SHERIN GUIRGUIS

Of Thorns and Love

September 30, 2018 – January 6, 2019

Organized by the
CRAFT & FOLK ART MUSEUM
los angeles

Curated by Holly Jerger

Sponsored by the
Fellows of Contemporary Art

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Foreword

Suzanne Isken, CAFAM Executive Director

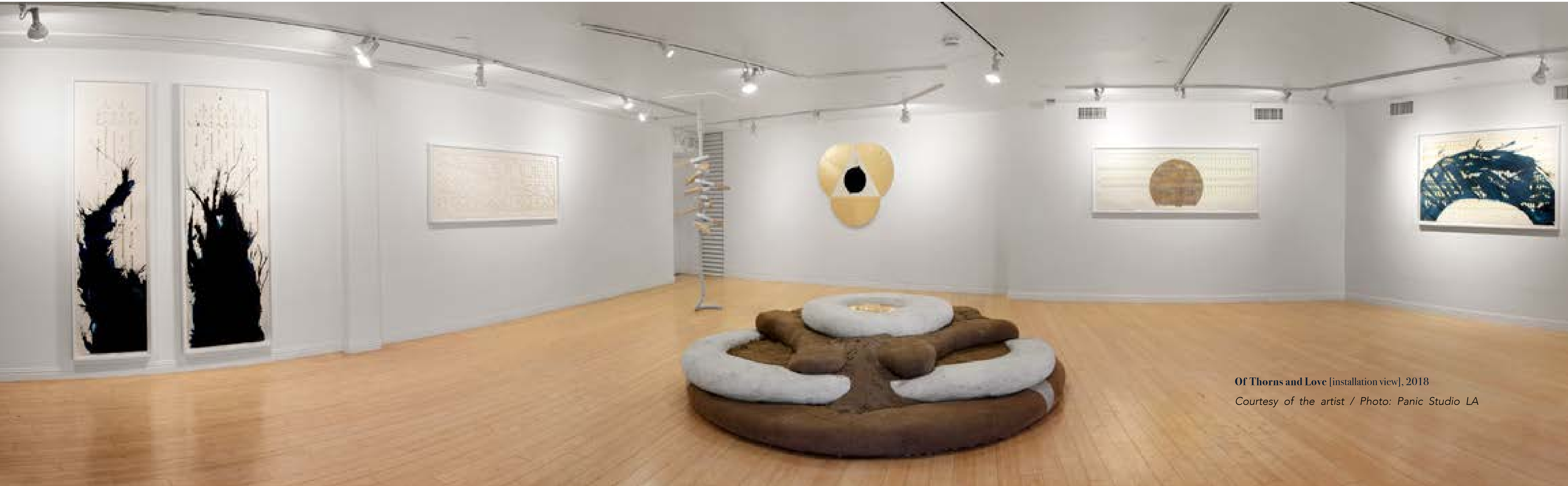
Sherin Guirguis seems to rejoice in the human touch, utilizing multiple techniques and media to tell a story. When I first encountered her work, I was struck by the way she elegantly merged the concepts of contemporary art with the hand of traditional craft. I was further impressed with how her choice of materials and technical skills defy predictability. I am thrilled that the Craft & Folk Art Museum (CAFAM) has the great honor of presenting Guirguis's first solo museum exhibition, *Sherin Guirguis: Of Thorns and Love.*

Guirguis is an important Los Angeles-based artist who was born in Luxor, Egypt and raised in Cairo, but relocated to the United States at age fourteen. Her studio practice is sourced from the cultural navigation between these two worlds, and her use of craft processes and materials creates a very personal relationship between herself as the narrator and the wider audience.

Though Guirguis often produces large-scale, paper-cut paintings, the works in this exhibition are smaller and lend an intimacy to her subject: the life and suppressed history of Egyptian feminist and activist Doria Shafik (1908–1975). Though Shafik's legacy has been deeply undermined by generations of Egyptian leadership, with this exhibition Guirguis gives Shafik a place: in history, in memory, and in the physical sites Shafik occupied. These works gently remind us of the possibility of social and political change, even when the sacrifices are almost unbearable. Through Guirguis's skillful devotion to her subject matter, we come to understand the contributions of Shafik's feminism to contemporary Egypt and to larger shifts in feminist thought worldwide.

I am grateful to Sherin Guirguis for sharing this work with us and for her contributions to the Los Angeles art community. I am pleased to acknowledge our colleagues at 18th Street Arts Center, who provided Sherin with a residency that she used to conceptualize this project. I would also like to thank exhibitions curator Holly Jerger for organizing this important exhibition. Thank you to Sasha Ali, manager of exhibitions and communications; Chenoa Cressey, designer and social media manager; Sonia Mak-Shahbazi, development manager; Andres Payan, curator of public engagement; Eunice Lee, program coordinator; and Marisela Norte, visitor services assistant, for realizing this exhibition and its public programs. A special thank you to Haven Lin-Kirk for her wonderful design of the catalogue and to catalogue contributors Andy Campbell, Heba El Kayal, and Anuradha Vikram for their scholarly input. Sherin and I would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Doria Shafik's two daughters, Dr. Aziza Ellozy and Dr. Jehane Ragai, for sharing memories of their mother with Sherin and helping to bring this project to fruition. Special thanks to Ola Seif at The American University in Cairo.

We wish to recognize our donors, the Fellows of Contemporary Art (FOCA), who made this exhibition and the accompanying catalogue possible. Since 1975, FOCA has been active in funding and promoting contemporary artists, exhibitions, and publications by emerging and mid-career California artists. Special thanks to FOCA member and friend Sharon Darnov for her assistance. Lastly, we would like to acknowledge our board of trustees for their continued support: Nancy Adams, Jill Bauman, Lorraine Bonanni, Jane Chang, Joe Coriaty, Richard Erickson, Robby Gordon, Hal Hamersmith, Michael D. Johnson, Fred Kuperberg, Wally Marks III, George Minardos, Tim Mullin, Janice Pober, Joseph Robillard, Stan Savage, Natasha Sedaghat, Glen Titan, and Peter Wendel.



Of Thorns and Love [installation view], 2018

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

Portrait of Doria Shafik by Van Leo, 1950

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Introduction

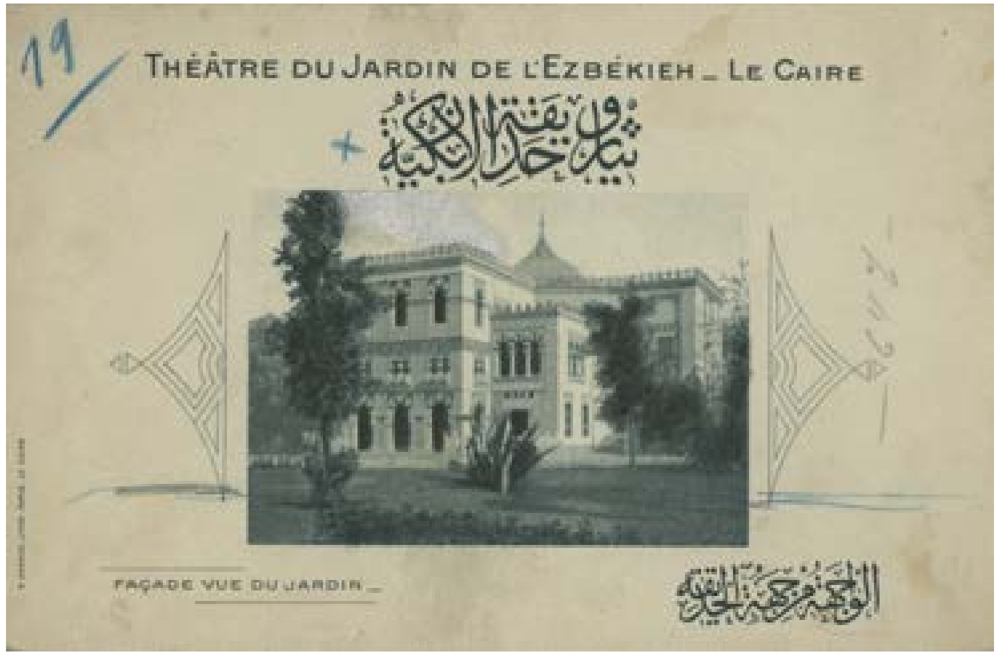
Holly Jerger, CAFAM Exhibitions Curator

> *With all my love of truth and freedom (two concepts that were but one for me), I would discover the way. The way could not be imagined beforehand, once and for all. The way is made of sweat and blood, of battles and tears. A way of thorns and love.*[1]

Artist Sherin Guirguis draws the title of her exhibition *Of Thorns and Love* from this passage in an unpublished memoir by Doria Shafik (1908–1975), the Egyptian feminist, activist, writer, and publisher who helped transform Egypt's political system in the 1940s and '50s. Guirguis has spent the last two years examining the life of Shafik who, despite her significant contributions to contemporary Egyptian history, was placed under house arrest in 1957 and virtually erased from record due to her opposition to Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt from 1956-1970. Through Shafik's efforts, Egyptian women gained the right to vote and participate in government. The programs Shafik established spread literacy and job training throughout the country, particularly for middle- and working-class women.

This exhibition continues a project Guirguis started five years ago to chronicle neglected feminist histories. Guirguis began her project with Huda Shaarawi, a key figure in establishing the feminist movement in Egypt, who was also an early mentor to Shafik. Shaarawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union and is largely known for publicly removing her veil at the Cairo train station in 1923. With this project, Guirguis is as much researcher as she is visual artist, collecting and safeguarding information that is often sparse and difficult to locate. Guirguis has condensed her research into abstract visual works that reference significant architectural sites and texts within the lives of the women she is documenting. By distilling their lives into physical sites and words, Guirguis focuses on the most essential and impactful aspects of these women's stories—creating a visual record of the actions and ideas they contributed to society. A large portion of this catalogue contains Guirguis's research on Shafik, including the image archive she has amassed and conversations Guirguis had with Shafik's two daughters, which were captured by writer Heba El Kayal.

For the works in this exhibition, Guirguis chose two defining moments in Shafik's life: her first public speech given in 1928 at Cairo's Azbakeya Gardens Theatre and the 1951 storming of the Egyptian Parliament led by Shafik. Shafik was only nineteen years old when she gave the speech at Azbakeya Gardens to the Egyptian Feminist Union (by invitation of Shaarawi). In that speech, Shafik publicly laid out her feminist philosophy for the first time, dedicating herself to providing education and other tools of self-reliance for all women.[2] Several years later, the 1951 action against Parliament was one of the most orchestrated and largest actions of Shafik's career. Over 1,500 women joined Shafik in the demonstration, leading to the senate president's commitment to pass a women's suffrage bill (which became law



Theatre of Azbakeya Gardens in Cairo, c. 1920s
Doria Shafik made her first public speech at the theatre in 1928.

© The Rare Books and Special Collections Library,
The American University in Cairo

in 1956). Guirguis symbolizes these events with two architectural structures: the fence around Azbakeya Gardens and the gates surrounding the Parliament building. Shafik's storming of Parliament and other actions brought women out into public space as no leader had done before, forging a modern feminist movement that offered Egyptian women liberation not only in the domestic or intellectual sphere, but also in the streets.

In her paper-cut paintings, which encircle the gallery space, Guirguis meticulously incises the intricate patterns of the Parliament gates and Azbakeya fence (paper was also a substrate for much of Shafik's activism, through her writing and publications). A brilliant yellow pulsates through the pierced shapes, signifying the light of day or being outside. In *Storming Parliament I* and *II* [2018, pp. 54 - 55], the deep blue of the Nile, which was a source of spiritual and creative renewal for Shafik, washes over the gates of Parliament and dictates the placement of Guirguis's cut marks. The sun rises over the Azbakeya fence and inverts its recessed patterns into physical texture in *Azbakeya (sun disk)* [2018, pp.42 - 43]. In past works, Guirguis's cut shapes signified the private, interior worlds of the figures she was documenting. In this new body of work, Guirguis's additive paper layers push out into the forefront of the work, into the public realm Shafik occupied. In some of these works, Guirguis also incorporates segments from one of Shafik's poems. Guirguis translated Shafik's French into Arabic, and using a thick, highly structured script, Guirguis fused Shafik's words into the fence pattern—giving her words physical permanence:

O, my homeland

Here I have returned

Will you welcome me

This time

with

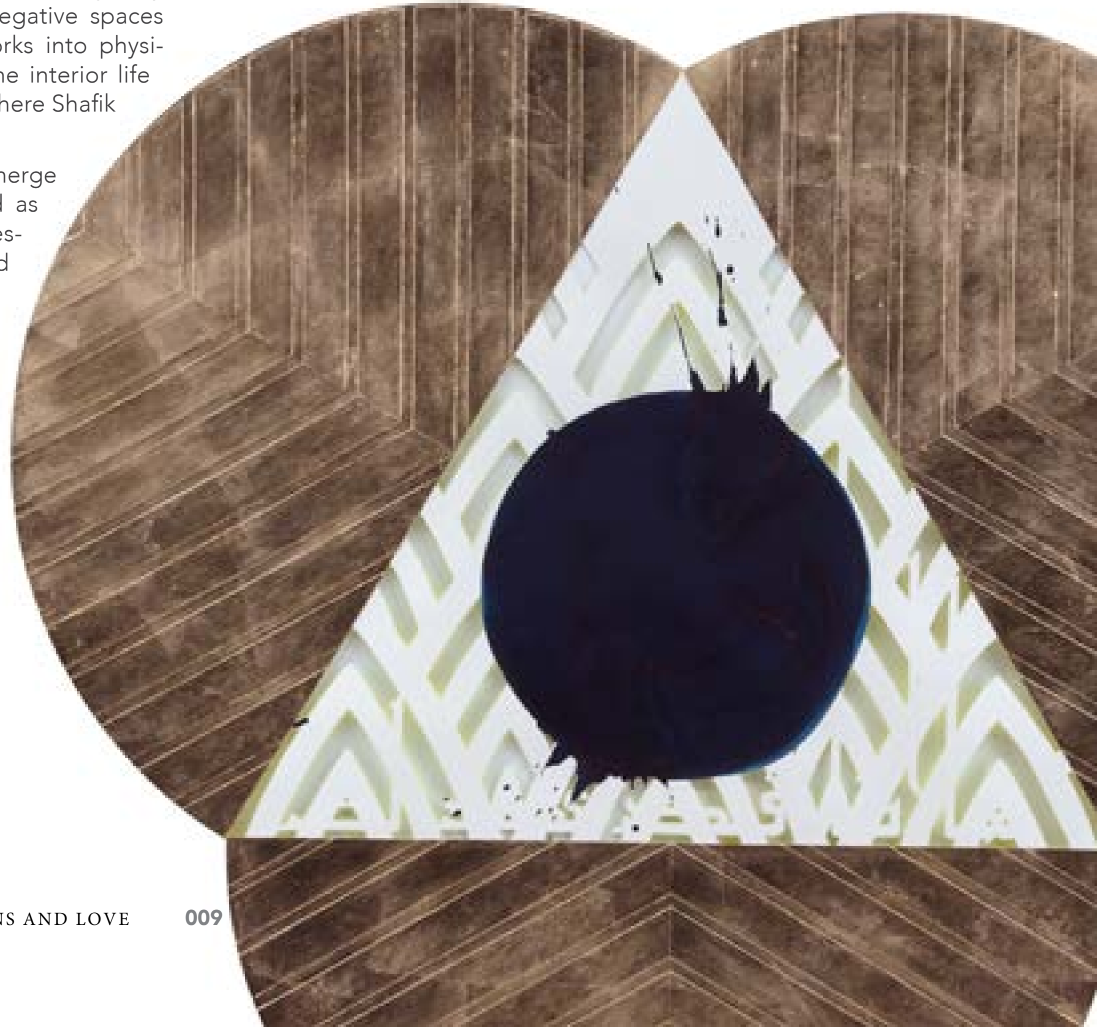
A little more love?

In addition to the paper-cut paintings, the exhibition includes two painted panels Guirguis produced during the summer of 2017 while in residence at 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, CA [pp. 40 and 41]. Guirguis synthesized her early research on Shafik during this residency, and the two panels serve as a transition between her series on Shaarawi and Shafik. A site-specific adobe structure anchors the exhibition and shares the same title, *Of Thorns and Love*. Guirguis began investigating adobe around the same time she started researching Shafik and was drawn to the material's accessibility and sensitivity to its environment (essayists Anuradha Vikram and Andy Campbell beautifully discuss Guirguis's use of adobe). Individual sculptural works also punctuate the gallery space and translate the negative spaces of Guirguis's paper-cut works into physical form, again bringing the interior life out into the public space where Shafik operated.

Guirguis's abstract works merge what could be interpreted as opposing processes and aesthetics: paper cutting and painting; adobe building and gold leafing; minimalism and ancient symbols and ornamentation. This conceptual tension lives within the visual harmony of Guirguis's pieces, and that tension is where the potency of her work lies. This tension also captures the contradictions Shafik personified.

World-traveled, highly fashionable, and educated in Paris, having received her doctorate from the Sorbonne, Shafik was both an insider and outsider within Egyptian culture and the Western societies she accessed. In her biography of Shafik, anthropologist Cynthia Nelson states that Shafik "was simultaneously engaged in a cultural defense and a social criticism"[3] as she worked to advance women's liberation as an integral part of Egypt's overall independence from colonial rule. Shafik epitomized the transition Egypt was going through at that time, moving from its traditional, colonial past into an independent, modern, and hopefully, progressive future.

In many ways, Guirguis is also defender and critic. This work is deeply personal for Guirguis as it reconnects her to Egypt and its people. She shines light on forgotten Egyptian history and makes it accessible, particularly to other Egyptian women. Through this project, she has been able to collaborate with many people in Egypt, including her own family and friends, as well as Shafik's.



Triple Disk Lotus
(here I have returned) [detail]
2018

Courtesy of the artist / Photo:
Panic Studio LA

Egyptian Parliament in Cairo, c. 1920s

Doria Shafik stormed Parliament demanding equal rights for women in 1951.

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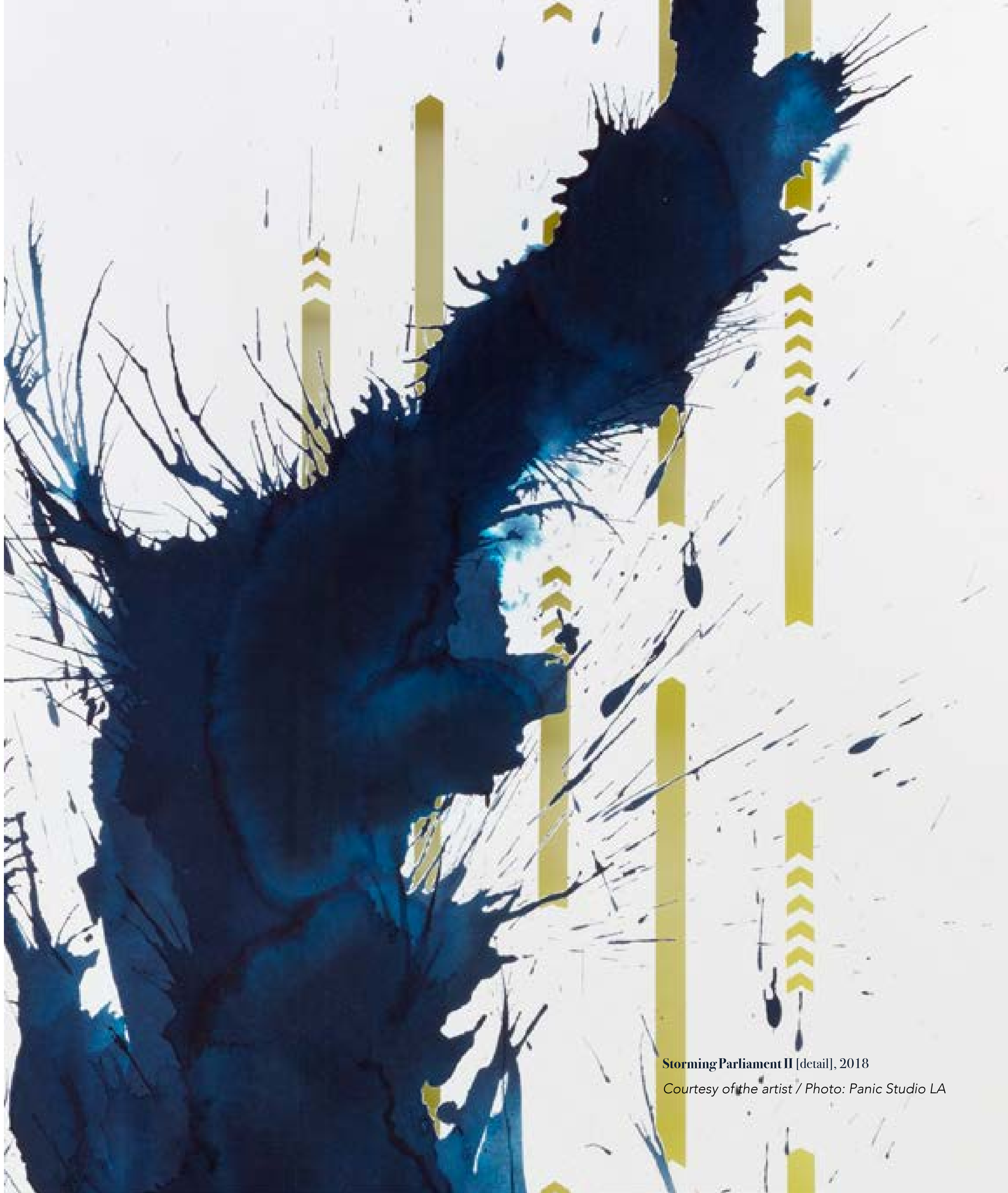
Guirguis's work also provides perspective into transnational feminisms, elegantly demonstrating that Egypt and other Muslim-majority parts of the world have concurrent feminist histories to the United States and the West. In 1957, at the same time that Shafik was placed under house arrest for her provocative efforts to secure political and economic rights for Egyptian women, women in the United States were denied the right to serve on a jury or vote (black women were not able to exercise their right to vote until the 1960s).[4] As Guirguis continues to highlight Egyptian women's historical and present-day political struggles, she illuminates the connections and variations in feminist movements around the world—each actively dismantling ingrained patriarchal codes and constructing their own paths to liberation. In Shafik's words, "The way is made of sweat and blood, of battles and tears. A way of thorns and love."



Storming Parliament II [detail], 2018

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

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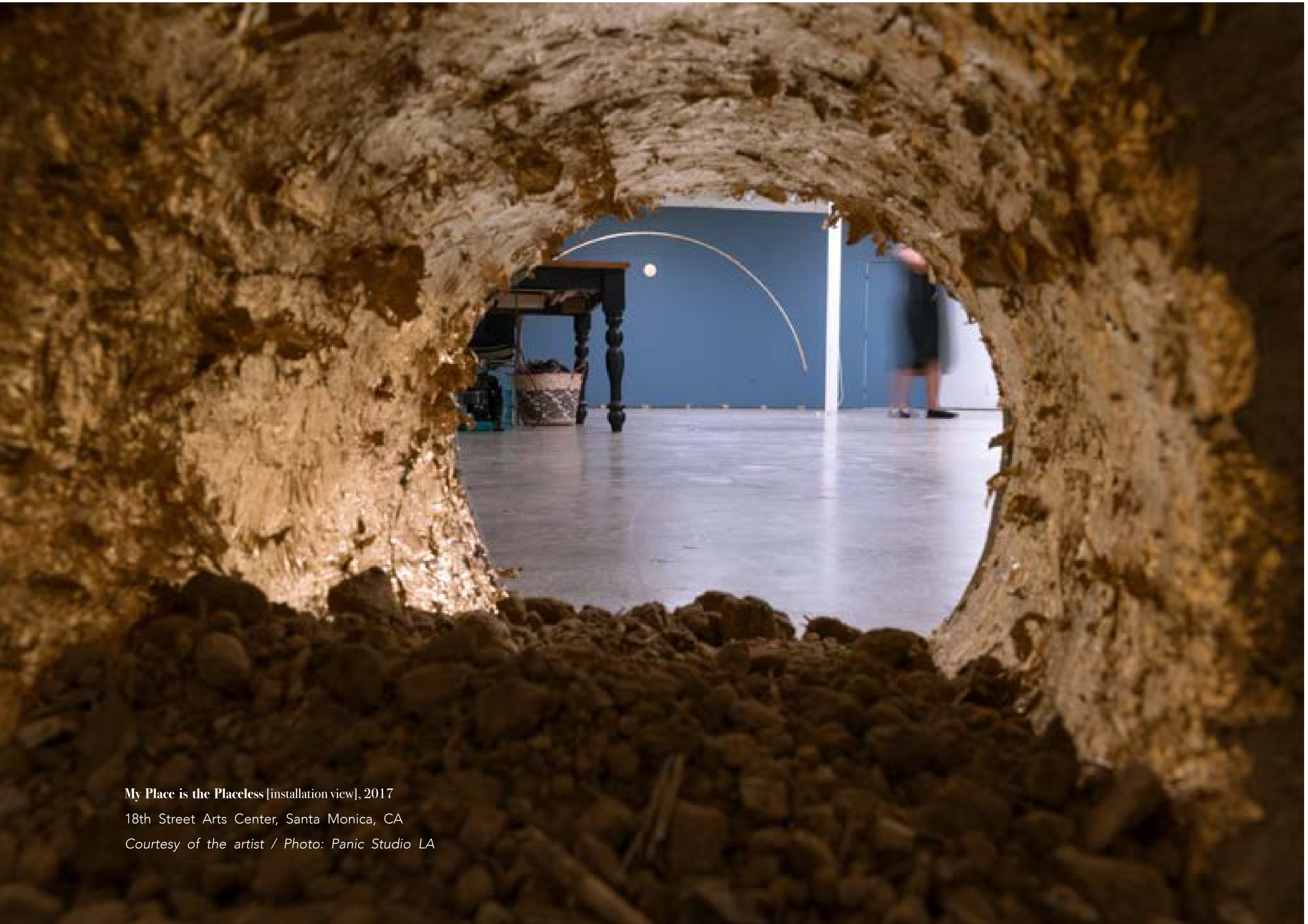
1 Doria Shafik quoted in Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), 209.

2 For full speech, see Nelson, 28-29.

3 Nelson, 283.

4 Raquel Solla, "The 19th Amendment Did Not Affect All Women" August 8, 2016, Odyssey website. https://www.theodysseyonline.com/the-19th-amendment-did-not-allow-women-to-vote.



My Place is the Placeless [installation view], 2017
18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, CA
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

Sherin Guirguis: Spaces of Feminist Action

ANURADHA VIKRAM

Sherin Guirguis's 2017 Artist Lab Residency at 18th Street Arts Center, *My Place is the Placeless*, was an experiment in translation. The initial challenge was to translate the artist's new body of work from outdoor monument to gallery installation. The next was to translate the extensive body of research she had amassed on the recent history of Egyptian feminism into simple, dynamic geometries that responded to textual and architectural source material in abstract, formal terms. Guirguis proposed the Artist Lab project as a bridge between two major undertakings: her first large-scale public artwork created for the Desert X Biennial in early 2017, and her first solo museum exhibition at the Craft & Folk Art Museum in 2018. The residency would allow her to bring her outdoor experimentations to completion while expanding her approach to studio art practice.

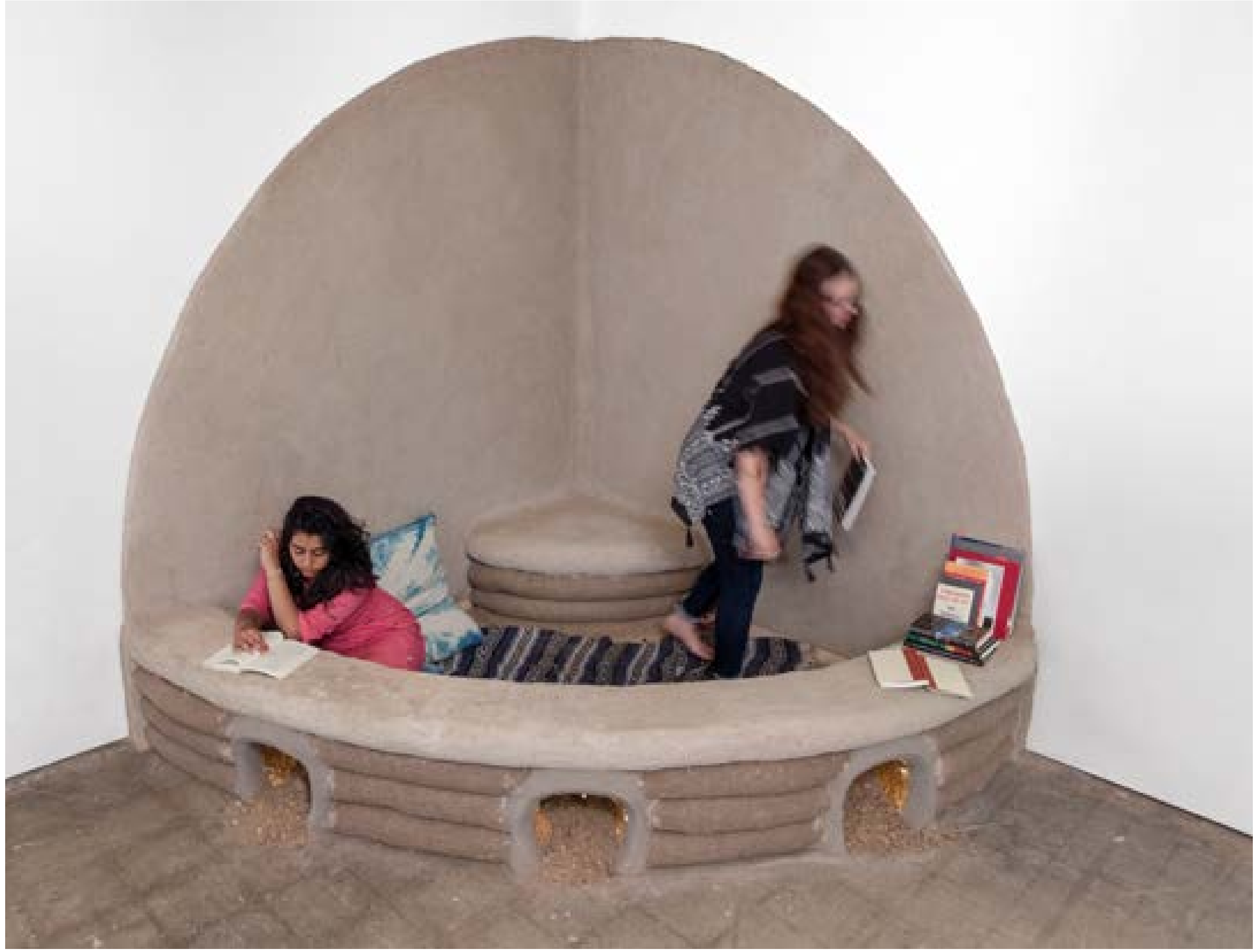
The Artist Lab is an opportunity for artists to stretch their practices with the space, time, and financial support to take risks and explore the unknown. For Guirguis, this meant spending time exploring how SuperAdobe—a process she had used for outdoor sculptural applications—might also be applied to her indoor studio practices of painting and sculpture. She liked the SuperAdobe because its result was both light and strong, and because it could be created from simple earth and water—a material born of the desert, as she was. The adobe is a living material, like earth itself, and responds to its environment. She was excited, as well, about the ethos of SuperAdobe inventor Nader Khalili (1936–2008), another desert-born migrant artist who promoted architecture and material science as socially and environmentally responsible practices. The resulting environment within the gallery was defined by architectures of non-linear geometry, rendered organic, soft, and round, and composed of bare earth with delicate gold leafing in unexpected, barely visible places. A large bench was installed in one corner of the space, functioning as a conversation or reading pit with an earthen floor and a collection of large, indigo-dyed pillows on which to recline. This space was intended for the artist to share her research with the public, through conversation but also by reading reference materials from her own research. Cool, slate blue walls majestically offset the earth-and-gold palette.

Guirguis is inspired by activists who make their politics material, whether as earth like Nader Khalili, or as word like Doria Shafik (1908-1975), the Egyptian poet and feminist activist. Shafik was an important figure in the Egyptian women's liberation movement of the 1940s and 1950s and died after decades of politically motivated house arrest. For Guirguis, Shafik's public activism and her solitary confinement are of equal interest. Shafik was an overarching presence in the project at 18th Street Arts Center, which was focused on intersections of art and activism related to land use and ecological conservation rather than explicitly naming women's rights as the focus of activism. Of course, discussions of ecology and sociability are implicitly feminist, as they prioritize life, care, and community over economic and physical displays of power.

The Artist Lab Residency at 18th Street was an ideal environment in which to inquire about the division of public and private spheres of action because it is a space where this boundary is frequently blurred. Throughout the course of the installation at 18th Street Arts Center, Guirguis engaged in workshops and dialogues with the public including artists, parents, immigrants, and school-age children. Meals were served, fabric dyed, and adobe structures built. The exhibition culminated with a private dinner for fifteen feminist-identified artists from Los Angeles hosted on 18th Street Arts Center's campus. These activities were organized in the spirit of Doria Shafik, who sought to extend ontological, political, and social freedoms to women through education, activism, and the arts.

Shafik's importance for Guirguis extends to her artistic and public personae, as well as her identities as activist and parent. A black-and-white headshot of Shafik that was pinned to the wall of the gallery at 18th Street depicts her as painlessly elegant, her hair in a chic updo, her eyebrows arched dramatically. Shafik did not feel the need to represent herself as a populist in order to connect her message with the rural, undereducated, and poor women of Egypt. Says Guirguis, "it was very much about the modern Egyptian woman, and her rights, freedoms, and responsibilities."[1] Shafik was comfortable in her persona as an intellectual and a radical. She wanted to represent Egypt as a modern society capable of including women of privilege, access, and sophistication. Through her work with legal aid and literacy programs, she used her influence to help women with less access to power negotiate systems that may otherwise have been opaque to them.

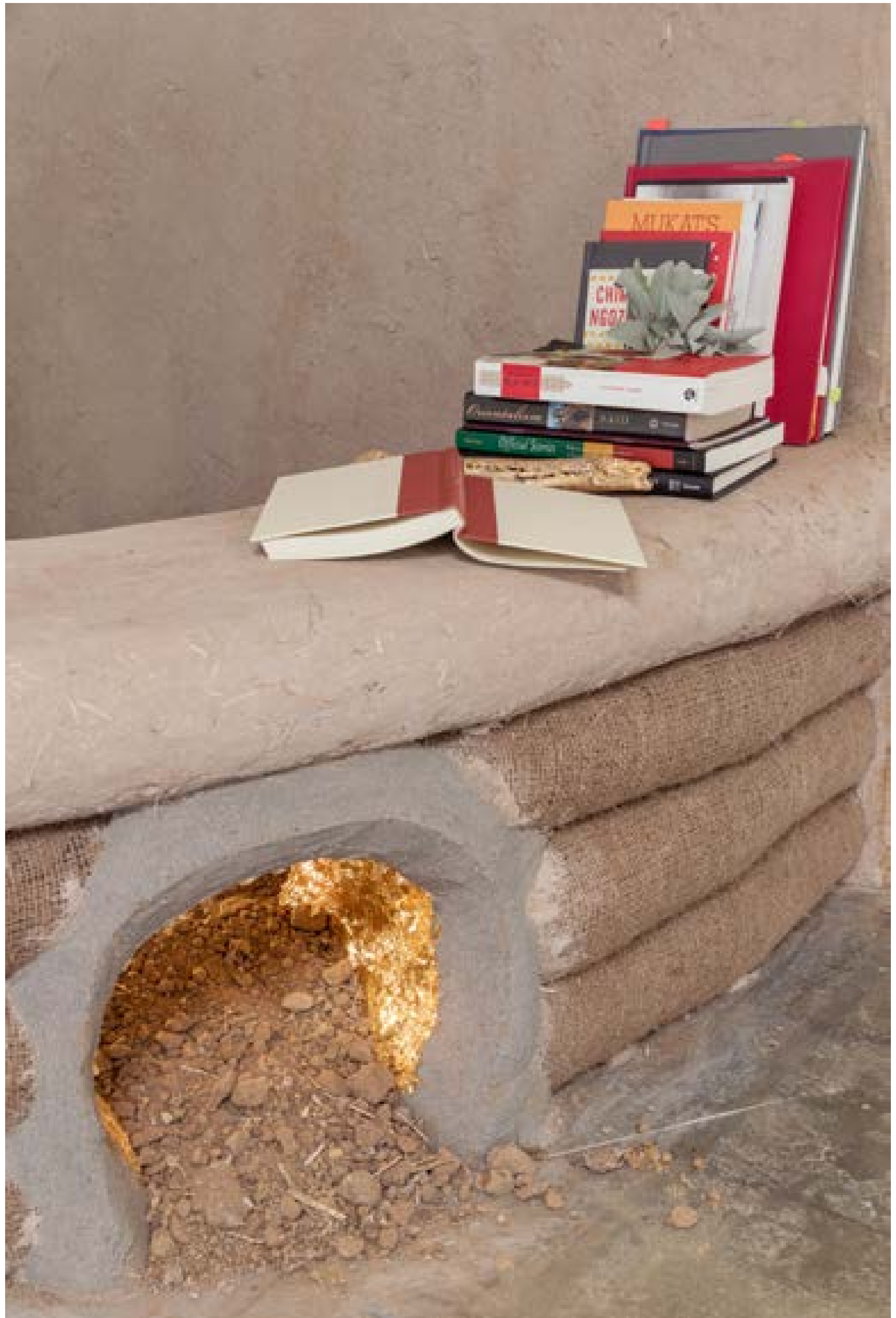
Due to its size, location, and history, Egypt's recent past has been a harbinger of modernizing political movements throughout the Middle East: from the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 that commenced in Cairo's Tahrir Square to the Nasserite political movement for Arab nationalism in the 1950s. In the 1920s and 1930s, feminists in Egypt were a diverse community. Says Guirguis, "The women came from all over Egypt, and from all different classes."[2] These women experienced an awakening to feminist politics within an Egyptian cultural context, grounding their politics in Islamic teachings and local cultural practices. Some leaders in the movement were able to develop their networks further through the close connections that existed between Cairo and Paris intellectual life in that era. Shafik herself earned a PhD in philosophy from the Sorbonne, which she undertook starting at age sixteen. Egyptian feminist pioneer Huda Shaarawi (1879–1947), who precedes Shafik in both history and Guirguis's artistic narrative, collaborated frequently with Paris-born Eugénie Le Brun (d. 1908).[3] Their leadership roles in the movement, explains Guirguis, were reflective of their closeness to power and access more broadly. The women of the popular movement "were [. . .] led by women who had more privilege and more access, because they were adjacent [. . .] to the power and education that the men [received], and [they understood that] the only reason they didn't have it was because they were women."[4] Despite the diversity of their class and educational backgrounds, the women experienced shared feminist milestones grounded in Egyptian paradigms. Shaarawi, for example, writes of being sent to the harem at age thirteen, when her brother was sent to university, and under-



My Place is the Placeless, 2017

Adobe structure built in collaboration with Nathan Wright and Wade Lucas.

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



My Place is the Placeless [detail], 2017

Artist Lab Residency at 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, CA.

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

standing the social influence that was denied to her on the basis of gender.[5]

The social rights and financial means to travel that privileged Egyptian women did have allowed them to see the absence of their broader civil rights at home. Guirguis points out, "Even women who had a lot of privilege, at that time, they did not have a lot of power."[6] The impact that women could have on Egyptian society was circumscribed by the limitations society placed on their public lives. As a result, organizing and pedagogy often took place in domestic spaces, rather than in the cafés and streets where the men held court. The sense of an interior as a communal learning environment, where women's traditional activities like cooking and caretaking might be carried out alongside intellectual and political development, was manifest within the space that Guirguis created at 18th Street.

Shafik galvanized Egypt's women's movement in the 1950s, leading a charge on the Parliament to demand the vote and creating a political union, the Daughter of the Nile Union, in the aftermath of the 1952 revolution. With the ascent of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970) to the presidency and the militarization of Egypt's government in the mid-1950s, Shafik became a target of official harassment and was eventually placed under house arrest. The woman who fought tirelessly for women's rights in the public sphere spent the last two decades of her life mostly confined to her home. Shafik's inward turn is as much of interest to Guirguis as her public persona. The division between these two aspects—inner self and outer self—is often marked in Muslim-dominant cultures by a screen or veil, a motif that Guirguis has explored repeatedly in her work. This barrier can be understood as one that is symbolically crossed or one that has phenomenological or even ontological implications. Such differences in the construction of interior and exterior, or public and private, are fruitfully explored in Guirguis's practice.

In the body of work Guirguis created based on research into Huda Shaarawi's life, the *mashrabiya* (or screen that is sometimes used to separate the women's harem from the men's areas of the home) is a central motif. It represents an architecture of separation that is defined by gender, but equally by the ontological understanding of subjectivity and self that screening (or veiling) represents. Shaarawi sought to liberate Egyptian women from the home and its attendant responsibilities, a task in which some of her role models were westernized, public women.[7] Yet for contemporary Egyptian women, liberation according to the Western model of a life lived in public may be a remote option when faced with a society skewed toward religious and political extremism on the whole.

Since the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (b. 1928) in 2011, the rights of women—as symbolized in the vote that Doria Shafik and her peers won for themselves and their peers—have been challenged by a rising tide of Islamist political power. The turn toward religious and political conservatism in Egyptian society has sometimes manifested through the actions of women, who use their political agency through the vote in the service of reactionary parties. This trend may represent a constrained form of expression of the autonomy that feminism promises, as anthropologist Saba Mahmood has claimed,[8] arguing that these women are empowered to fully represent their diverse and possibly contradictory beliefs, even as society takes a turn toward authoritarian politics. The limitations of their political expression are the same as the constraints on freedom experienced by the broader public. Like Shafik, faced with a politically repressive or volatile street culture, feminist activists have learned to work in the interior, domesticated spaces where women are able to assemble safely. Under duress, adaptability becomes a survival skill, not a mark of ideological compromise or moral weakness, but a strategy to keep the political agenda of liberation moving forward.

Art—particularly abstract art—is often assumed to be removed from political, cultural, or social interests. Traditionally, artists work privately in studios, alone or with assistants, out of public view. Exhibitions of artwork feature the artist at the reception and for events, but the works themselves rarely change between opening and closing. In the Artist Lab, the work that artists do inside the studio is made available to the larger public to observe, with the artist's permission. Objects are created onsite, going directly from conception to exhibition, sometimes with participation from the audience. The private work of artistic insight and experimentation becomes the subject of every exhibition, whatever its content. The relationship between the artist and the public is in constant negotiation. Though shared, the studio is a space where the artist makes a home for their practice, which is offered to visitors on terms set by the artist.

For Guirguis, the nomadic condition is one to be embraced, stemming from her ancestry and from her present experience of diaspora. Her project's title, *My Place is the Placeless*, reflects her interest in displacement, nomadism, and cultural erasure. The title is drawn from a poem by Rumi called "Who am I?", which also gives her Desert X sculpture, *One I Call* (2017), its name. Says the poet, "I'm not of the East or West, neither land or sea." 18th Street Arts Center is such a place—a refuge for artists navigating global professional networks and local commitments. This calling is true to our founding in late 1988, at the moment that sociologists have dubbed "the global turn" in reference to shifting political and economic power balances between the formerly dominant United States and Europe, and the increasingly dynamic nations of the Global South. Community connections within our neighborhood are enhanced by the broad international view of current events and geopolitics that we advance through our public programs. Rumi exhorts, "My place is in the Placeless, my trace in the Traceless." Intimate, personal exchanges of ideas are free to transpire and inspire within this space.

Anuradha Vikram is a writer, curator, and educator. She is artistic director of the Los Angeles-based artist residency program 18th Street Arts Center; faculty at Otis College of Art and Design; member of the Board of Directors of the College Art Association; and member of the editorial board of contemporary art journal X-TRA. Her book, *Decolonizing Culture*, was published by Art Practical + Sming Sming Books in 2017.

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[1] Interview with Sherin Guirguis, March 13, 2018.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Rula B. Quawas, "'A Sea Captain in Her Own Right': Navigating the Feminist Thought of Huda Shaarawi," *Journal of International Women's Studies 8,* no.1 (November 2006): 224.

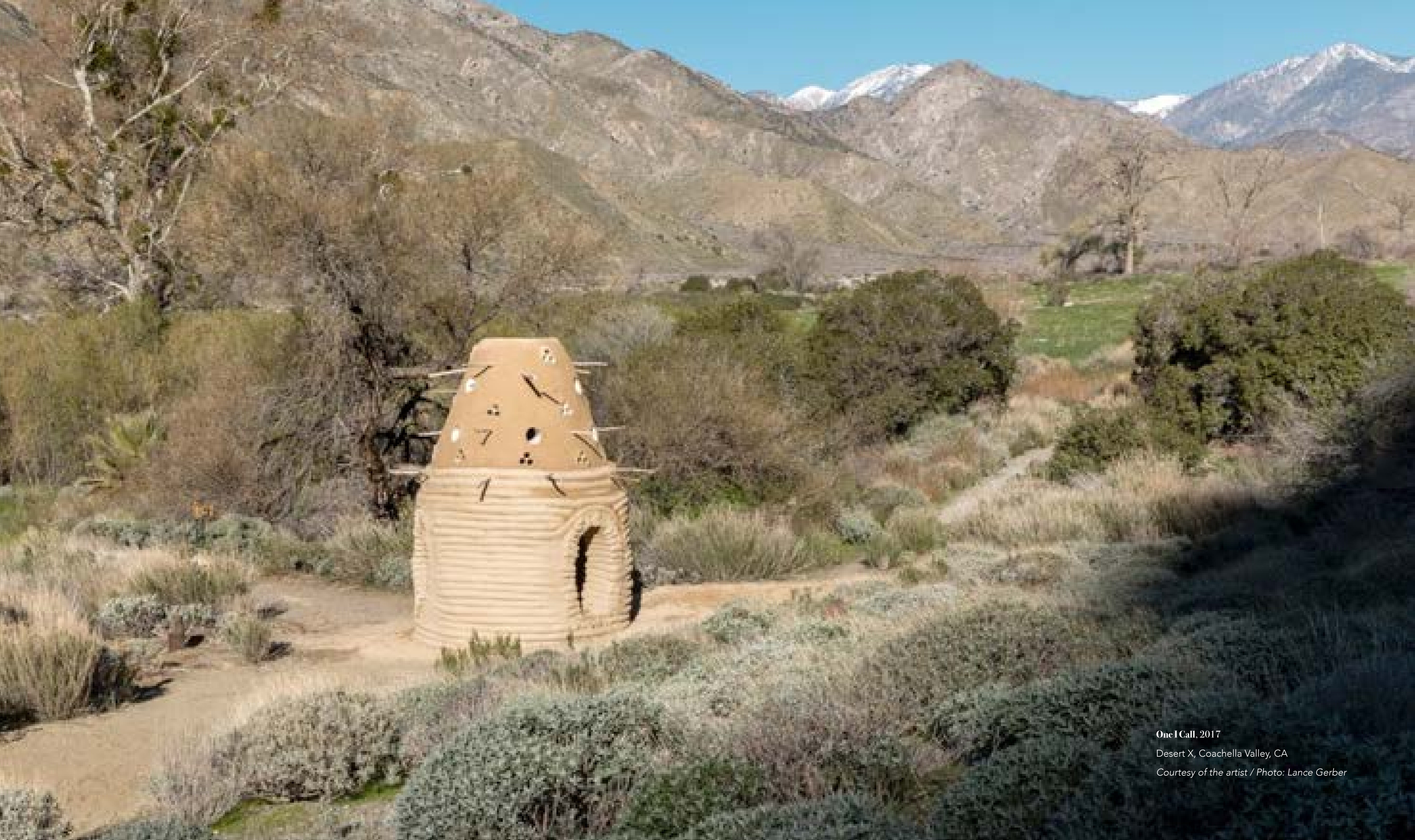
[4] Guirguis, op. cit.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Quawas, "A Sea Captain," 224.

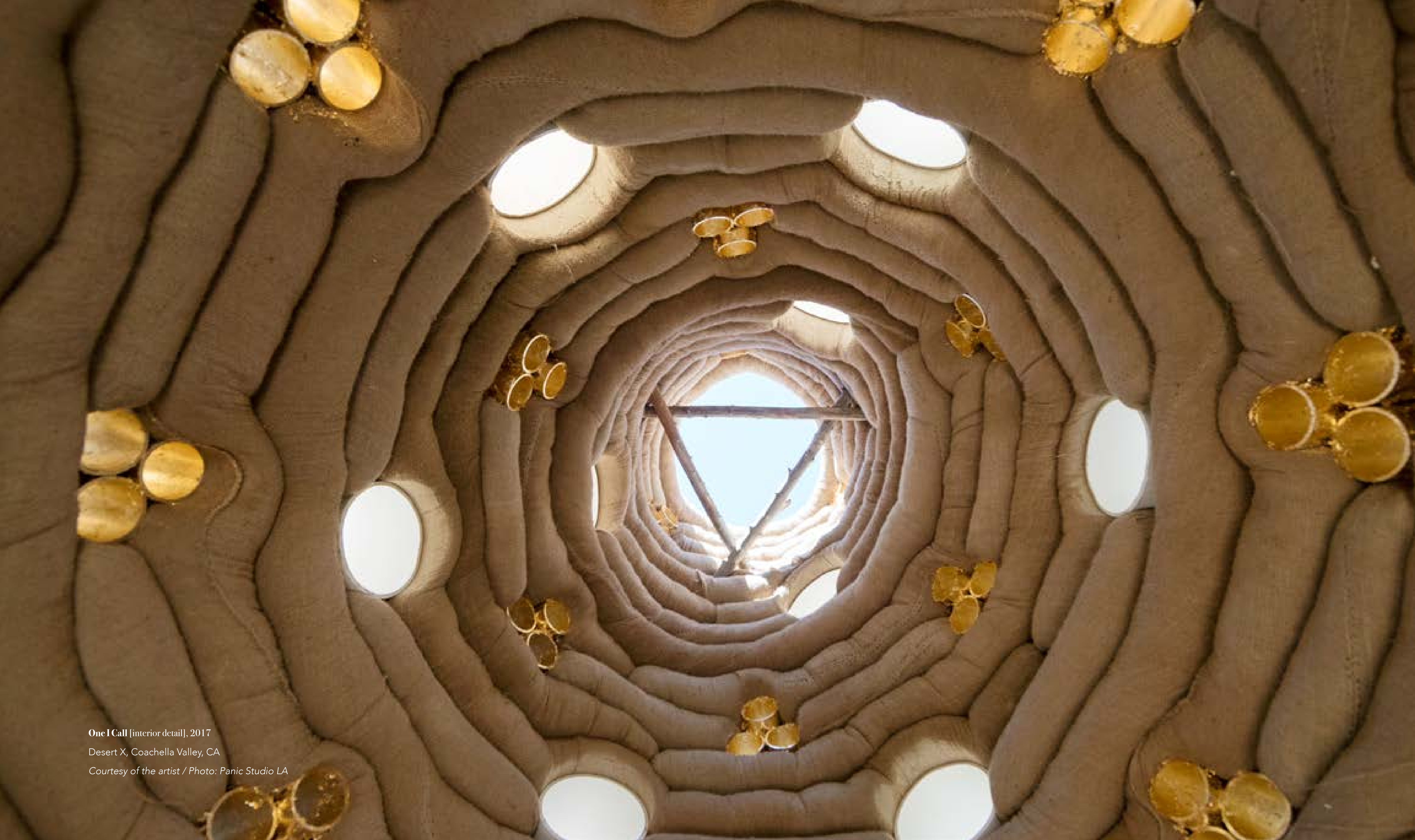
[8] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 1.



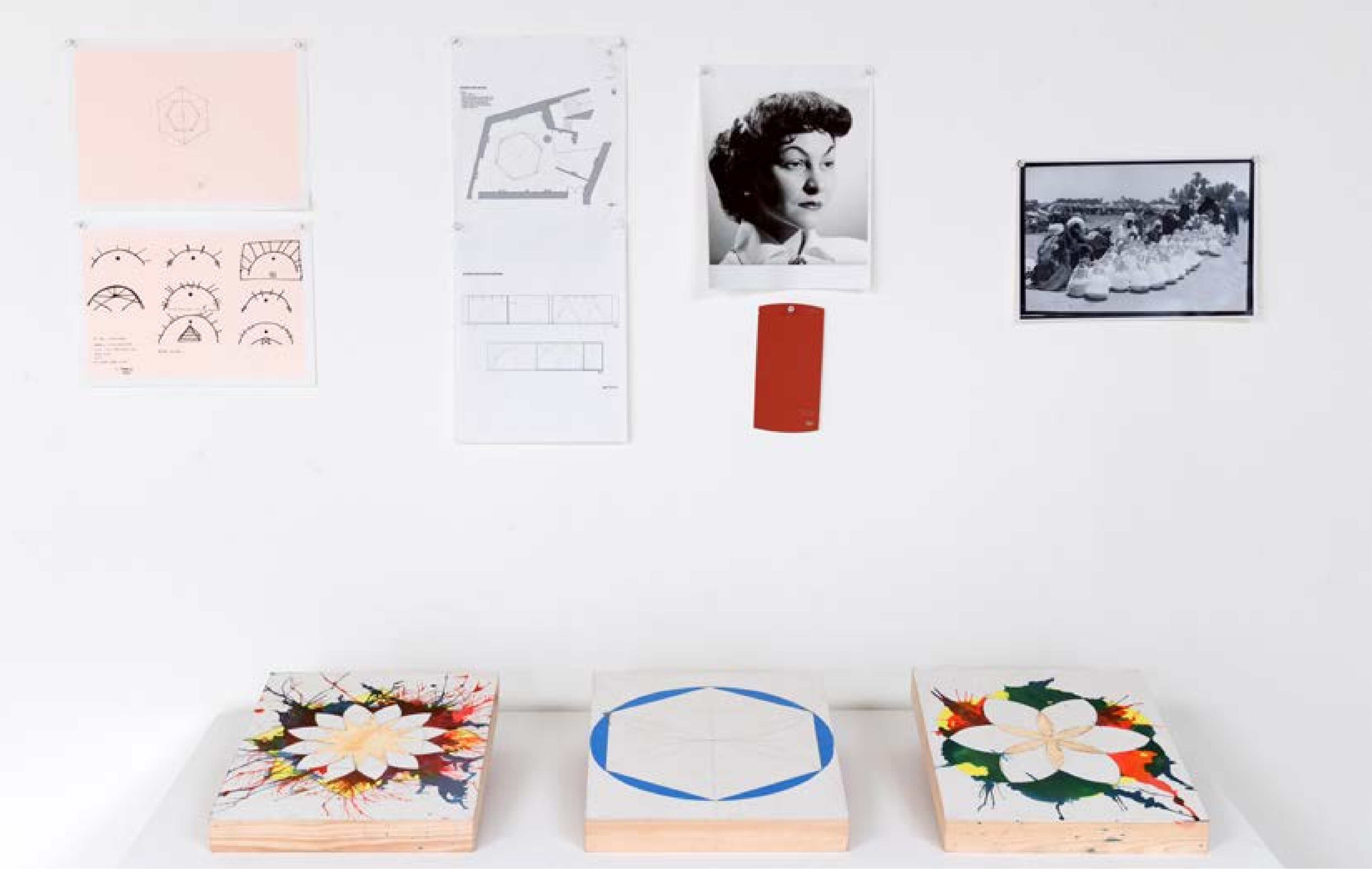
One I Call, 2017

Desert X, Coachella Valley, CA

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Lance Gerber



One I Call [interior detail], 2017
Desert X, Coachella Valley, CA
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



My Place is the Placeless [installation view], 2017
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

Sud
Est
Ouest
Nord
169
Echelle de cent mètres
L'EZBEKIEH : Parc paysager public au Caire

Map of Azbakeya Gardens in Cairo, 1897

From the book *Le parc public de l'Ezbekieh au Caire (1897)* by Gustave Delchevalerie.

House Arrest

ANDY CAMPBELL

> *To philosophize one must first live; but only living would be insufficient. It is indispensable to turn inward and consider the living being that one is.*
>
> - Doria Shafik[1]

What happens to a public life when it is contained? And how to sum up that life, before the containment and after? Searching, interior, liberated, depressed, and alone. During the nearly twenty years she spent under house arrest in Cairo, the feminist publisher, philosopher, activist, and poet Doria Shafik (1908–1975) attempted to write her life's story twice over. These texts were never published, joining a 1956 attempt written at the request of a U.S. magazine publisher in the dustbin of history. For Shafik, writing an autobiography represented nothing less than the "very conquest of my being," in a life she considered "a series of incessant combats."[2] The remnants of these autobiographical attempts were gathered (along with letters, poetry, and other personal effects) and placed in a series of suitcases, then transferred into the custody of her daughter before Shafik ceremoniously took her own life by stepping off the balcony of her sixth-floor apartment.

That is a particularly tough sentence to write, and also, I imagine, to read. If Shafik were my mother I would not want this last fact about her life to overshadow her accomplishments. And yet this difficult, troubling fact is important precisely because it is an outcome of the carceral technology known as "house arrest." Shafik was given this sentence in 1957 for her open criticism of the mounting authoritarian regime of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970). He responded, in turn, by disappearing her name from all press, banning her protesting and performative body from public life, and depriving her of her connections to an array of international contacts built up over decades of publishing, speaking, and organizing.

What, then, is left? Poetry.

Lili'uokalani. Bao Tong. Zhao Ziyang. Mehdi Karroubi. Aung San Suu Kyi. Imran Khan. Jiang Yanyong. Andrei Sakharov. Mir Hossein Mousavi. Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu. Iryna Khalip. Liu Xiaobo. Ibn al-Haytham. Galileo Galilei. Jafar Panahi. Qazhyghumar Shabdan.

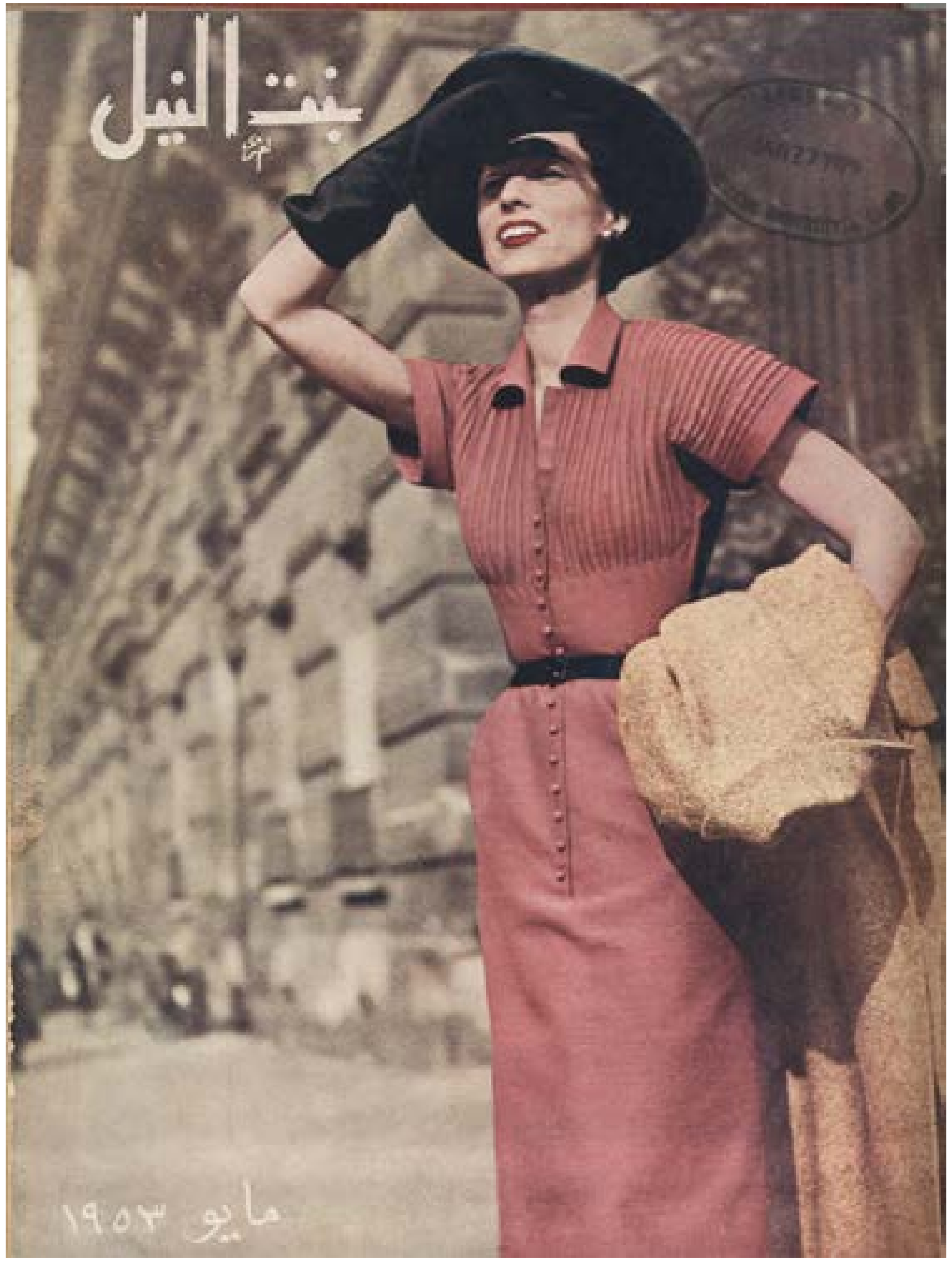
Sherin Guirguis, an artist living and working in Los Angeles, has picked up the threads and poetry of Shafik's life, transforming her meticulous research into an interlocking installation of paintings (large and small), free-standing sculptures, and an adobe structure in the center of the gallery. At first it may be hard to tell whether there is even a person at the center of Guirguis's artistic inquiry, as many of the objects she produces appear to be merely ornamental or decorative. Cut paper, gold leaf, and thinning branches of colored inks are mainstays in this work, and often evoke *mashrabiyas* (lattice-work privacy screens) or gates, both architectural features that demarcate public and private realms.

Guirguis's research into the life and experiences of Shafik is an expansion upon previous bodies of work, which address other innovative and politicized historical personalities. This includes a look at the political legacy of another, older Egyptian feminist, Huda Shaarawi (1879–1947), who was a heroine of Shafik's as well as her earliest benefactor and supporter. Other works, especially the site-specific adobe sculpture *One I Call* (2017), are informed by the architectural innovations and populist futurism of Iranian-born architect Nader Khalili (1936–2008).[3]

It is not merely coincidental or cultural that Shaarawi, Khalili, and Shafik shared an interest in poetry. Shaarawi and Shafik wrote poetry, and Khalili spent years translating the work of Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi (1207–1273), better known as Rumi. Art and poetry have long been likened to one another, or at least put into dynamic relation. Each is a conjuring of the world, a refashioning of the world's component parts into new and profound eruptions of meaning.

"Poetry is not a luxury," Audre Lorde concisely argued. It "is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives."[4] In her work for the exhibition *Of Thorns and Love*, Guirguis provides the inverse of this axiom, pointing out how architecture can be the skeleton of a life of poetry. Each of Guirguis's works in this exhibition references an aspect of the Cairene architectural milieu that supported and defined Shafik's life—from the gates of the Egyptian Parliament building that Shafik stormed with hundreds of women in 1951 to demand women's suffrage, to the landscape architecture surrounding the Azbakeya Theatre, where she gave one of her first public addresses. In the case of the latter, only the fence *(soor el-Azbakeya)* of the elaborate garden designed in the 1870s by Jean-Pierre Barillet-Deschamps (at the behest of the viceroy of Egypt) still remains.[5] Today, it is a used book market; and one can still find there, sometimes, worn copies of the magazines Shafik used to edit. The Azbakeya fence's design bespeaks a particular colonial confluence and chain of translation. Its abstracted papyri and lotus finial designs are the products of the desires, on the one hand, of colonial Egyptian government officials to mimic the garden designs popular in the metropole, and, on the other hand, France's fascination—appropriately dubbed *égyptomanie* (Egyptomania)—with the monuments, landscape, and, above all, the picturesque, exoticized projections of Egypt's peoples, since the first Napoleonic survey campaign was conducted at the turn of the nineteenth century. Essentially, the Azbakeya fence is a French translation of ancient Egyptian visual motifs, which are then sited back in Egypt.

Guirguis's citation of the Azbakeya fence in her large cut paper works is both an acknowledgement of the power of site as well as an exploration of the enduring legacy of this historical and asymmetrical colonial relationship. The Azbakeya fence and the gates of Parliament are containment structures ornamented with fantasies of an Orientalized East. Such fences keep out and they keep in, and in this respect Guirguis sees the gates and fences of Cairo as a metaphor for Shafik, whose "work was just as important in its outward-facing mission and trajectory as its inward-facing



Bint al-Nil magazine,
published May 1953

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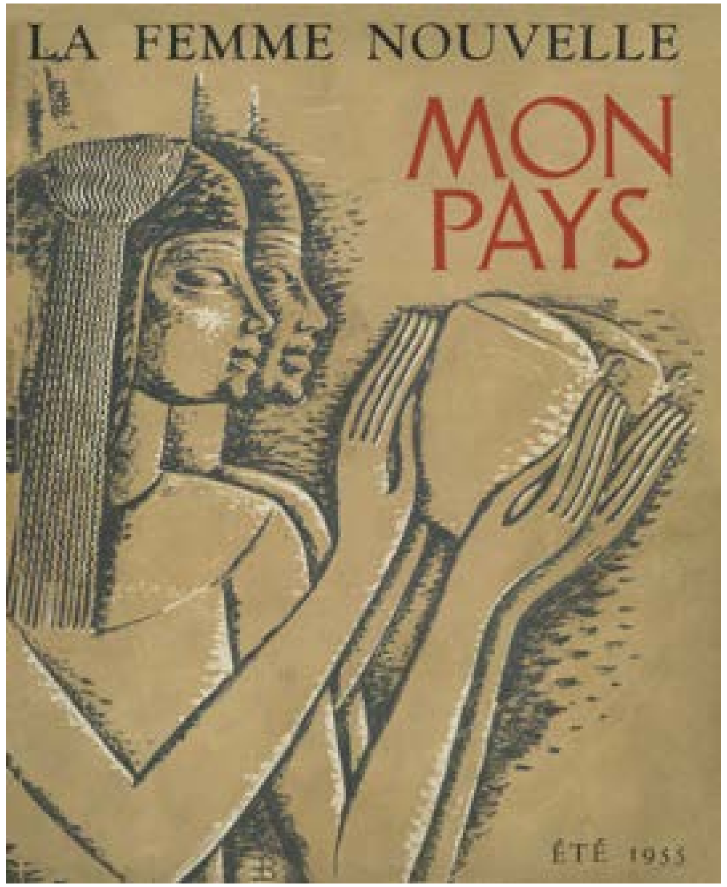


La Femme Nouvelle, published Summer 1955
© Archives Centre d'Études Alexandrines / CNRS

mission."[6] For this dichotomy Shafik was both loved and reviled. While she was lauded as a young woman for representing her country *vis-à-vis* her matriculation to Paris's Sorbonne (where she earned her baccalaureate and doctorate degrees), she was later criticized for similar reasons, as she travelled the world giving lectures on the state of women's rights and Egyptian politics.

This split is nowhere more apparent than the two magazines she edited—*La Femme Nouvelle*, a magazine published in French and English bearing the royal seal of Princess Chevikar and, eventually, Princess Faiza, and *Bint al-Nil*, Shafik's own magazine published in Arabic. *Bint al-Nil* translates to "Daughter of the Nile," and Shafik also used the evocative phrase as the name for the political party she later founded, dedicated to women's suffrage. As German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has argued regarding eighteenth century Europe, newspapers and magazines were key institutions in solidifying a growing bourgeois public's sense of itself—providing a potentially important opportunity to counterbalance monarchical power.[7] But *La Femme Nouvelle* was, in many respects, an extension of monarchical power; it was filled with advertisements and articles extolling the architecture, urban planning, and the cultural scene in Egypt. The publication rarely carried content that was expressly political, and was never critical of the regime. Upon first glance, *Bint al-Nil* (founded some years after Shafik left her post at *La Femme Nouvelle*) would seem to be no different, with its covers full of smiling and fashionable young women. Yet inside its covers Shafik wrote articles and editorials that called upon her readership to demand equal rights for women—to demand access to education and resources. It was this confluence of fashion and politics that most angered her critics, and won her many supporters.

For conservatives in Egypt, Shafik was a firebrand and a Western colonial sympathizer because her demands for women's rights supposedly ran counter to Islamic diktat (never mind that her claims were based on a careful and studious reading of the Quran and Sharia law). For leftist groups, Shafik was not radical *enough*, and her enframing of women's issues within a cosmopolitan lifestyle betrayed a sincere class politics that might liberate all of Egypt.

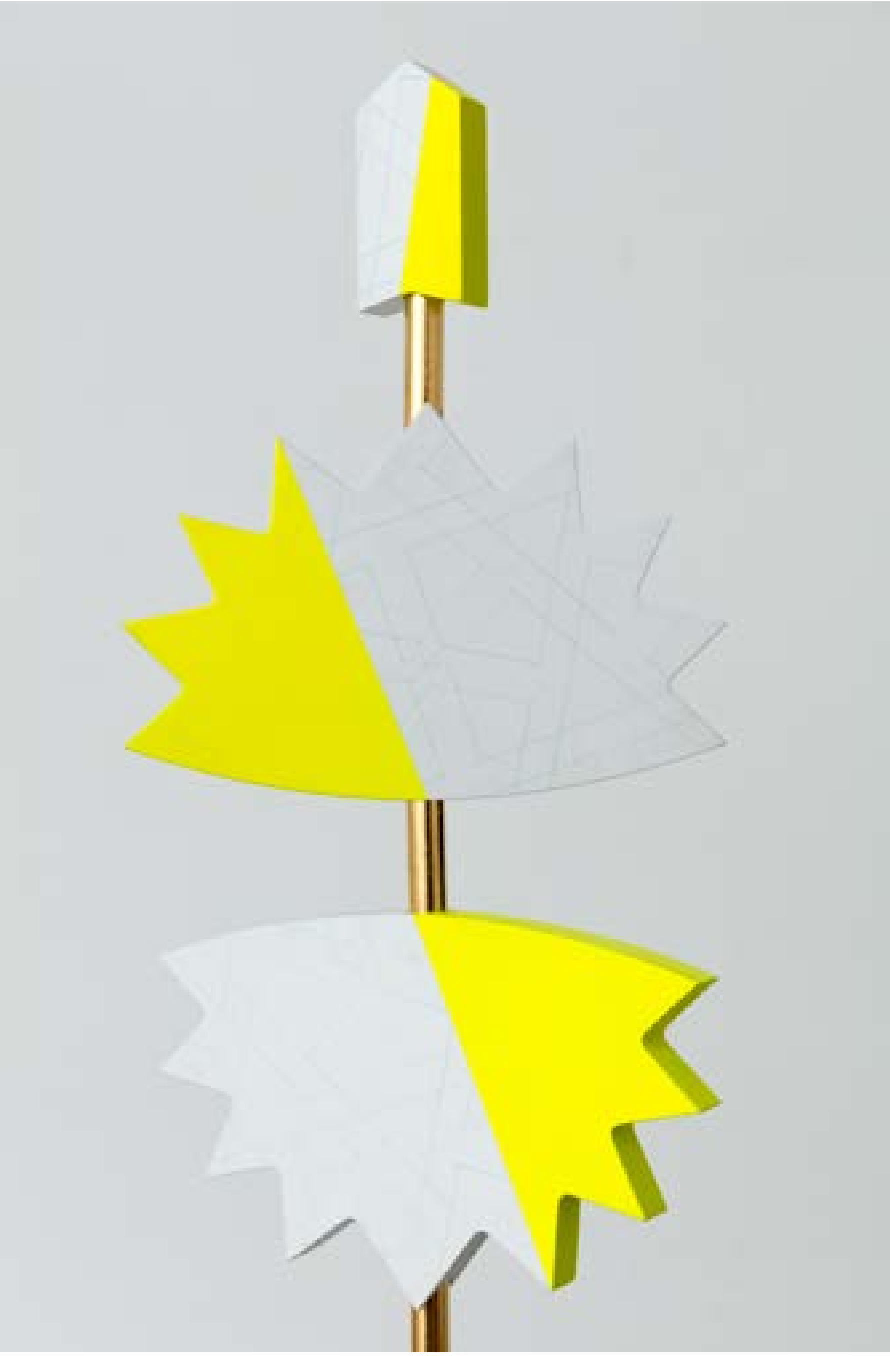
Gender also mattered a great deal in how political opponents perceived and represented Shafik. An unsurprisingly familiar refrain: Shafik's efforts were dismissed, by both male and female commentators, as exercises in self-service, a paean to her carefully plucked eyebrows and European fashion sense. One newspaper column pronounced that Shafik was "motivated purely by the desire to gain personal publicity rather than to redress any serious social problems"; she was mocked as the "Leader of Candied Chestnuts," a "lady of the salon," and as insincere about the liberation of women.[8] Upon getting her doctorate from the Sorbonne, a critic questioned whether "the award was due more to her feminine charm than to any scholarly merit."[9] Her association with her husband, who was a lawyer connected to the Wafdist government, and her early ties to the palace did not help, giving her the appearance of being "too bourgeois to be taken seriously" for some left-leaning critics.[10]

Yet Shafik was more complex than any of these critiques allow—for while she was no doubt inspired by the demands for women's suffrage central to Western feminist movements, she patterned her politics after Huda Shaarawi, an *Egyptian* feminist. And while it is true her fashion tended towards the *haute* bourgeois, she spearheaded several political efforts, including an inter-class literacy campaign, designed to address poverty and gendered oppression. In short, Shafik simultaneously bore the many burdens of Egypt's colonial and postcolonial realities alongside the politics of being a woman in politics.

Guirguis's work, then, brings together these parts of Shafik's life, representing the political forces that shaped Shafik and that she shaped in return, through design and pattern. In using the Azbakeya fence as a mnemonic for such tensions, Guirguis insists on the exigency of metaphor to capaciously relate all the complexity that Shafik's critics closed off. Shafik was a public figure, until she wasn't. And this split—a rift between the known and the unknowable—is hinted at in the cut paper works on display in *Of Thorns and Love*. Guirguis paints the backsides of these works vibrant fluorescent yellows—so that they appear to glow from within.

Bernie Madoff. Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Raj Rajaratnam. Diana Brooks. Martha Stewart. John G. Rowland. Boaz Yona.

Opening *Of Thorns and Love* is a large blue-and-gold wall mural, with arching catenary forms and stick-like staccato rays.



Bint al-Nil [detail], 2018

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

The artist has based this design on the visual iconography of Nut, ancient Egyptian goddess of the sky, who spreads her starry body over the heavens to block the rays of Ra, the sun god. Egyptian art history was an enduring interest for Shafik; when she was studying for her doctorate in France she wrote two theses: one about Islam and women, and the other concerning ancient Egyptian art. Her idiosyncratic understanding of her own visual cultural heritage can perhaps best be summed up in her thesis title, "*L'Art pour l'art dans l'Égypte antique*" ("art for art's sake in ancient Egypt").[11] Of course, Egyptian art was not simply autotelic (complete within itself), but was a complex system of signification. What Shafik's enframing of Egyptian art as "art for art's sake" reveals is her desire to apply modernist French notions of art's autonomy to her own cultural milieu, bringing the two into much closer contact than either French or Egyptian art history might necessarily allow. One supposes this might be to give Egyptian art a kind of credibility within modernist European artistic discourse that otherwise slots ancient art from Africa under the disciplines of anthropology or archaeology. And this is not the only example where Shafik's love of French culture and modernist ideas melds with long-held symbols of Egyptian art and cultural heritage.

Shafik was always searching for answers, and her poetry professes to this fact; in her poems, which are almost exclusively written in French, she consistently invokes Romantic and modernist notions of the Absolute, Beauty, the Heart, and her favorite geographical feature-cum-metaphor for the life that courses through bodies, cities, and souls . . . the Nile. In using the Nile as a geographical and spiritual center, Shafik reorients some of the hallmarks of modernist poetry. A poem, posthumously published, succinctly draws these concerns together:

CAPTER L'INFINI	(CAPTURE THE INFINITE
O Nil!	O Nile!
Incarnation d'ABSOLU	Incarnation of the ABSOLUTE
ta vue	your view
m'illumine le coeur! . . .	illuminates my heart! . . .)

While the poem begins with an invocation to the Nile, it ends, not with a word, but with an ellipsis. Such punctuation signals a trailing off . . . a pause . . . or a stunned silence. Perhaps, for Shafik, the Nile engendered all three. The sculptures in *Of Thorns and Love* are similar in this regard, their bombastic shapes evocative of explosions and cartoonish geometry. Yet their forms are derived from the negative spaces found in Guirguis's previous *mashrabiya* cut paper works dedicated to Huda Shaarawi. Appearing as totems, Guirguis's sculptures point to negative space as an integral part of pattern and design, similar to the way that the application of bright color to the reverse side of her cut paper works suggests an interior world. Sited within the larger exhibition, these sculptural elements interrupt the sensuous ornamentation of the paper works, suggesting to a viewer how space structures feeling, and feeling structures space.

Lindsay Lohan. Lauryn Hill. Paris Hilton.
Dr. Dre. Meek Mill. T.I. Michael Vick.
Robert Downey, Jr. Bobby Brown. Roman
Polanski. Lil' Kim. Andy Dick.

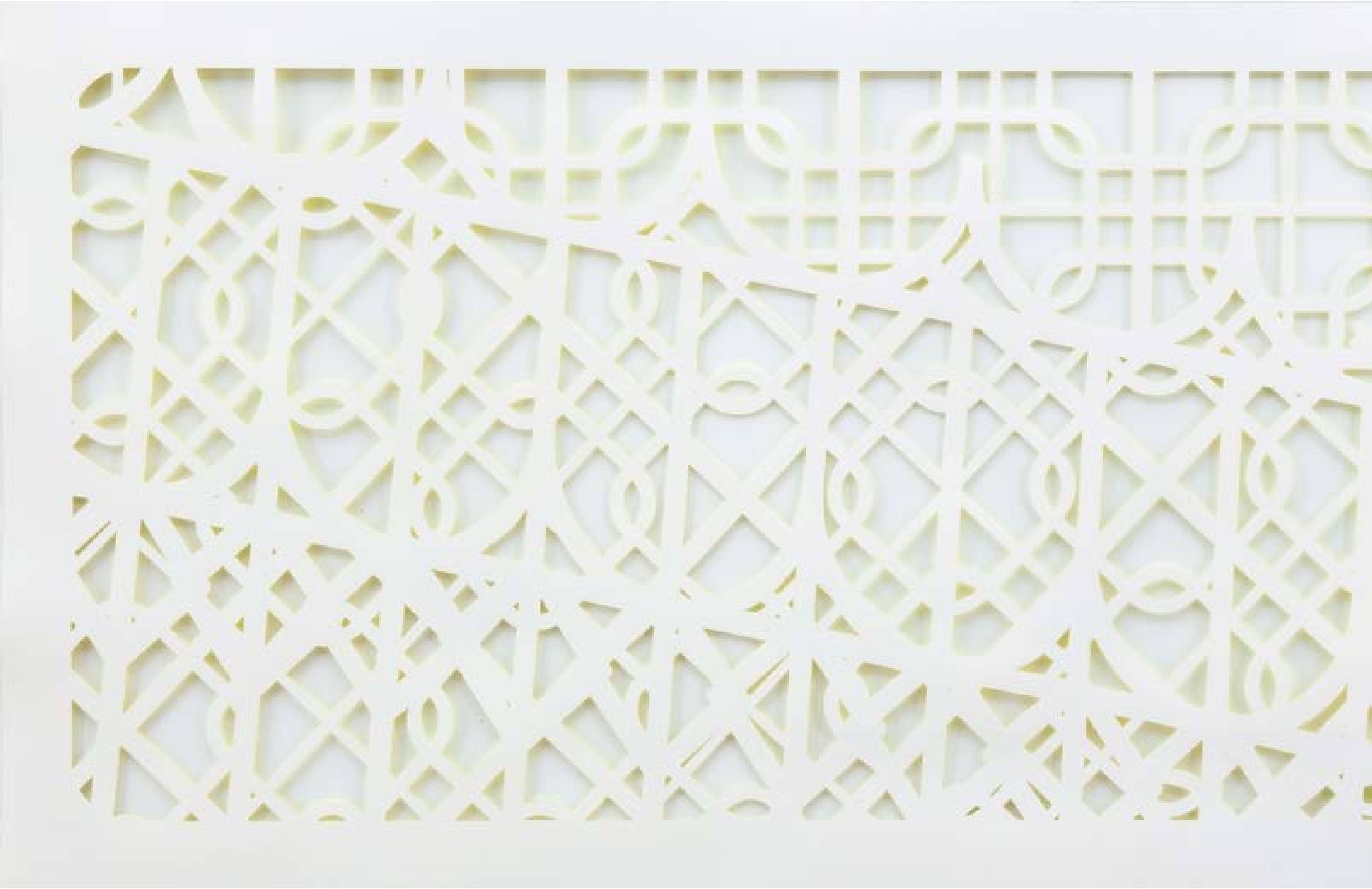
To date, only one biography has been written about Shafik's life, by the American anthropologist Cynthia Nelson. Having accepted a teaching position at The American University in Cairo (AUC) in 1963, Nelson's time in Egypt overlapped with Shafik's final years, yet Nelson doesn't give any indication in her book that she ever met Shafik in person. This makes sense, as Shafik's isolation was so entrenched by the early 1960s that it wasn't until her death that Egyptian and international newspapers broke their silence and remarked on her incredible life. For Nelson, researching and writing about Shafik served as a logical extension of her subject's political aspirations. Speaking to the senior librarian and archivist at AUC, Nelson mused about her biography of Shafik, "It turned out to be [. . .] that young students at AUC, upon reading it, said we never realized we had such women [. . .] In a sense it's kind of an interesting process of being able to, I guess be an intellectual midwife."[12]

Education, literacy, the vote, parliamentary representation—these were the motivating forces of Shafik's feminism, and anyone who continues to write and agitate about these things falls under her penumbra, whether they care to admit it or not. Just as Nelson served as an "intellectual midwife" for Doria Shafik, the political efforts of Shafik were an extension of those of her mentor Huda Shaarawi. Born into a harem, Shaarawi is perhaps most famous for removing her face veil in the Cairo train station in 1923. In this and other political gestures, Shaarawi's activist work was, in many ways, a prototype for Shafik. For example, in 1910 Shaarawi founded a girls' school that taught academic subjects, countering the status quo of women's education, which was the privileging of the domestic above all else. Shaarawi also founded multiple feminist groups, including the Egyptian Feminist Union, and later, the Arab Feminist Union, both of which published magazines. Shafik's political activities encompassed literacy campaigns and founding a feminist group/political party of her own. Suffrage was the central concern for Shafik, and gaining women's participation in the political sphere was a structuring force in her life.

When Shafik went on hunger strike in 1957, her second such public act, Nasser's regime had already taken political control of Egypt. Nasser's political opponents were being disappeared, and although Shafik tried to warn her fellow Egyptians about the potential danger of Nasser's rule, her protest actions and writings ultimately fell upon deaf ears. Shortly after her failed hunger strike, Shafik was put under house arrest.

Pol Pot. Augusto Pinochet. Robert Mugabe. Miguel Etchecolatz. Efraín Ríos Montt. Kamuzu Banda. Reynaldo Bignone. William Calley. Oscar Pistorius. Adriano Sofri.

House arrest, as a punishment, exists on the carceral spectrum between prison and exile. Its power resides in its transformative capacities to fashion home into a cage. People all over the world are put under house



Azbakeya (with a little more love) [detail], 2018

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

arrest for myriad reasons. Sometimes, as in the case of Doria Shafik, house arrest is a political strategy meant to deprive a political agitator of the necessary oxygen of publicity. The punishment is also common with white-collar crime, such as bank fraud, where the infraction is so nebulously understood that the economic and symbolic violence enacted by perpetrators is not seen as coeval to physical harm or violence, and thus undeserving of confinement in a prison. Sometimes the convicted person is just too famous, and seemingly above anything as base as jail time. In other instances a person's crimes are so great in magnitude, such as genocide or massacre, that a punishment is equally incomprehensible. Throughout this essay I have listed those who fall into these categorical distinctions.

Once Doria Shafik was put under house arrest, her world became very small . . . physically, socially, and psychologically. Nasser made it illegal to mention her name in the papers, and this enforced public amnesia had its intended punitive effect. In the yawning gap between her former life and her new reality, Shafik took up the study of foreign languages, continued to write poetry, played bridge, and visited with close family. But these activities are not comparable to organizing, publishing, and agitating—activities that connect the self directly, temporally, to the performance of politics and nation. Doria might have survived house arrest, sure, supposing she would have been released . . . eventually. But would she have *lived*?

What retreat is left when isolation is an enforced reality?

In ancient Egyptian culture, a person dies more than once. There is the first death, which happens soon after you draw your last breath—an expiration of the body. And then, years later, centuries if you are particularly lucky, talented, or terrible, there is another death, a moment when your name and memory are finally forgotten. This notion can be traced back to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* (c. 2400 BCE–50 CE), personalized compendiums of spells and mortuary texts whose purpose was to facilitate the passage of the deceased's soul through the afterlife. One text, written on behalf of a New Kingdom scribe named Ani (c. 1250 BCE), contains a spell that speaks directly of this possibility of a second death in the underworld of Khert-Neter.[13] "I am not a man of no account (or ignorance)," he exclaims, in defiance of the bleak prospect of being forgotten.[14] This second death, or even the barest mention of its possibility, serves as a fulcrum upon which the diverse enterprises of archiving, interpreting, and storytelling are founded. Doria Shafik, speaking of Huda Shaarawi, implored her supporters to, "remember her until you understand something of what you owe her."[15] In this lightly chiding way (perhaps Shafik was reminding herself as much as anyone else), public memory could not only keep the feminist elder alive, but might also activate and resurrect her politics afresh. Ultimately, and happily, as Guirguis's exhibition proves, Shafik's adversaries did not succeed in their efforts to disappear her name. Because of this we can make an invocation of Shafik's name—for a person who lived, and for whom only living was insufficient.

Andy Campbell is an Assistant Professor of Critical Studies at The USC Gayle Garner Roski School of Art and Design. His writings have been published in *Artforum*, *Art Papers*, and *Semigloss*, and his first book, *Bound Together: Leather, Sex, Archives, and Contemporary Art*, is forthcoming from Manchester University Press.

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[1] Doria Shafik quoted in Cynthia Nelson, *Doria Shafik, Egyptian Feminist: A Woman Apart* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996), 42.

[2] Ibid., xvii–xviii.

[3] For more on the use of Khalili's SuperAdobe construction system and the durability of colonial forms of violence and resistence in Guirguis's sculptural practice see: Andy Campbell, "One I Know: Sherin Guirguis's *One I Call* and the Durability of Form," X-TRA 20, no. 2 (Winter 2018). http://x-traonline.org/article/one-i-know-sherin-guirguiss-one-i-call-and-the-durability-of-form.

[4] Audre Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 36–9.

[5] Nourhan H. Abdel-Rahman, "Egyptian Historical Parks, Authenticity vs. Change in Cairo's Cultural Landscape," Procedia 225 (July 14, 2016), 391–409.

[6] Sherin Guirguis, conversation with author, June 4, 2018.

[7] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Berger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991) [originally published in German in 1962].

[8] "Actualité, July 22," *Le Journal d'Egypte*, July 25, 1950, as quoted in Nelson, 164. The "candied chestnut" insult is particularly stinging for it collapses two things—the gendered dismissal of Shafik's earnestness (as candied chestnuts are almost cloyingly sweet and delicate), and of her allegedly colonialist leanings/sympathies (as candied chestnuts are a francophone dessert—*marrons glacés*)

[9] Quoted in Nelson, 94.

[10] Ibid., 124.

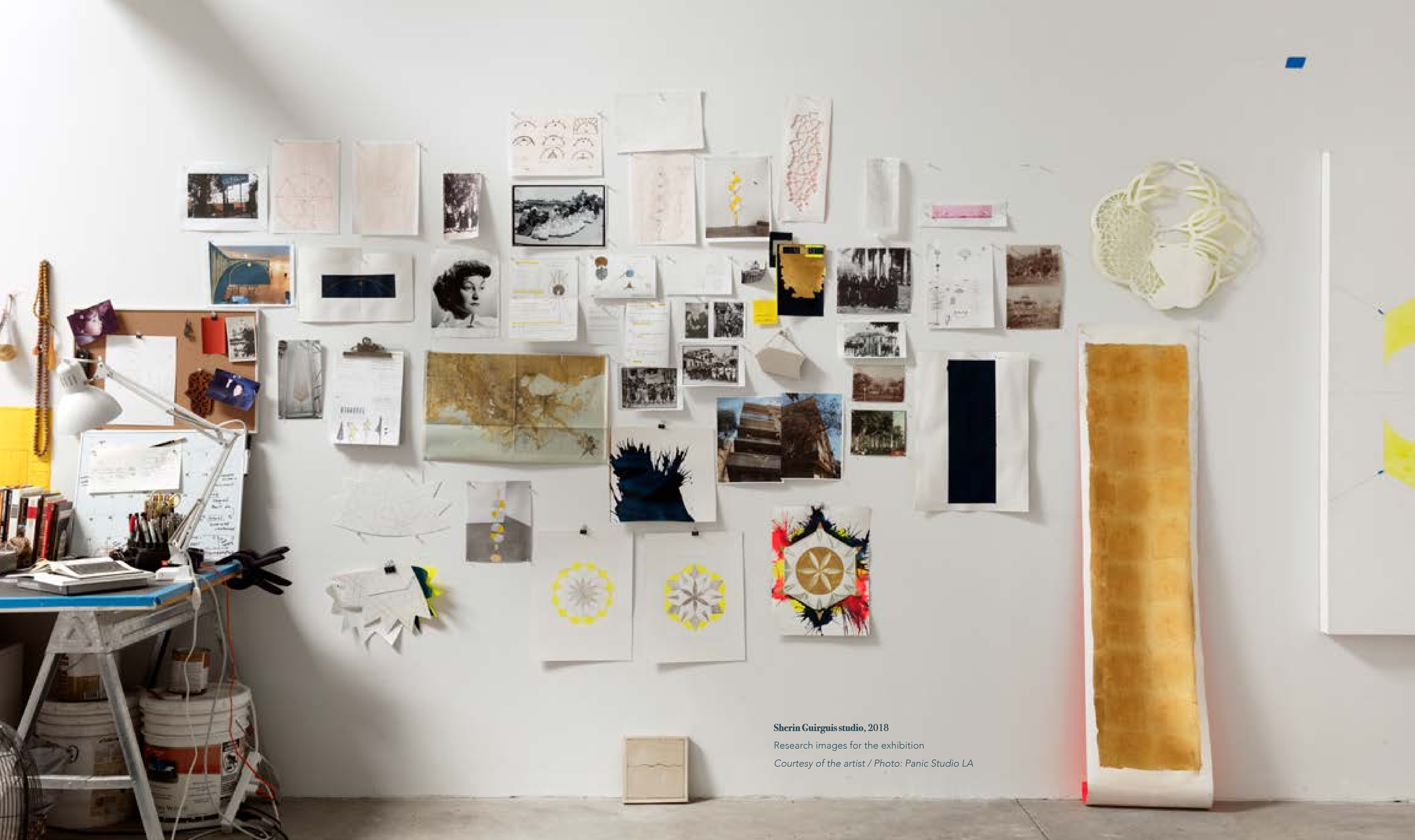
[11] Ibid., 74.

[12] "Remembering Cynthia Nelson: Friend, Colleague, and Mentor President…", American University in Cairo: A Newsletter for Faculty and Staff 8, no. 7 (March 2006), web. http://www.global-sisterhood-network.org/content/view/1018/59.

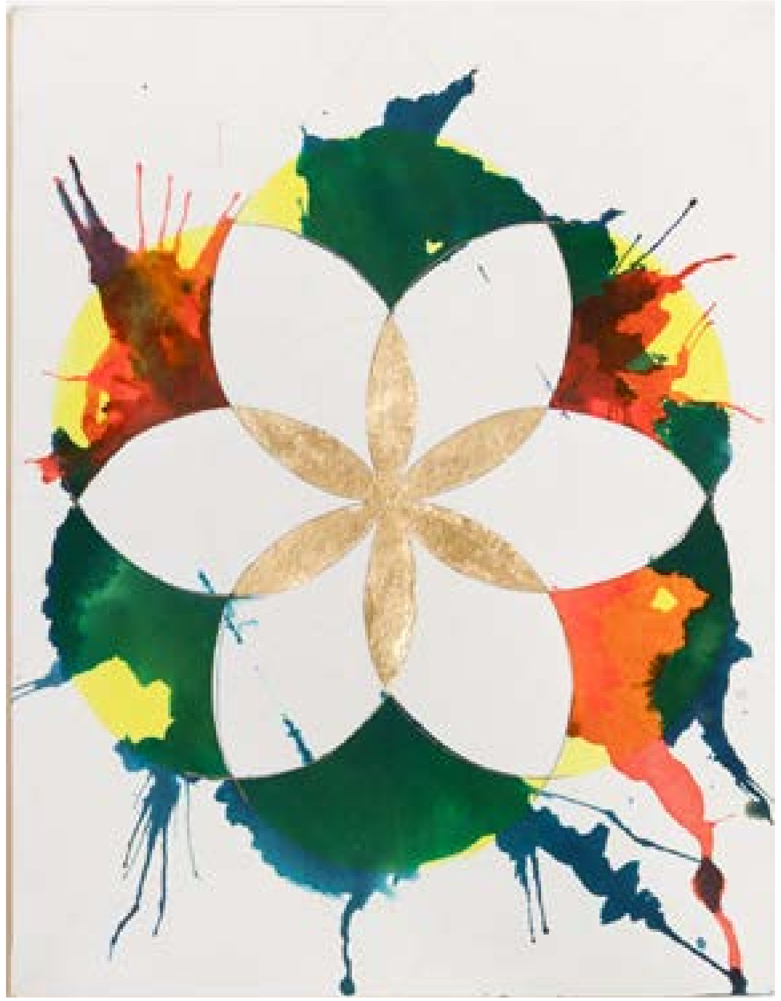
[13] Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Great Awakening, The Egyptian Book of the Dead* [reprint of 1895 edition] (Brooklyn, NY: A&B Publishers Group, 1999), 315.

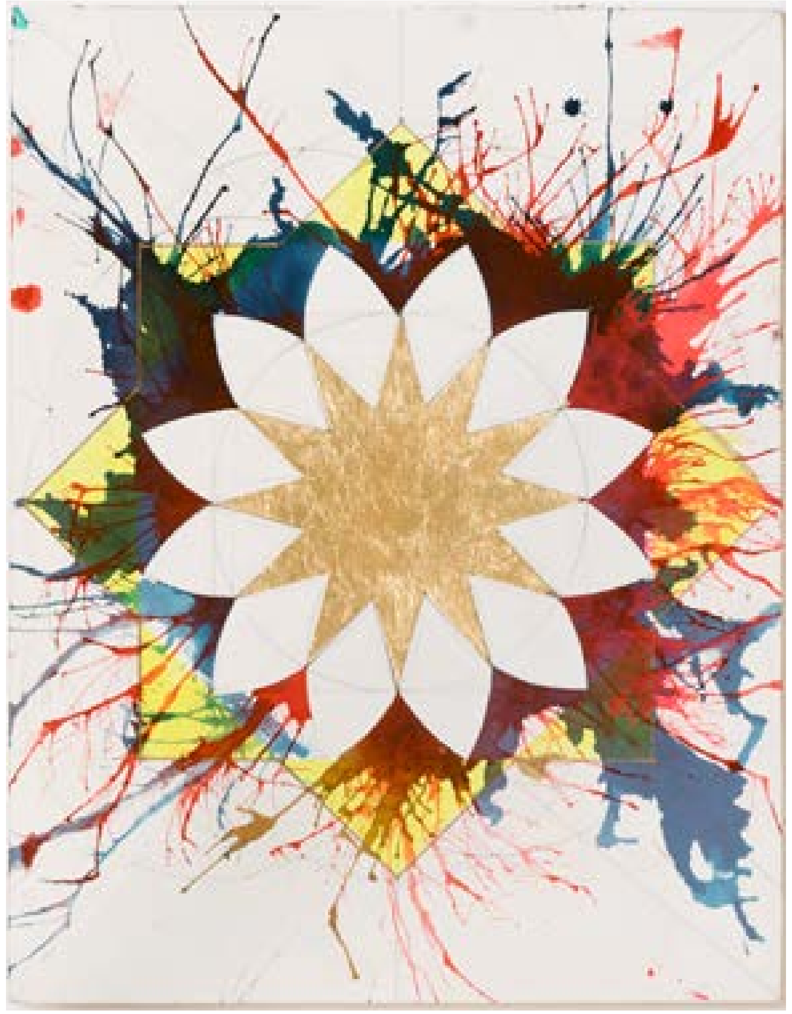
[14] Ibid.

[15] Quoted in Nelson, 141.



Sherin Guirguis studio, 2018
Research images for the exhibition
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA





(left to right)

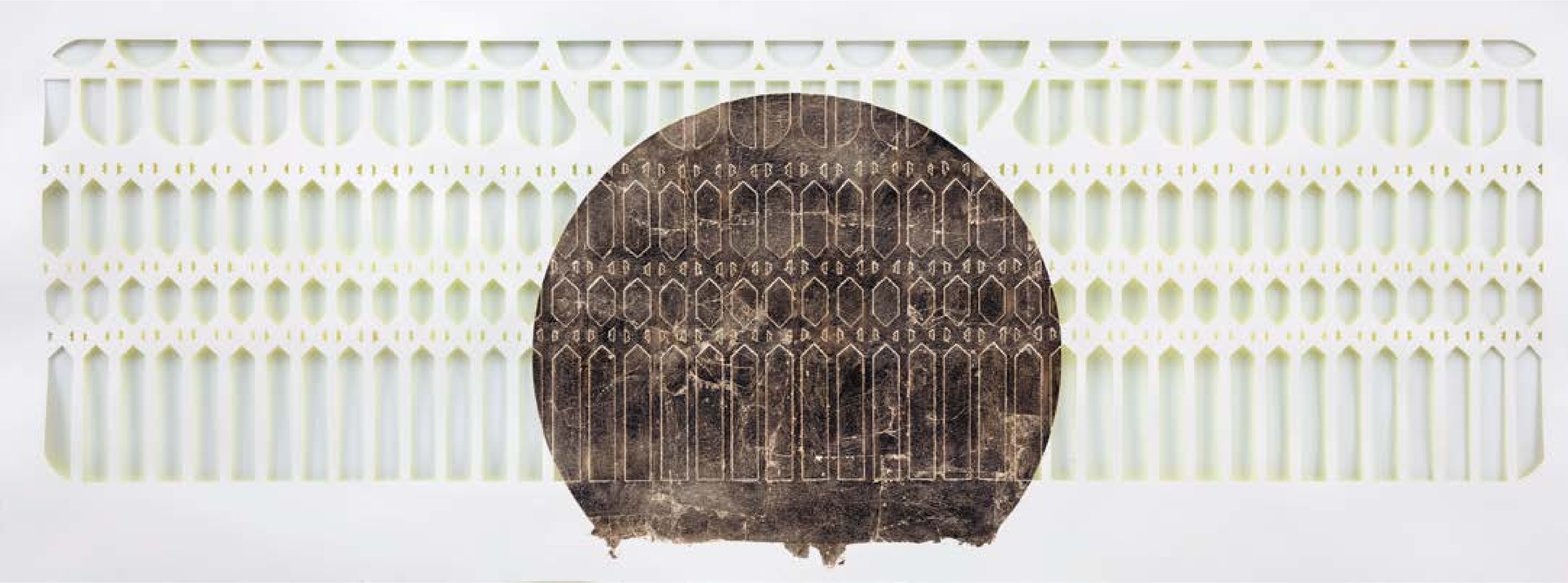
Placeless I, 2017

Mixed media on paper, wood panel
14 x 11 inches

Placeless II, 2017

Mixed media on paper, wood panel
14 x 11 inches

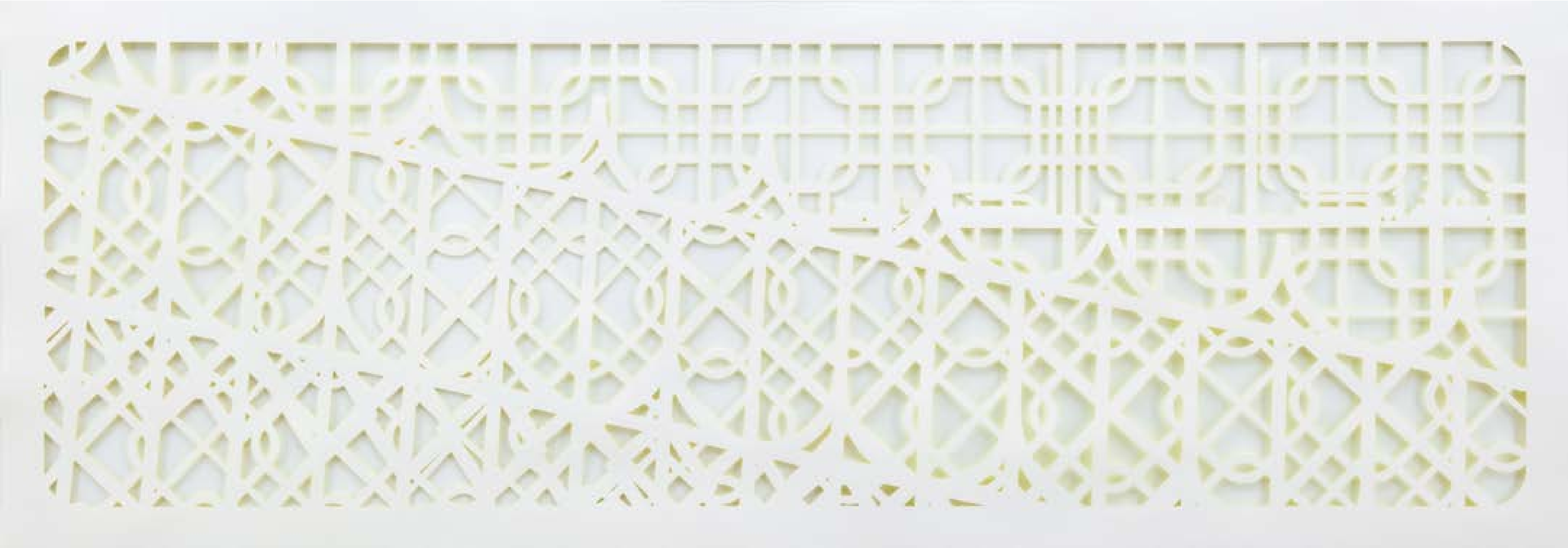
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



Azbakeya (sun disk), 2018

Hand-cut paper, gold leaf, acrylic paint
28 x 74 inches

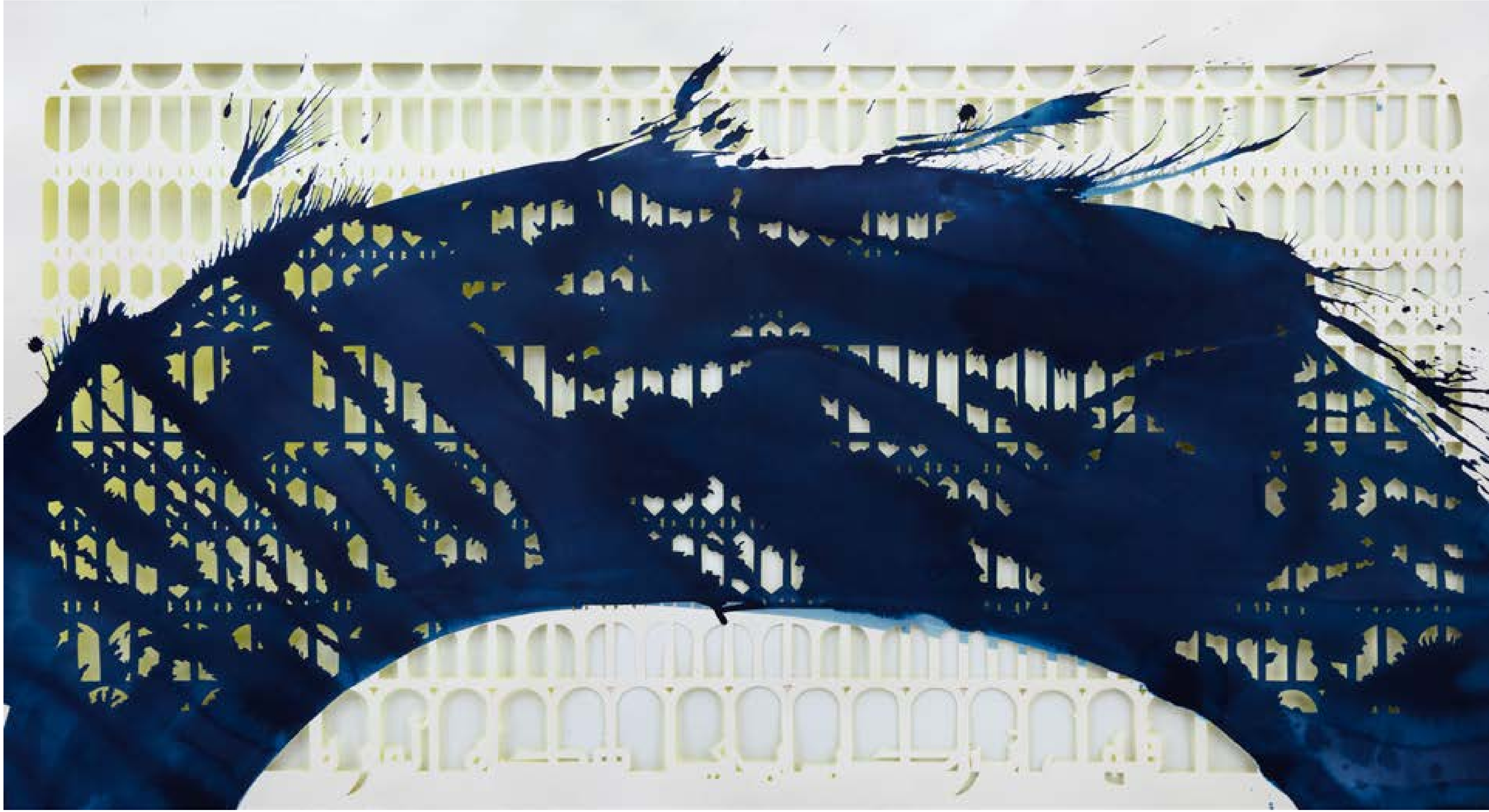
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



Azbakeya (with a little more love), 2018

Hand-cut paper, acrylic paint
26 x 74 inches

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



Azbakeya (will you welcome me this time?), 2018

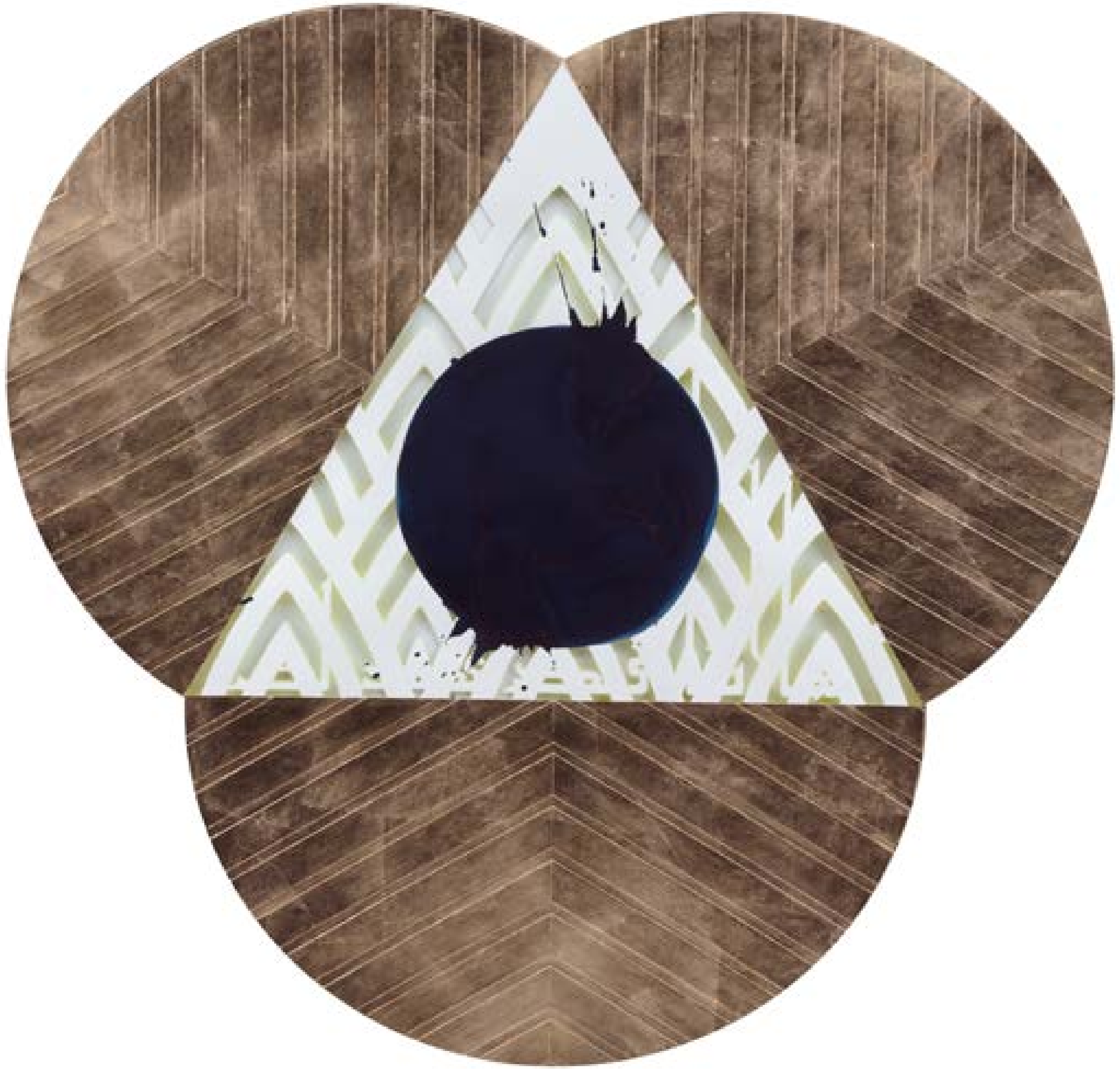
Hand-cut paper, ink, acrylic paint
35 x 63 inches

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

Triple Disk Lotus (here I have returned), 2018

Hand-cut paper, ink, gold leaf, acrylic paint
48 x 48 inches

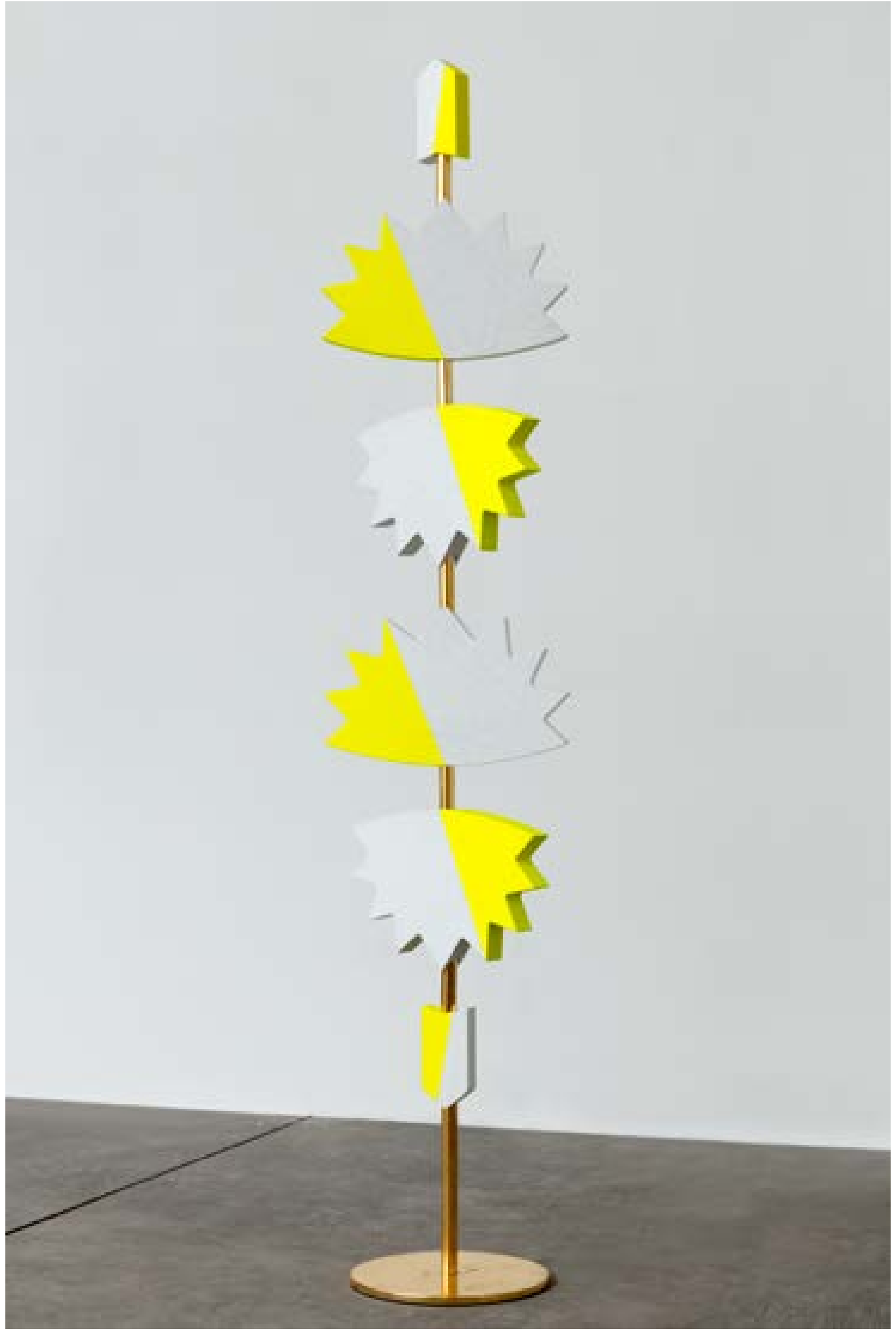
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

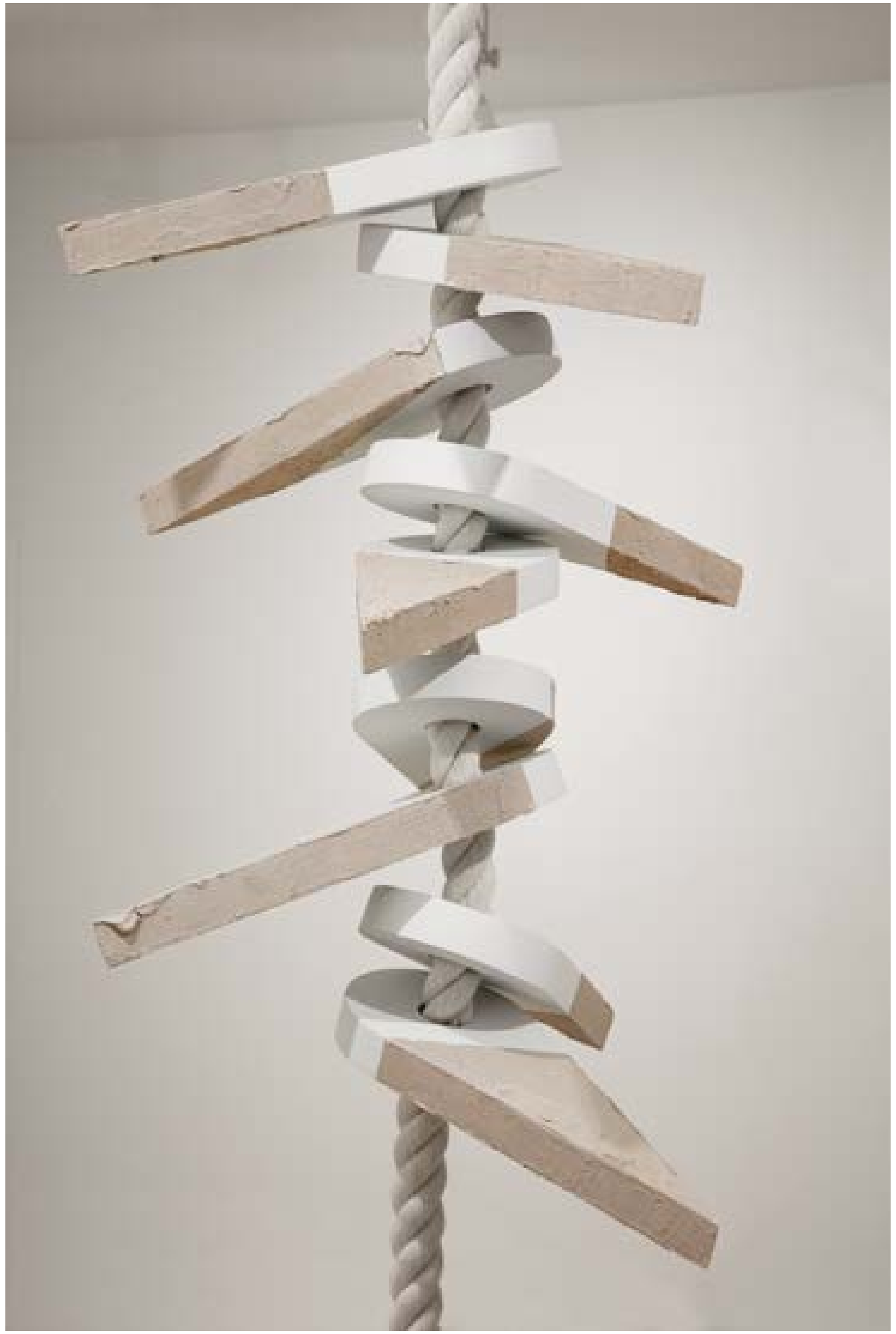


Bint al-Nil, 2018

Brass, wood, acrylic paint, color pencil, gold leaf
76 x 15 inches

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

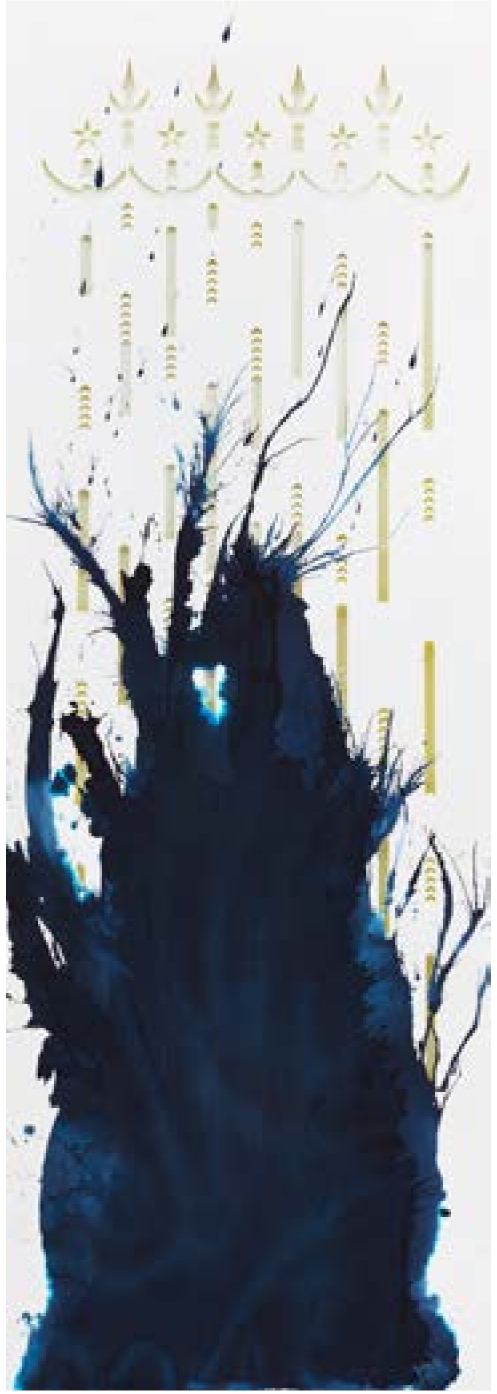




Larmes d'Isis [detail], **2018**

Wood, rope, acrylic paint, adobe
103 x 26 x 26 inches (approximate)

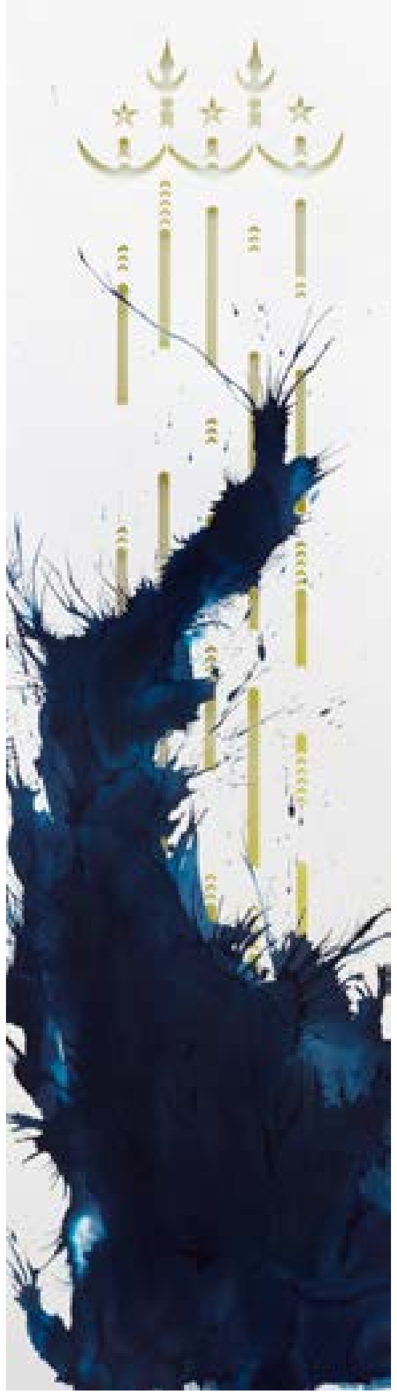
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



Storming Parliament I, 2018

Hand-cut paper, ink, acrylic paint
76 x 27.5 inches

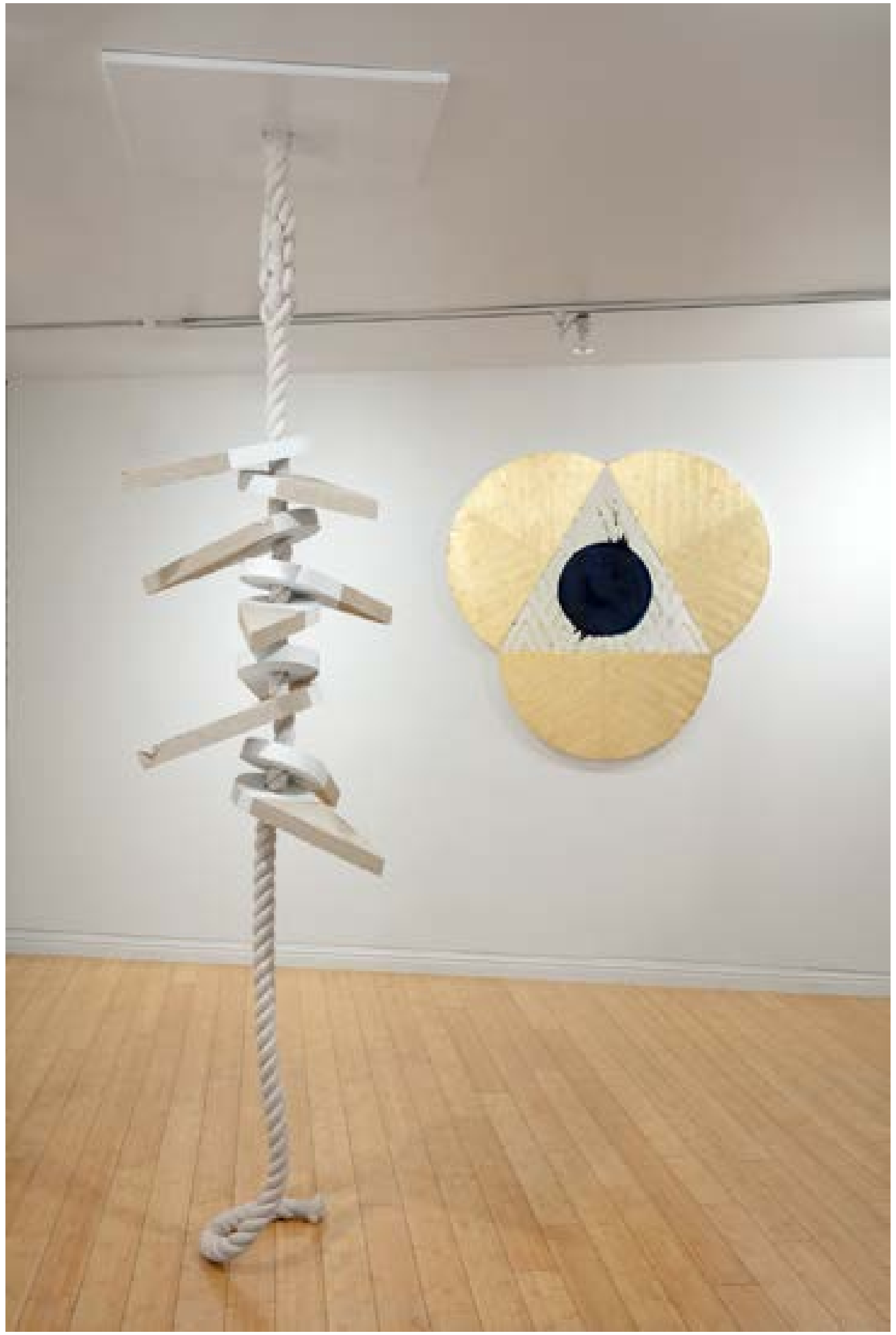
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



Storming Parliament II, 2018

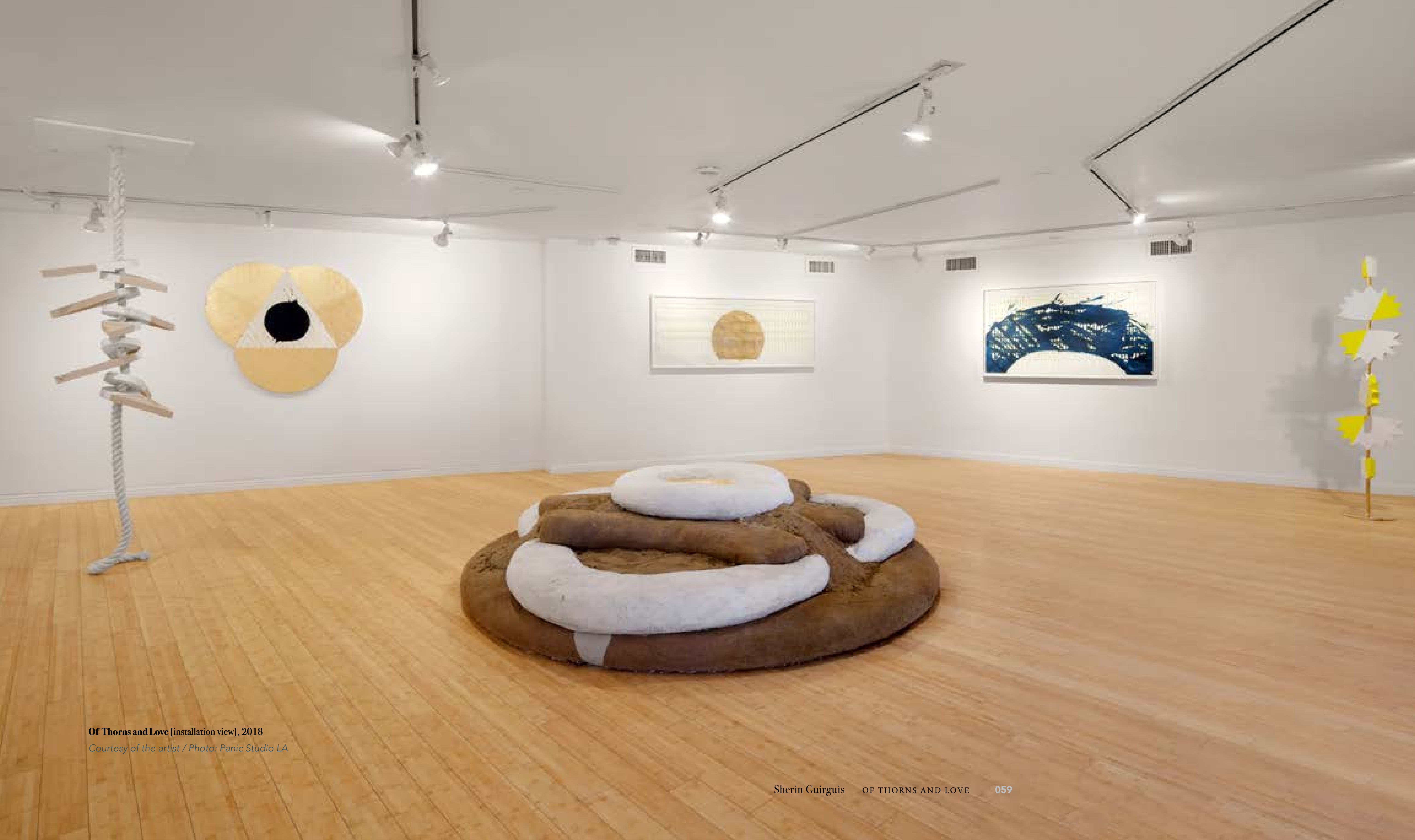
Hand-cut paper, ink, acrylic paint
76 x 20.5 inches

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



Of Thorns and Love [installation view], 2018

Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA



Of Thorns and Love [installation view], 2018
Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Panic Studio LA

Doria Shafik with members of the executive council of Bint al-Nil Union during a planning session for the march on Parliament demanding political rights for women, February 1951.

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Constructing an Egyptian Feminist–Futurism

HEBA EL KAYAL

The history of feminism in Egypt has yet to be thoroughly written and recorded. The notion that an aspect of history in Egypt is yet unrecorded may seem laughable: there is a perpetual writing and recording of history in Egypt, starting from temple walls and tombs thousands of years ago, to monuments and landmarks commemorating recent war victories, to a prolific journalism and print culture in the twentieth century that considers such commemorations bold propaganda . . . and yet this is all arguably a male history.

The commemoration and celebration of women in Egypt is very limited. There are only two public statues in the city of Cairo that celebrate women. One statue is of the Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum (1898–1975), who came from humble, rural origins and who captivated the entire Arab world with songs that celebrated the culture and identity of not just Egyptians, but all Arabs. Poetic love songs and political lyrics resulted in her becoming an icon of Arab nationalism, and Kalthoum's statue can be found close to where her former villa once stood on the island of Zamalek in Cairo.

The second sculpture of a female figure that can be found in Cairo is *Nahdet Masr* (1919–1928), or *Egypt's Awakening*, by the Egyptian artist Mahmoud Mukhtar (1891–1934), which is composed of a female figure lifting a veil off her head with one hand while her other hand is resting on a sphinx. This statue is located in front of Cairo University. Mukhtar's sculpture represents modernity dawning on Egypt, with Egypt personified as a female figure looking out to the future. Some interpretations also view the figure's removal of the veil as a homage to the historic act of Egypt's first feminist, Huda Shaarawi, removing her face veil at the Cairo train station in 1923 to demand that women seek personal freedom from the patriarchy. Whereas Shaarawi was protesting women's place in society at the time, Mukhtar was celebrating Egypt's growing nationalist movement and its emancipation from British imperialism.

To this day, there is a lack of recognition and celebration of the women who have contributed to the development of modern Egypt, be it in public art, history books, or print. Sherin Guirguis's project on twentieth-century Egyptian feminist Doria Shafik (1908–1975) is crucial to the safeguarding of a historical narrative that has been compromised by the conscious removal of key female figures in Egyptian history owing to their intellectual and political differences with male leadership. The following interviews are an attempt to start making visible the history of Shafik, who was mercilessly removed from

Egyptian history for objecting to the military regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), and the lack of rights and freedom he was prepared to grant Egyptian women. Shafik's feminist activism helped grant Egyptian women the right to vote in 1956, and thus Shafik's contribution to modern Egypt is far greater than she has been credited for.

Excerpts from interviews conducted with activist and writer Nehad Salem, artist Sherin Guirguis, and Doria Shafik's two daughters, Dr. Aziza Ellozy and Dr. Jehane Ragai, aim to highlight the challenges that Shafik faced whilst contextualizing her legacy and its impact on women of both her time and today. Salem, who was born in 1933, witnessed firsthand many of the political and social changes that Egypt went through while she was an activist and member of the Egyptian Communist Party in the 1950s. As the granddaughter of one of Huda Shaarawi's friends and supporters, her personal reflections are fascinating to explore. Along with the experiences of Shafik's daughters as they witnessed their mother's activism, these interviews are but a first hopeful step toward constructing a historical narrative for Egypt that does not ascribe to only one gender, but a feminist–futurism that will witness a retelling of a movement that continues to develop and grow.

Heba El Kayal has a master's degree in modern art history and curatorial studies from Columbia University, has served as a consultant and staff member for numerous art collectors, galleries, and an auction house, and was the lifestyle editor for *Daily News Egypt* from 2008 to 2012.

Portrait of Doria Shafik, 1945

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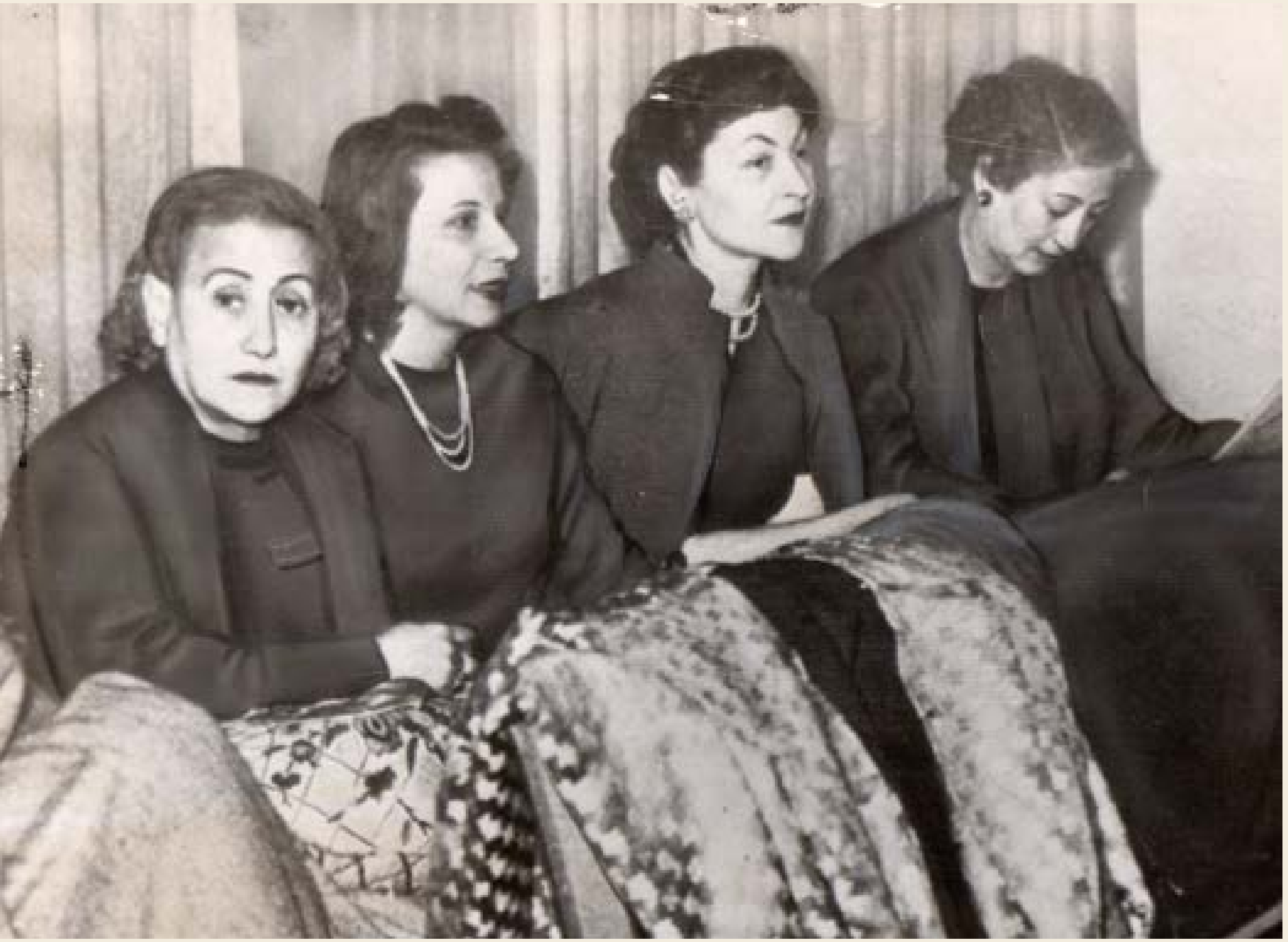

Doria Shafik on hunger strike in 1954 with three other colleagues at the Press Syndicate in Cairo.

Photo: Associated Press

Interview with Nehad Salem

CONDUCTED BY HEBA EL KAYAL

Nehad Salem (b. 1933) has been politically engaged since her youth. Having first joined the Egyptian Communist Party in the 1950s, Salem fought in the resistance in 1956 during the British occupation of Port Said in Egypt. She obtained a BA and MA in Comparative Literature from The American University in Cairo (AUC) in the 1960s, and worked as an interpreter for various United Nations organizations in Paris, Vienna, and New York.

Heba El Kayal: How does Doria Shafik's legacy differ from Huda Shaarawi's?

Nehad Salem: Huda Shaarawi starts with the 1919 revolution[1] and her movement, her ideas. What she was mostly dealing with was the importance of casting off the veil, literally, and going on demonstrations with women.

HK: Why was Doria's legacy erased so soon after her death?

NS: Doria used to have several contacts abroad in India, the States, and other places, and that was taken by the Free Officers[2] as her being a "foreign agent." That's why they ostracized her. After the events of the Tripartite Aggression in 1957,[3] America was still trying to break [President] Nasser. She tried to intervene, and so Shafik was then considered a foreign agent and forced into house arrest.

I believe Doria Shafik to have been the first germ of [highly educated and motivated] middle-class women. Huda Shaarawi, I think, was confined to a social society that my mother belonged to. Today, we're at a point where we have had women being killed in the streets during protests and needing an entity to protect harassed women and those who are abused—this is the third step from Huda Shaarawi, largely speaking.

I've known Doria Shafik's two daughters (Aziza and Jehane) since university. I went to university when my children went to kindergarten, and so I was [a few years] older than they were. During the January 25th [Arab Spring] uprisings in 2011, her daughters, Aziza and Jehane, protested in Tahrir Square.

Of course, much has happened in between. Today, and with the beginning of consumer society and the decrease in industry, which led to high rates of unemployment particularly for males, the number of women working to support their households [particularly as maids] is really incredible. Sadat[4] and Mubarak[5] were not particularly interested in [developing Egyptian] industry, but more in making their own fortunes. Nowadays, the number of women who support their husbands and their families has increased tenfold.

HK: Don't you think we have ideologically regressed in Egypt? Weren't we at a point in the '60s and '70s more progressive? And if so, why was that?

NS: Yes, thanks to Nasser's revolution. In 1957, during the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt, two other young women and myself—despite being married and having two young children whom I left with the mother of a friend of ours—volunteered to train to support the resistance [with my husband]. We received training in a camp on land that was volunteered by the mayor of a village nearby Port Said. I carried supplies for the secret service inside. Years later, the wife of this mayor came to visit me in my office in Cairo after having searched for me, and proudly told me that owing to having seen me and the other young women train and fight in the resistance, she decided to go to school and even finished an undergraduate degree.

Afterwards, the political climate become complicated, and the level of corruption in government increased, and so I think the factor of politics during Nasser's time played a big role in creating a progressive and liberal environment—only to be erased by the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood.

HK: How did the political environment of the '60s and '70s, and the tail end of Doria Shafik's movement, provoke a more liberal attitude in Egypt, if any?

NS: It wasn't a complete opening, no. But there was an evolution in society's way of thinking. [That time] was when more women started going to university, and when education became available for all. There were young girls who would get dressed up in the latest fashion coming from Italy, and young women who would get veiled because they were going to mix with young men in the university so they thought they would be more "respectable" than the girls who were wearing miniskirts. In one family, you would see women wearing the veil and others miniskirts!

In my opinion, I think Doria Shafik's movement allowed for women to object. Whereas Huda Shaarawi spoke to and for women of the higher social class, Shafik spoke to middle-class women and was able to reach the grass-roots level as well as the higher social class.

HK: The first initial action by Huda Shaarawi took many, many years to register with people. It's interesting that you think of Shafik as the leader of a second-wave feminism. What I'm interested in is attempting to measure the impact of Shafik on the women who came after her, which if I'm calculating correctly, is your generation.

NS: In my generation, many changes happened. For example, the famous journalist Ahmed Bahaa-Eldin married a Coptic woman. This was unthinkable before. His wife, Daisy, was a college graduate, and was an example for many women in that field. Also, the mixing of genders at schools. I was married off young (at eighteen) owing to family circumstances—my mother was remarried a third time, and I couldn't be left on my own. I was in need of my "corrector," that being a husband to "correct" me.[6] After I got married to my second husband in my late twenties, I went to university.

HK: Wow! Just consider the semantics of that, a "corrector."

NS: Of course! Horrible.

HK: Whereas feminism has influenced men in the West, and some men today label themselves as feminists, you don't see many men making that claim here in Egypt, leaving a big gap in any potential ability to make change here in Egypt. Whereas you had men and women fighting together in 1957, and now you have women taking up ministerial posts, what is it that's preventing Egyptians from progress?

NS: Until a man begins to feel, not just claim but really believe, that his wife is capable of doing work that is equally as good, we will always be at a point of stagnation. So long as women can't rely on a school or kindergarten system in Egypt, they will stay at home. That's why I say politics and social matters are of utmost importance in the consideration of female empowerment. When education is improved radically by hiring and paying teachers decent wages, this will have great impact also. When a woman can know that her children are safe and well taken care of while she is working, then we can have progress. The economic state of the country and the political regime responsible for the country have great impact on the prevalent ideas in society and society's ability to evolve and improve.

Doria Shafik drinks her first glass of milk after a seven-day hunger strike, 1954.

Keystone Pictures USA / Alamy Stock Photo

HK: You said something I want to go back to about change in society happening only if a man starts to believe that a woman can do a job as well as him. What is preventing him from realizing that his wife and her friends are doing his job even better? Why are we still at this point?

NS: Unfortunately, women in Egypt have become judges and ministers and ambassadors but within a specific parameter. So long as the lower middle class, and women from the lower classes, can't also achieve the same status owing to their lack of education, things won't really improve. Also, when a man can truly be proud of his wife for having become a judge or minister and proud—not simply for the prestige it warrants him personally that his wife has achieved high status socially—but truly accept her achievement, it will then lead to change. These attempts are all shallow so far.

HK: When Shafik tried to join Cairo University as a faculty member, the dean of the university wouldn't allow her to join the faculty because she was a woman. She was so young, and she had just come back from Paris with a PhD. Why was this opportunity for her not afforded? Had a man with the same social background with a PhD been given an opportunity?

NS: He would have been accepted. Absolutely.

HK: But because, by virtue of her being a woman . . .

NS. Yes. They didn't refuse her because it was Doria, but they would have refused any woman at the time. A man was more "eligible" to be hired.

HK: Shouldn't Nasser have had the vision later to utilize her?

NS: Absolutely, but Nasser didn't have vision. He was an army officer and therefore helped out in many ways politically, but when it came to his agricultural reforms or his educational reforms, he didn't have vision or good understanding.

HK: Nasser didn't really have an agenda for feminism, did he?

NS: No, I don't think he had. He spoke of it because women were allowed into Parliament during his time, but they weren't really accorded positions of power or major responsibilities, so they were very limited.

HK: Do you think Shafik had wide impact and influence?

NS: Unfortunately, no. There were too few women of her generation to accept her ideas and see the future the way she was looking at it. She belongs to a generation before me, and at that time, there weren't enough people in her class who knew how to read and write. Violence in the family was still present, honor killings too (we're still living that problem, maybe to a lesser degree)—but there weren't enough women like her at the time to join in on hunger strikes, etc., who had her mentality. They would say those were the Western ideas she imported. Today, you have women who are part of national movements who are willing to undergo hunger strikes, etc., who can complete her journey.

HK: What about women of your generation?

NS: My generation has a lot of women who received higher education. The artists Gazbia Sirry and Tahia Halim are women of my generation who had an extensive life. I think the limited number of educated women during Doria's generation was bad luck, it was a time when not many women sought an education. Her movement made a small impact, but there was no continuity.

HK: This impact was gaining the right for women to vote. How do you measure her impact?

NS: The mere fact that she had an impact was a success, even though it was limited to what she achieved.

HK: If there hadn't been Doria Shafik, who might have come up?

NS: Someone else, but she would have to have been courageous, and to have understood what necessary steps needed to be taken.

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[1] The 1919 revolution was an uprising by Egyptians against British occupation for the exiling of Saad Zaghloul, the leader of the Egyptian Nationalist movement, by British authorities.

[2] The group of military men responsible for the military coup against the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, led in part by Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser became the second president of Egypt, from 1956 to 1970.

[3] Also historically referred to as the Suez Crisis, or the Second Arab–Israeli War. The event was prompted by Israel and backed by the United Kingdom and France to regain Western control of the Suez Canal after Nasser had nationalized the canal. The United States opposed the invasion by the three countries, and thereafter tried to convince Nasser to oppose the growing influence of the U.S.S.R. and ally itself with the U.S.

[4] President Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt from 1970 to 1981.

[5] President Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt from 1981 to 2011.

[6] The insinuation is that a young woman left unmarried is a mistake on the part of the family and requires a husband to ensure all her future actions are in line with moral and social codes of the time.

One of the members of Bint al-Nil telling Doria Shafik about her future by "reading the cup" on March 26, 1954. This comes after the hunger strike of 1954.

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Interview with Dr. Aziza Ellozy and Sherin Guirguis

CONDUCTED BY HEBA EL KAYAL

Dr. Aziza Ellozy (b. 1942) is a professor of practice at The American University in Cairo (AUC) and associate dean for Library and Learning Technologies. Previous to her joining AUC, Ellozy was a tenured professor at Fordham University in New York in the department of Natural Sciences. Ellozy has focused her career on education reform and technology applications in the teaching and learning process both during her time at Fordham and currently at AUC. She is Doria Shafik's eldest daughter.

Sherin Guirguis: I've been wanting to have a conversation between three generations of Egyptian women to talk about the legacy of feminism in Egypt and its roots. I embarked on this project five years ago starting with the work of Huda Shaarawi, thinking about her push to move women out of the harem and into the salon and how that work was built upon by Doria Shafik taking women out of the salons and into the streets, and into Parliament–public spaces in a way that no one had dared to do before.

I'm interested in different ways the three of us have engaged this history: you [Aziza] experiencing it first-hand, me experiencing it through [Cynthia] Nelson's biography [of Doria Shafik] from abroad, and Heba experiencing it a few generations later in Egypt.

Dr. Aziza Ellozy: There were very difficult moments at times. I think both [my sister and I] could say that we idolized her. As we were growing up, she was very much a star and out there; when I was a child that was her most active period before she was silenced. I think all the values we have were inherited from her more so than the culture around us. She was very special. She was driven to the point that she felt she was on a mission. She was an intellectual, and a poet, a very complex person. She had a private persona and a public one that were very different. We were privy to both, but sometimes it was hard. There were vulnerabilities in her, and at the same time, a lot of strength.

There was no question that she stood for [values I still] admire. Things have not changed very much since; now we have the vote, but I think we jumped back many years. The idea of freedom, how she saw it, was certainly picked up while being away in France, so I think both my sister and I grew up with those values.

It was hard to see her vilified afterwards. Her activism started off as a feminist one, and then it became a national mission against Nasser's dictatorship, which she thought of as a military dictatorship. It was hard to see her go from being an activist to being called a traitor and then silenced over the years. It colors your worldview in many ways. I'm not an activist, it's not what I'm cut out for. It wasn't a conscious choice, but an unconscious one of the life that I do want.

SG: At this moment for you, looking back at her work and activism and decision to commit such a big part of her life to this work that affected her time with you, do you see a kind of legacy of hers in your life?

AE: So much so! When I consider my values, I definitely inherited those from her. I think at times she was extreme, I don't think that's the way I am, but what moves me today is when someone strongly believes [in a cause] in that way. My father had a great impact on us also, but I would say that my mother's values are really what were instilled in us, and I see them not only in her children, but even her grandchildren today.

Heba El Kayal: When you speak about the values and principles that you say are really present in the family today, what are they? Were you aware growing up that your mother was raising you with different values than those of your classmates' mothers? Were you able to recognize these values as a young child or young woman?

AE: I can't quite answer how early on I recognized them, but there were two differences. First, the cultural. As a nuclear family, we were very different than our cousins, who grew up in a more conservative way. Some of our classmates came from families that were similarly-minded, but in terms of the setting we grew up in, I sensed that it was different. At the dinner table, we had all sorts of people, such as journalists and artists—which was very different than my friends' dinner tables, which were mostly family members. I took it for granted and never questioned it, it was just the way it was. I think in terms of values we were never lectured, "This is right, this is wrong," and the more intellectual values we just absorbed.

SG: Here we are, three women from the same place, but with different experiences. What is that moment of coming into this agency, as children or young women? I can't imagine what that moment in Doria's house must be like, but I love the idea that without lecturing, with just your presence in this environment, you didn't need to question your own agency because of your gender.

Zaynab Fuad and the literacy program of Bint al-Nil, 1951

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AE: My gender? I never questioned that. My father, when I came of age, let's say around twelve, his family was a little bit more conservative than ours. His family was questioning the freedoms we were given, but my mother then interfered. I admired him, he never pushed back. We grew up with quite a bit of freedom.

SG: Heba, maybe you can tell us more, seeing as you're the youngest of us: Is this the right moment for us to be looking at the work of Doria again, and can we see it in a new context that's even more effective? If Huda took us from the harem to the salon, and Doria from the salon to the streets, where do we go next?

HK: I do feel the regression on the street, in terms of the struggle that a lot of young women from more rural areas face when they come into the city, especially with the recent massive migration of young people. I feel that I've witnessed moments where women from disenfranchised backgrounds are not treated fairly. Also, because of religious conservatism and how society is shaping itself in more recent years, I definitely think Doria's work needs to be revisited and reconsidered. What that means, I don't know . . . because the system is really locked into a certain model as it is right now, and whether it's from an educational standpoint or cultural standpoint, I really don't know what the answer is, because we've seen increasing cases of sexual harassment on the street, and more cases of violence, and it is really worrying.

What can I do for other young women is the question I ask myself every day. Can I empower them by providing them with work opportunities? Or ideas and values? Can I do that through writing or journalism? I don't have an answer for it and I think ultimately there is no one answer–it's going to be many, many answers.

I think I was blind to it when I was still in college, I didn't feel then that I didn't have agency or freedom of thought, and I only realize this now as I'm entering my thirties and getting older that I'm losing my agency and recognizing how big the problem is. It really goes against what I thought growing older would be. I thought the older one gets, the more agency one has–especially in a society that values older women and takes them more seriously. Actually, ironically, I find it harder to assert my agency.

SG: I wonder whether that's because the world as a whole is becoming more conservative, and that as women–as the barometer of cultural freedom–we feel it first? Or is it because we're ready to take the next step to move again and demand more freedoms and rights?

AE: I might be biased, but the situation in Egypt and Arab countries and Muslim countries is harder. Though it was repressive during Nasser's time, it was still more secular and there was a balance between the state and the Muslim clerics. Our culture, if argued from the point of view of religious expectations, is more repressive than a secular culture. I think that is another problem. I don't know how to answer your question, Heba, of how [to encourage change], but I think our only hope lies with education and teaching people that they can and should question, and that it's okay to question. It's a first step and in many ways, we are not there.

Research images depicting Doria Shafik from Sherin Guirguis's studio.

Found online, these photos depict Doria Shafik during a suffrage march in the early 1950s and her image on a banner during a 2013 protest in Tahrir Square, Cairo.

Interview with Dr. Jehane Ragai and Sherin Guirguis

CONDUCTED BY HEBA EL KAYAL

Dr. Jehane Ragai (b. 1944) was a faculty member in the chemistry department at The American University in Cairo (AUC) from 1970 until her retirement in 2014 as an Emeritus Professor. In addition to her primary focus on surface chemistry, her interest in archaeological chemistry led to her study of ancient Egyptian mortars from the Sphinx and Kephren Valley Temple. She is Doria Shafik's younger daughter.

Sherin Guirguis: I was fourteen when I left Egypt, and I had never heard of Huda Shaarawi or Doria Shafik, but I definitely had feminist instincts as a young girl. One of the questions in this research and exhibition project is how we inherit these instincts—where do feminist roots come from? We tend to assume that it came through Western colonization. From your perspective, what are the differences in what we traditionally think of as feminism in the West and your experience of feminism in Egypt?

Dr. Jehane Ragai: Of course, feminism in the West and in Egypt are quite different. In the social arena in the East, feminism entails Sharia law whether [its focus is] polygamy or [the nature of divorce laws], or whether [its focus is] education or freedom. In the political arena in terms of power and work, or in terms of having important positions, there are similarities between Egypt and the West where people are paid different salaries with women being paid much less than men. There are definitely overlapping common points.

SG: How did Doria view feminism in the context of religious doctrine? Was she always thinking about them together as opposed to separately?

JR: Her whole idea in life was freedom, and that means [as a whole], be it personal or political.

SG: One of the reasons why I fell in love with Doria's history is because I feel a personal closeness with her story. Every time I go back [to Egypt], I feel that personal distance, so I have that same yearning of belonging, of something that is part of you but away from you at the same time. Doria has a beautiful poem which she wrote on her way back to Cairo from the Sorbonne about returning home, which I refer to in several works included in the exhibition.

JR: She identified with home from afar.

SG: It's important for me to think of Doria's work now, in America, because currently there's a very important discussion around the exclusivity of the feminist movement and the lack of diversity of voices included in it, in particular those of women of color.

JR: Although it existed.

SG: Although [these movements] existed—but weren't included. Again, thinking of Doria's work, and how her work was so international and not just limited to Egypt. She traveled and met with people from all over the world, connecting various feminist ideologies.

I wish I had known about Doria's work earlier. I hope to come back and engage in conversations about these ideas more with you and Heba and this tribe of feminist women in person. I hope that young women growing up in Egypt are more likely to know these important women and their activism and be empowered by this forgotten history.

JR: But it's you, Sherin, and not everyone is like you. It's true that there are people, but not everyone is particularly interested in history. Some leave and forget about their Egyptian history and identify with other cultures.

SG: But I think that's the place of art and cultural production in general—the places where lost stories get resurrected and re-centered into a contemporary discourse. It's interesting to see how much contemporary art is being made in Cairo now, and then exhibited in the United States and Europe—so there is a platform. Just the idea of creating a platform for these stories to exist and be remembered is inspiring. I'd like to see whether we can light that match and see whether it catches.

How did you perceive what was happening around Doria's work? What of that resonates still? So much of it sounds so romantic now, but I'm sure for you it had felt different.

JR: Growing up there was a lot of pride, but at the same time it was difficult for the household because we moved from one crisis to another. I grew up close to my sister because we had moments when it was difficult: My mother's first and second hunger strikes, and Daddy imprisoned for a while as well . . . all of this made it very enriching at the same time!

SG: What was that like to watch your mom go through the hunger strikes?

JR: The first hunger strike we got to know about when Mummy decided to go to the press syndicate with fourteen other women behind her; two daughters of one of the hunger strikers came to stay with us then. There was so much attention from the international press, so we were worried a bit of course. But at the same time there was a sense of pride for what she was doing.

The second hunger strike, I remember waking up one day and Mummy had her coat on and I asked her, "Where are you going?" And she replied, "You'll understand when you're older what's going on, and that I'm doing it for Egypt." I remember running to the kitchen to give her a biscuit, I don't know why. I was young. Then of course it was a big ado because attacking Nasser was a big thing, and people at school kept telling us "Your mother is dead!" So, it was very difficult [. . .] for us coming back home and seeing a soldier at our door [watching us].

But, our parents were very loving. When there is love, that mitigates a lot of things, you see, and Mummy used to say her love for her daughters was absolute and that she never expected anything in return and we felt that love. She was very beautiful. We had an Irish nanny, Mary, and the instability of the house was mitigated because of Mary's presence, and the love of Mummy and my father, and the admiration we had for them in the midst of a lot of pressure and turmoil.

SG: This speaks to Doria's legacy and your father's legacy—what and how this completely indescribable thing happens when you see this activism model in front of you.

JR: We're grateful. The nice thing about Mummy was her extreme sense of ethics and that the material was not important.

Heba El Kayal: Did you feel different growing up than other girls, were you able to perceive that difference? Aziza mentioned being aware of the differences between your mom and other parents.

JR: In a practical way, yes, because we were left very much [free and] on our own, and so we felt a sense of responsibility and respected this kind of freedom as such. I personally did not feel very different and I felt comfortable wherever I was. Aziza left to the States and lived there for thirty-two years. The differences were there, but it doesn't seem like the travel changed Aziza.

SG: This is the first time in a long time where I'm yearning to go back home [to Egypt]. In a way, these projects are [ways] to reestablish connections, roots again, not just for me but hopefully for others who leave and feel displaced. It's interesting to see how as the country changes, as I change, as my knowledge of my own history expands, I start to create new, stronger connections to Egypt.

JR: New bonds to Egypt.

SG: Exactly. Which is why for me Doria's legacy is not just a historical or feminist legacy, but it's a very personal legacy. Her work actually made space for me in my own home that didn't [exist] before. For me it's kind of life changing. It's easy to see the broad picture of the Parliament [storming] and the gaining of the vote that are so challenging and public, but it's also the little personal stories and space that she created for others.

JR: She was very poetic and she would write so easily. There was this dichotomy in her character. To the outside world she was very defiant, and there was this part of her that was very sensitive and very vulnerable. They met, but they met at loggerheads.

HK: I know this is conjecture, but do you think she would have been happy or satisfied with the current reality for women today in Egypt?

JR: Yes, I think she would have been happy with women, but still polygamy exists, and exists even in very educated milieus. On a social level, things she fought for are still not realized. On a political level, women are ministers now, etc. On an economic level, yes, women do participate and do work and, in many places, are economically independent—so that's a kind of empowerment. So maybe not total satisfaction, but partial. She wouldn't be happy about the prevailing political situation [laughs], although during Morsi's[1] time it was catastrophic, but you can't justify the current reality by saying it was worse.

HK: Do you think that your mother's work had impact not just on yourself, but women of your generation? Do you think that there was spillover quite soon because it often takes time for things to set in motion?

JR: I think so, but unconsciously . . . You do find on many levels that things have completely changed from the past [such as dating], but like many other issues that have changed worldwide such as the acceptance of partners. There are things that have come with time, and I don't know whether this is because it's a normal evolution or because of Doria Shafik's legacy. I would assume that it's both. It's an unconscious, not conscious, spillover.

SG: I think it trickles down, that it's almost imperceptible how you learn it. My mother never sat me down and said, "This is feminism," and I'm sure Doria didn't sit you down and say that to you either, but we watch how they move and act in society, and learn from that. My mother had her own business and went to work every day. I can imagine it's even more exaggerated for you, Jehane, as it wasn't common to have a woman be so political in public life.

JR: My father was really broad-minded for his generation, but they had a difficult relationship—but I know they loved each other very much. No man could be supportive to the end when there were big surprises every now and then. But at the same time, we used to have our friendly Friday lunches and we'd always have our friends and my mother and father there.

HK: What I found interesting was that Doria never found religion to be an obstacle to freedom or rights of any kind.

JR: No. In fact, one of her two theses at the Sorbonne was about women and their rights in Islam, which argued that women had a lot of privileges in Islam that they didn't in other religions, but it was a question of interpretation. Unfortunately, because of the negative propaganda today against Islam, women are seen to not have rights. The Sufis talk about self-realization, and I think at the end she reached that stage of self-realization. I could see how peaceful she was, but when I came back from England that was the only time frame when she was not doing well—but that was a specific time, only for a year before her death.

HK: How do you wish for her legacy to be preserved and maintained? In an ideal world, what do you wish the state would do for her?

JR: Well, it was [made a] point to erase her, everything, her work and her words, but now you find her name is gradually surfacing. She deserves more than that, of course—a road or statue in her name—but the important thing is not that. It's not to be egocentric, but the causes she fought for [to be] fulfilled.

HK: I think we suffer from an identity crisis in Egypt at the moment because so much of this history has not been handed to us. Isn't it interesting that there's a certain mining of history, and that this is being done by young people because we feel like we haven't inherited a culture or history of modern Egypt that we can fall back on?

JR: Of course! Even during the time of Nasser and later on, it was pathetic how history was written. History is not erased or eradicated, there's always a resurfacing, and a reawakening. And I think the "awakening" is coming gradually, but it will take some time. Mummy and other figures who fought for these causes will become known. This looking into the past and trying to get a better understanding of history is happening because you can't get rid of history.

SG: I think the reason why we are able to have the kind of conversation we are having today is because so many people around the world share multiple cultural roots and experiences. Although it was uncommon at the time for Doria to mitigate Egyptian and French cultures, it's not so strange anymore. We have to rethink the way we describe our identities. It doesn't have to be one or the other, it's in fact a beautiful, messy combination of all of it.

JR: Do you feel comfortable, Heba, in Egypt? Can you relate to people here?

HK: Yes, I can engage with people on the street despite them having preconceived notions of who I am because of my background as an Egyptian with a foreign education and experience living between Egypt and the United States. I've learned to navigate these differences by working in different fields. I think the barrier between different social classes in Egypt broke during the time of the 2011 revolution owing to the shared experience when people were protesting in Tahrir Square, and I think people can communicate across class more comfortably.

JR: Yes, in the context of Tahrir, certainly.

HK: But I think also in the context of women, there's been a barrier broken. For instance, the lady who I regularly get my nails done with, Fatten, is a few years older than I am, and divorced. I've found that there's a sense of equality and camaraderie that's coming through because the challenges are becoming similar in Egypt for women across all classes. I think that young women are fed up because they've been told that marriage is the solution or the beginning of their freedoms, but they've come to realize, like Fatten, that's not true. What's interesting is that there's flexibility coming up now. Fatten's turned down a few people after her divorce because she feels that she's being taken for granted or not viewed well because she was previously married. Now, she's refusing to settle and choosing to be independent.

JR: And that's now being repeated throughout Egypt.

SG: And that story is what Doria fought for: economic freedom so you can have agency to choose for yourself.

JR: Hopefully, we're going to move into a better world.

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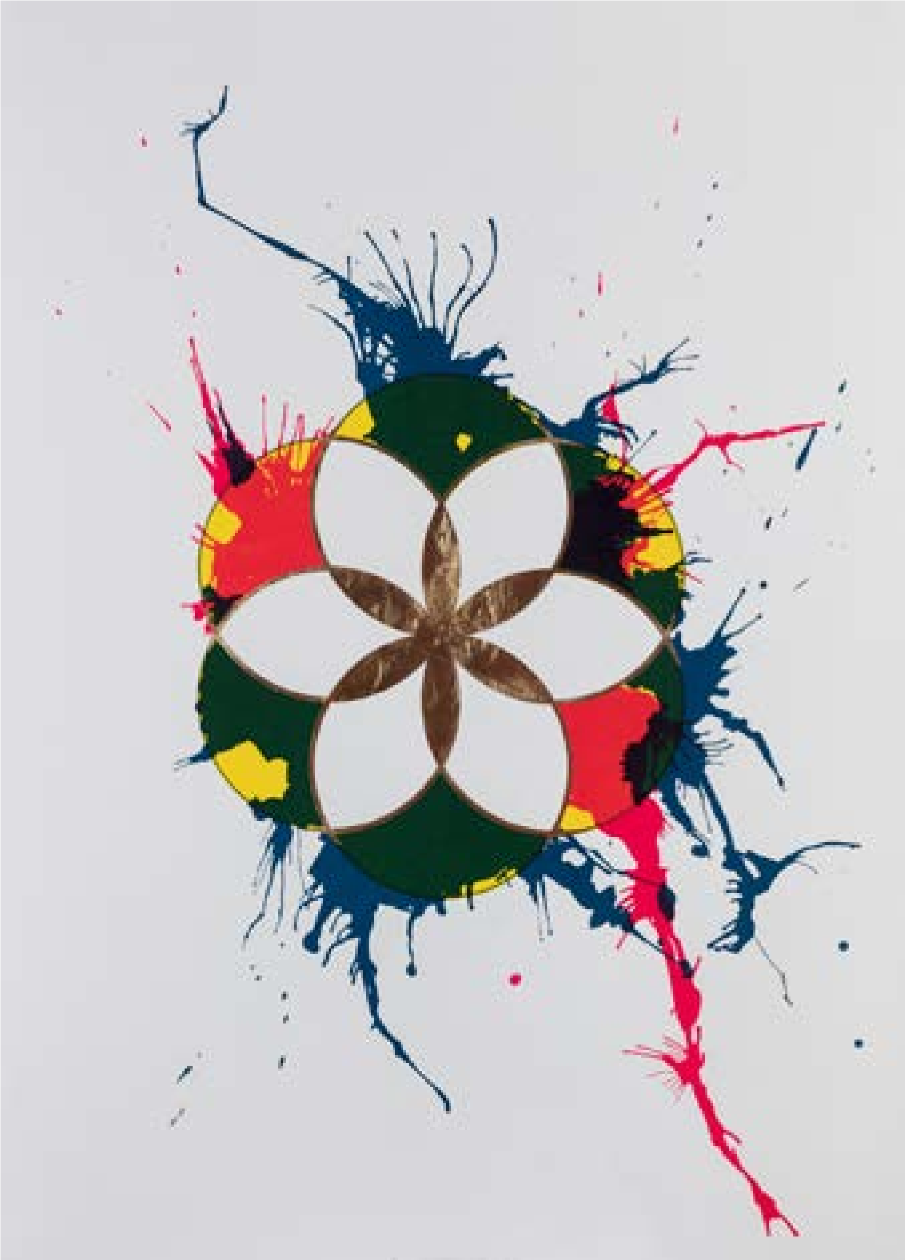
[1] Mohamed Morsi was the elected candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood party and served as president of Egypt from June 2012 to July 2013.



Untitled, 2018

Four-color silkscreen, gold leaf, paper

In conjunction with the exhibition, Guirguis produced this limited edition print at Self Help Graphics & Art. The print edition was sponsored by the Fellows of Contemporary Art.

Photo: Panic Studio LA

Biography

Born 1974 in Luxor, Egypt

Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

Education

2001 Master of Fine Arts in Painting, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

1997 Bachelor of Arts in Art, College of Creative Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Museum and Public Collections

Las Vegas Art Museum, Las Vegas, NV

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

The Museum of Fine Art, Houston, TX

Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Public Art Commission, Los Angeles, CA

Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

U.S. Department of State, U.S. Consulate, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2018 *Of Thorns and Love*, Craft & Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA

2017 *My Place is the Placeless*, Artist Lab, 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, CA

2016 *El Beit El Kabir*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE

2015 *El Beit El Kabeer: Ollal*, Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, CA

2013 *Passages//Toroq*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE

2012 *SouthwestNet: Sherin Guirguis & Carrie Marill*, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ
Duwamah, Frey Norris Contemporary, San Francisco, CA

2010 *Qasr El-Shoaq*, LA><ART, Los Angeles, CA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2018 *Conceptual Feedback*, Honor Fraser, Los Angeles, CA

Into Action, Spring Street, Los Angeles, CA

2017 *One I Call*, Desert X Biennial, Palm Springs, CA

Mashrabiya: The Art of Looking Back, The Fine Arts Gallery at San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA

2016 *L.A. Exuberance: New Gifts by Artists*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

The Ease of Fiction, Contemporary Art Museum, Raleigh, NC; California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2017); Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco, CA (2017)

Islamic Art Now, Part 2: Contemporary Art of the Middle East, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

2015 *No Such Place: Contemporary African Artists in America*, Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art, New York, NY

We Must Risk Delight: Twenty Artists from Los Angeles, Official Collateral Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy

C.O.L.A. 2015 Individual Artist Fellowships Exhibition, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2014 *The Avant-Garde Collection*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

Color Dialogues, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE

2013 *Rogue Wave '13: Fifteen Artists from Los Angeles*, L.A. Louver, Venice, CA

Desaturated Rainbow, Kopeikin Gallery, Culver City, CA; Field Projects, New York, NY (2013)

2012 *Encounter: The Royal Academy in the Middle East*, Katara Cultural Village, Doha, Qatar

Tessellation Make Up, CDA-Projects / Zilberman Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey

Artists' Tower of Protest, Pacific Standard Time Performance and Public Art Festival, Los Angeles, CA

2011 *Pangea: Art at the Forefront of Cultural Convergence*, Frey Norris Contemporary, San Francisco, CA

2010 *2010 California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

Quadruple-Consciousness, Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA

2009 *Attention to Detail*, Heather James Fine Art, Palm Desert, CA

Under the Knife, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, CA

2008 *Fall Out*, Peggy Phelps Gallery, Claremont, CA

Panopti(con), Bank Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2007 *Las Vegas Diaspora: The Emergence of Contemporary Art from the Neon Homeland,* Las Vegas Art Museum, Las Vegas, NV; Laguna Beach Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA (2008)

2005 *Quickening*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson, AZ

Sculpture: Bari Ziperstein, Sherin Guirguis, and Carrie Ungerman, Bank Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Selected Awards and Artist Residencies

2017 Visiting Artist, Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama, CA

Artist Lab Residency, 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, CA

2015 City of Los Angeles (C.O.L.A.) Individual Artist Fellowship

2012 California Community Foundation Mid-Career Visual Artist Fellowship & Grant

Artists' Resources for Completion Grant, Center for Cultural Innovation

Investing in Artists Grant, Center for Cultural Innovation

2010 Nimoy Foundation Artist Residency, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

2009 Access to Artistic Excellence Grant, National Endowment for the Arts

Faculty Research Grant, USC Roski School of Fine Arts, Los Angeles, CA

Exhibition Checklist

All works courtesy of the artist. All photography by Panic Studio LA.
Measurements listed H x W x D

Azbakeya (sun disk), 2018
Hand-cut paper, gold leaf, acrylic paint
28 x 74 inches

Azbakeya (will you welcome me this time?), 2018
Hand-cut paper, ink, acrylic paint
35 x 63 inches

Azbakeya (with a little more love), 2018
Hand-cut paper, acrylic paint
26 x 74 inches

Bint al-Nil, 2018
Brass, wood, acrylic paint, color pencil, gold leaf
76 x 15 inches

Larmes d'Isis, 2018
Wood, rope, acrylic paint, adobe
103 x 26 x 26 inches (approximate)

Placeless I, 2017
Mixed media on paper, wood panel
14 x 11 inches

Placeless II, 2017
Mixed media on paper, wood panel
14 x 11 inches

Storming Parliament I, 2018
Hand-cut paper, ink, acrylic paint
76 x 27.5 inches

Storming Parliament II, 2018
Hand-cut paper, ink, acrylic paint
76 x 20.5 inches

Triple Disk Lotus (here I have returned), 2018
Hand-cut paper, ink, gold leaf, acrylic paint
48 x 48 inches

Of Thorns and Love, 2018
Adobe, burlap, gold leaf
Site-specific

CRAFT & FOLK ART MUSEUM

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition *Sherin Guirguis: Of Thorns and Love*, organized by the Craft & Folk Art Museum, September 30, 2018 – January 6, 2019. This exhibition and catalogue were made possible through the generous support of the Fellows of Contemporary Art (FOCA).

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Craft & Folk Art Museum
5814 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90036

www.cafam.org
info@cafam.org

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