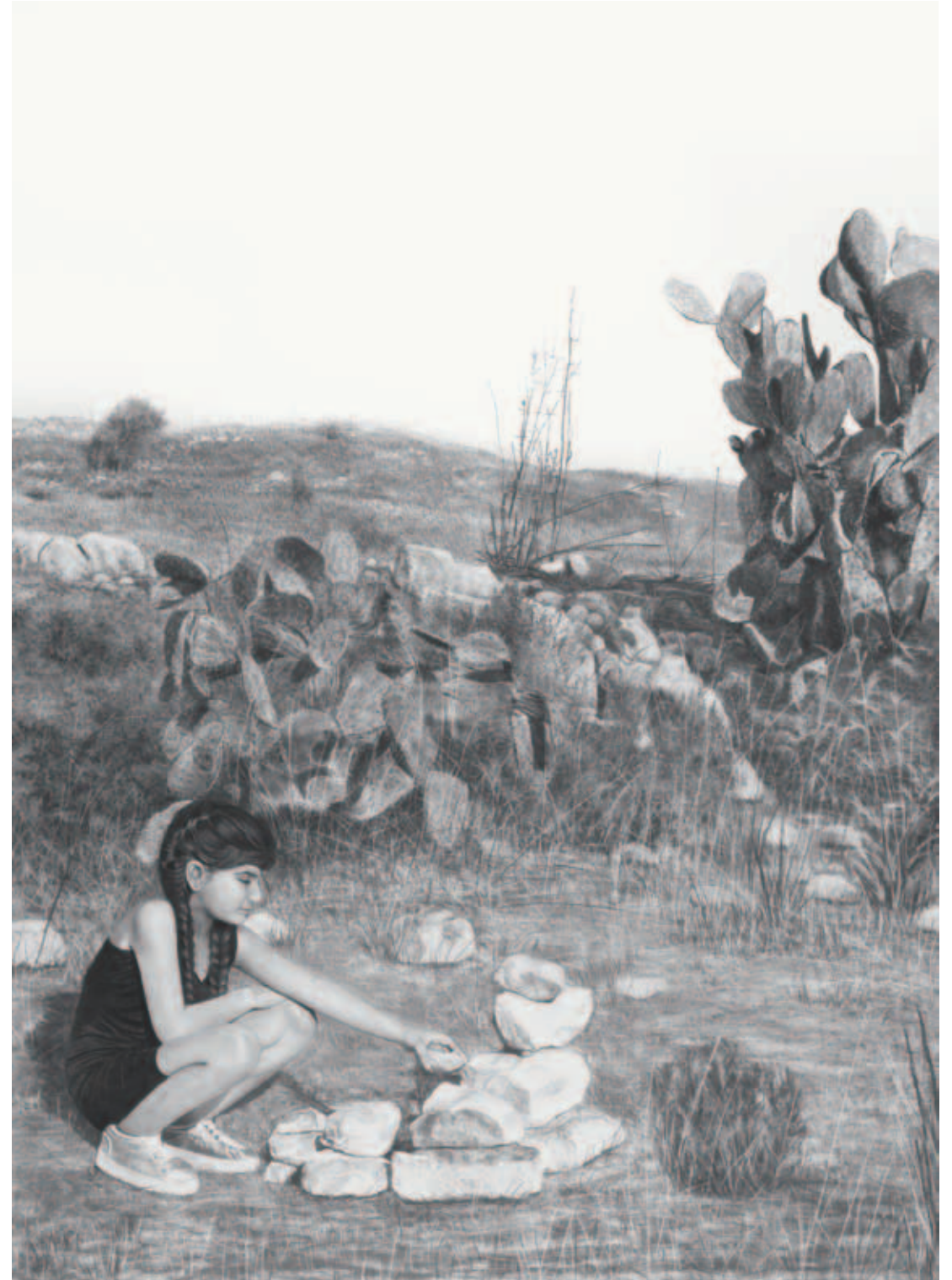
54 **Titel III**, 2022, charcoal on paper, ? x ? cm

> **Mansaf**, 2018, charcoal on paper, 40 x 33 cm



- 56 **Cooking series**, 2018, charcoal on paper, 48 x 33 cm
> **Cooking series**, 2018, charcoal on paper, 60 x 40 cm





60 **A bundle from Home / Bukhje**, 2018, charcoal on paper, 50 x 65 cm



61 **Hanging series**, 2018, charcoal on paper, 48 x 33 cm















74 **Untitled**, 2020, charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm



75 **Justice**, 2021, charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm









82 **Four elements**, 2022, charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm
At the crossroads, 2022, charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm ?????



83 **The sixth sense**, 2022, charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm ?????



84 **Titel IV**, 2022, charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm ?????



85 **The hunter**, 2022, charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm





88 **Titel II**, 2022, charcoal on paper, ? x ? cm

<< **Titel II** (86-87) detail



BERLIN DIARY

Berlin Diary contains all works made in Berlin and presented at Stedelijk Museum Vianen

ROOTS

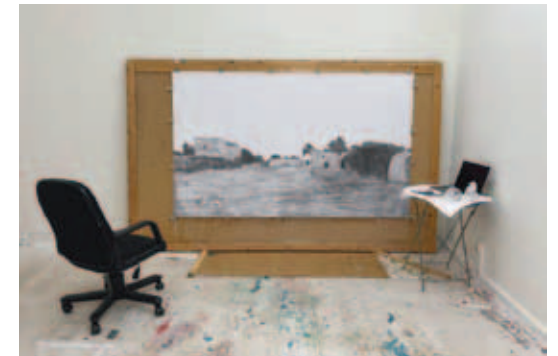
Roots presents all works selected for the first exhibition of Samah Shihadi in The Netherlands at Museum MORE

BIOGRAPHY SAMAH SHIHADI

Samah Shihadi draws inspiration from her family's experiences, navigating the traumatic history of the Palestinian people and their traditions. Using hyperrealism as her chosen medium, she delves into issues surrounding identity, her society, and the political realities that shape her world.

Shihadi's delicate drawings, made with great precision touch on topics central to contemporary art and offer a pronouncement and visual report that fluctuates between the internal, personal, social and cultural. Her drawings, created in a slow, meticulous, and prolonged work process, also evoke a sense of urgency and immediacy regarding subjects in the here and now: the status of women in society, tradition and religious belief versus social and political reality, and local landscapes charged with history.

Shihadi holds an M.F.A. from the University of Haifa and a B.Ed. in art from Oranim Academic College of Education. A recipient of multiple awards, Shihadi has showcased her work extensively, internationally. Her work has been collected by institutions including LACMA Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Khirbat Jiddin #1 in progress at Studio Livingstone Projects Berlin

SAMAH SHIHADI

1987 SHA'AB, ISRAEL

LIVES AND WORKS IN HAIFA, ISRAEL

EDUCATION**2013- 2015**

- M.F.A. The Art Department, Haifa University

2008 - 2012

- B.ED. Art & Education, Oranim College

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

- 2023 • Livingstone Projects Berlin, International Studio & Presentation Program
- 2022 • Excellency Award, Association for Women's Art and Gender Research in Israel
- 2018 • Haim Shiff Prize for Figurative-Realistic Art
 - Pais Culture Council Support in Exhibition and Catalog
- 2016 • Ismail Shammout Award in Fine Art
- 2015 • Young Award, Ministry of Culture & Sport
 - Excellency Award, Haifa University
- 2014 • Promising Artists, Galilee Paint Art Fair
- 2013 • Pais Culture Council Support in Exhibition and Catalog
- 2012 • Excellency Award, Oranim College

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2023 • *Berlin Diary*, Stedelijk Museum Vianen, The Netherlands
 - *Roots*, Museum MORE, The Netherlands
- 2020 • *Terra (Un)firma*, Tabari Artspace, Dubai, UAE
- 2019 • *Spellbound*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel
 - *The way home*, Wilfrid Israel Museum, HaZore'a, Israel
- 2018 • *Hungry for Home*, Tabari Artspace, Dubai, UAE
- 2015 • Machanayim Art Gallery, Mahanayim, Israel
 - *Wanted*, Umm El Fahem Art Gallery, Umm el Fahem, Israel

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 • *Back to Berlin*, Livingstone Gallery The Hague, The Netherlands
- 2023 • LACMA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, USA
- 2022 • *Volta Art Fair*, Basel, Switzerland
 - *Ecmnesia*, Cosmo, Rome, Italy
 - *Food Weave*, Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel
- 2021 • *The Haifa Way*, Haifa Museum of Art, Haifa, Israel
 - *1+1*, Payramida Gallery, Haifa, Israel
 - *Breathing*, Mishkenot Shaanaim, Jerusalem, Israel
 - *Inside/Out*, Contemporary Art Platform (CAP), Kuwait
- 2020 • *Abu Dhabi Art (Fair)*, Abu Dhabi
 - *Bodyscapes*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
- 2019 • *Objects of imagination*, Jordan National Gallery, Jordan
 - *Family stories*, Kunstmuseum Bochum, Bochum, Germany
 - *Beyond the veil*, Memoire de L'avenir Gallery, Paris, France
 - *Our permanent guardian*, Yasser Arafat Museum, Ramallah, Palestine
 - *Belonging*, Dubai design district, Dubai

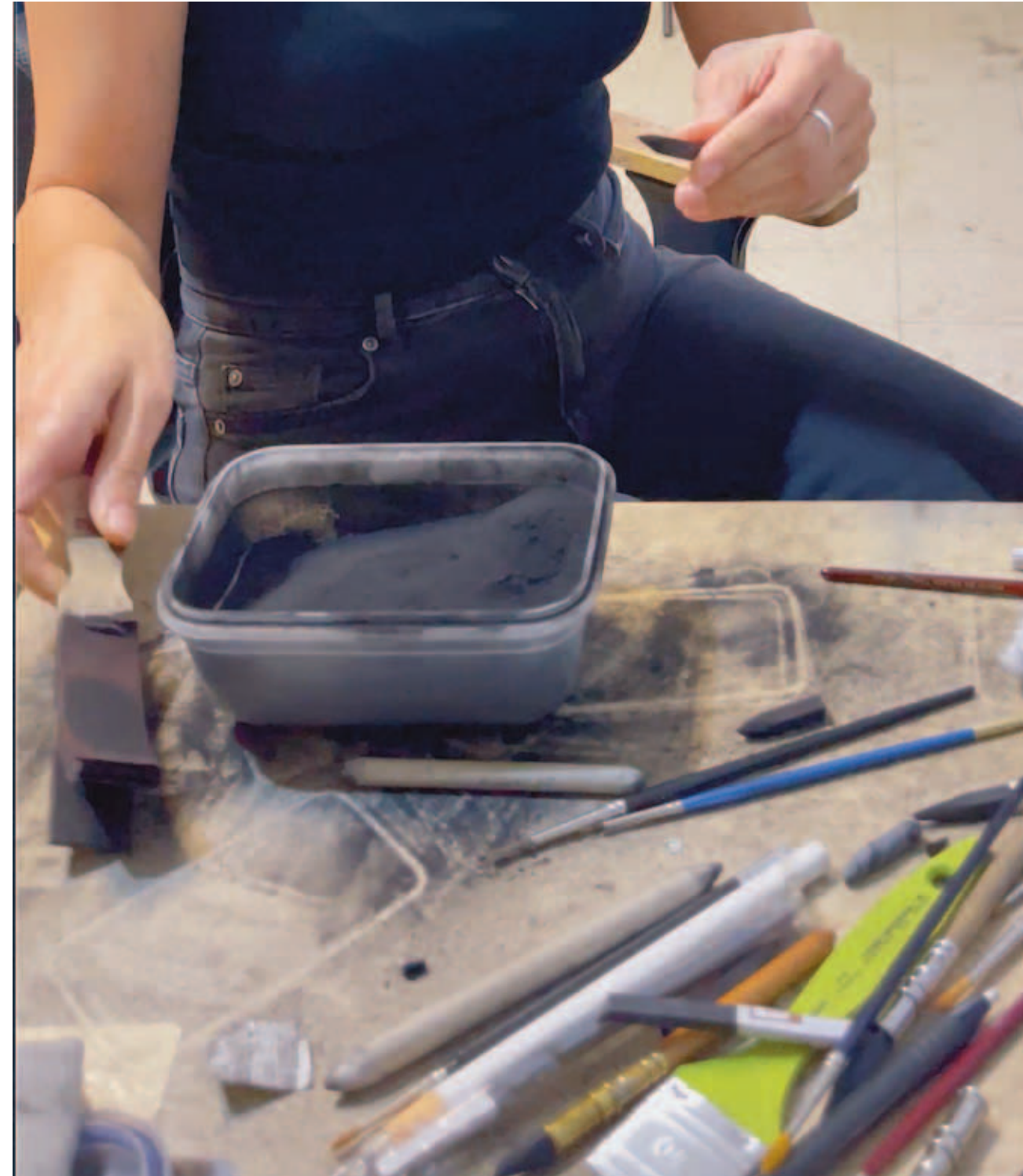


Roots, Museum MORE, The Netherlands, 2023



Berlin Diary, Stedelijk Museum Vianen, The Netherlands, 2023

- "1948", Haifa City Museum, Haifa, Israel
- *Limit less*, The gallery at the walled off hotel, Bethlehem, Israel
- 2018 • *Khamsa*, Islamic Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
- *Art Dubai* 2018, Dubai
- *House.....Houses*, The gallery at the walled off hotel, Bethlehem, Israel
- *Motion trap*, Idris Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel
- 2017 • *A sight of disjunction*, Manjmi Haifa Culture Lab, Haifa, Israel
- *A sight of disjunction*, Beit saa, Ramallah, Palestine
- *Hamsin*, the collaborative art center, Givat Haviva, Israel
- *Third Identity*, Contemporary Art Platform (CAP), Kuwait
- 2016 • *Head & tails*, Binyamin Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel
- *Roots of identity*, Art on 56th Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
- *Paper Biennale 6*, Artists' House, Jerusalem, Israel
- *The winners: Ministry of Culture and Sport Prizes for Art and Design*, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Herzliya, Israel
- *Zoom 2016*, Ticho House, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
- *Palestine format actuel*, Mac.A Expo2, Asilah, Morocco
- *The identity of the Palestinian Artist*, Umm El Fahem Art Gallery, Umm el Fahem, Israel
- *Fresh Paint 8*, Tel Aviv Port, Tel Aviv, Israel
- *Durability*, Dar Al-Kalima University College of Art and Culture, Bethlehem, Israel
- *Crossroads*, Zawyeh Gallery, Ramallah, Palestine
- 2015 • *Spots and Signatures*, Sister House, Tel Aviv, Israel
- *Spots and Signatures*, The House of Culture & Art, Nazareth, Israel
- *Bread and Roses 10*, Shenkar College, Ramat Gan, Israel
- *We will see the Other Days*, Gabirol Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel
- *Personal to the Bone*, The House of Culture & Art, Nazareth, Israel
- *Graduate Exhibition (MFA)*, Haifa University, Haifa, Israel
- *Palestinian Artists Exhibition*, HerzLilienblum Museum, Tel Aviv "Similarity", Hecht Museum, Haifa, Israel
- 2014 • *Bread and Roses 9*, Kastiel as is, Tel Aviv, Israel
- *Galilee Paint 2*, Ort School, Tiberias, Israel
- *Combination*, The House of Culture & Art, Nazareth, Israel
- *Contact*, Hecht Museum, Haifa Paper Work, Mofet Institute, Tel Aviv, Israel
- 2012 • *Low Tech*, Wadi Gallery, Haifa, Israel
- *Log in log out*, Beit Hagefen Gallery, Haifa, Israel
- *Bread and Roses 7*, Minshar School of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel
- *Graduate Exhibition (B.ED)*, Oranim College, Tivon, Israel



TEXT

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Samah Shihadi, *New World*, 2023
 charcoal on paper, 70 x 100 cm

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TABARI
 ARTSPACE



SAMAH SHIHADI

BERLIN DIARY

In 2023 Samah received an invitation from Jeroen Dijkstra at the Livingstone Gallery in The Hague to take up a three-month residency at the Livingstone Projects studio in Berlin. During this period, she produced a new body of work that unfolded much like a diary. Her earlier memories – the familiar landscapes portraying the land of origin of her grandparents in Mi'ar – were blended with new ones.

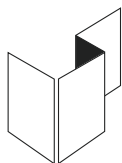
The residency prompted a new series capturing the essence of other villages in the Mi'ar region, which had faced destruction in 1948 – Khirbat Jiddah, Al Bassa, and Dair Al-Qassi. The landscapes are recognisable and the ruins offer a reminder of turmoil on once fertile land. There is, however, no overt activism or confrontation here. Instead, Samah opts for a different path – that of empathy and communication.

By not focussing on polarisation but instead making us aware of the beauty of the landscape, of old memories and new memories still to be made, Shihadi takes an important step as a human being and as an artist towards all of us, indifferent to background or religion.

The artwork that concluded her stay in Berlin signifies her approach to art and the position art takes in society. In this drawing she situates herself crossing the bridge which first opened when the Berlin Wall fell, reconnecting East with West. This image radiates hope and trust towards the future.

Werner van den Belt
Artistic Director Stedelijk Museum Vianen

Laura Cherrie Beaney
Tabari Artspace Art Gallery, Dubai



**VAN SPIJK
ART BOOKS**