

INVISIBLE POWER

striving for
FEMININITY AND IDENTITY



curated by Sara Nabil
with Rada Akbar, Leila Mousavi, Mohsin Taasha
08.12.2023 - 14.01.2024

ACUD Galerie
Veteranenstr. 21
10119 Berlin

**GOETHE-INSTITUT
IM EXIL**



Curator

Sara Nabil: artist, human rights activist

„As an Afghan woman, I have a deep feeling for my fellow Afghan women; therefore, most of my artwork focuses on social and political issues, and positive change in women’s lives. Art is my weapon, it serves as a tool through which I fight against patriarchy, injustice, unfair politics and inequality. Art is a tool through which I can achieve my goal of contributing to ensure that societies adhere to gender equality, principles of open society, justice and fairness.“ - *Sara Nabil*

Sara Nabil was born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1994. After studying political science in Afghanistan, she emigrated to Germany in 2015, where she obtained her Bachelor’s degree in Art and is currently completing her Master’s degree at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach.

Sara Nabil's activism began when she was just 14 years old. She spent her childhood in the shadow of war, extremist ideology, and one of the darkest regimes in the world. Throughout her teenage years she experienced war and the everlasting hope for peace. This prompted Sara to stand up for her rights and those of her fellow women in a country where most women are deprived of their rights.

Sara Nabil has participated in more than 50 national and international exhibitions. She is a co-founder of “Shamama Gallery”, the first art gallery, which was founded by four women in Afghanistan, in 2014. In April 2022, she founded “E-School AF”, an online education platform that provides online schooling for girls, who were deprived of their fundamental rights by the de facto Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Rada Akbar is a conceptual artist. In her work, she denounces the oppression borne by the women in her country, upholds their rights, and draws attention to their role in society and history. In Afghanistan and in her recent exile in Paris, Rada Akbar has used art to denounce this reality and to testify to the presence of women who have contributed to the history of their country. With photography, performance, and the plastic or textile art, frequently recovering traditional techniques, Akbar gives expression to the pain of Afghan women as she presents their strength and courage in different forms which make them visible to the rest of the world. Recently, she has been working to recover the tradition of the Persian miniature combined with the art of rug making as a way of portraying the history of Afghan women.



The Goddesses of Hope, Rada Akbar

This piece is a contemporary reflection of the realities faced by Afghan women, inspired by a 1590s miniature painting from Herat. Traditional motifs are transformed into contemporary symbols, representing the challenges and struggles confronting Afghan women today. The substitution of a garden of roses with thorns, and roses with blood drops and dried opium flowers symbolises a shift from beauty to pain and suffering. The inclusion of a hidden snake, represented in black, signifies the dark and regressive situation women face in Afghanistan. Replacing the original poetry with a contemporary poem written by Mahtab Sahel amplifies the voice of Afghan women and showcases their resilience and desire for change. The image of a sculpted carpet being folded to hide the woman's face symbolises the Taliban's efforts to erase women and their cultural heritage, representing the suppression of women's voices and restrictions on their freedom.

Mahtab Sahel – Red Verses

In this homeland that is no homeland,
where injustice sets fire to one's breath,
Hell is just a symbol – for the life of women.
A night-worshipping tribe, all deniers of love,
have imprisoned moonlight in a shallow bog
of slime and mire and infested muck

Poem translated by Dr. Houman Harouni



Invisible Captivity, Rada Akbar

„In 2013, *Invisible Captivity* was created, a mixed photo and painting project shedding light on the cultural and religious forces that shape women's lives and identities, particularly in Afghanistan. Through the use of fingerprint-like patterns, it highlights the verses from religious texts and Hadiths which are often used to justify the violation of women's rights. This work is a powerful reflection of the agency of women and has been a defining moment in my life as an artist.“ - *Rada Akbar*

Leila Mousavi is an Afghan artist based in Hamburg. She uses 3D simulation, video, sound, sculpture, and digital fabrication to recreate myth and history. Through archival practices and storytelling, her work interweaves intricate counternarratives that challenge the enduring influence of colonialism and patriarchy.



*Thousands of Untold Stories, Leila Mousavi
courtesy Nima Latifi*

„In *Thousands of Untold Stories*, a part of the Lost Goddesses project, I have tried to combine the tales of 40 girls and lesser-known goddesses of Bakhtar in order to reconstruct and redefine narratives that exemplify the power and significance of women's roles across different eras of Afghanistan. These are the women who have deliberately been marginalized and rendered invisible. I utilized diverse artistic mediums including sculpture, video, sound, and a poem (Parwana Fayyaz) to bring visibility to these women. Many women with various backgrounds participated in this project.“- *Leila Mousavi*

Mohsin Taasha is a visual artist from Afghanistan, based in Nice, France. His fundamental study and practice of the arts began during his high school years in 2008. He obtained a BFA Degree from BNU-Beaconhouse National University of Lahore, Pakistan, in 2017. Although most of Taasha's artworks are paintings or drawings, he includes other mediums such as video art and installations as part of his artistic experimentation and creation.



REBIRTH OF THE REDS, Mohsin Taasha

„The inspiration of *REBIRTH OF THE REDS* series came in 2016 after the horrific suicide bombings that targeted the largest rally in Afghanistan's history in Dehmazang Square, Kabul, leaving around 400 people killed and injured. The rally was organized by thousands of Hazara activists of the Jonbish Roshnai ('the Enlightenment Movement of Afghanistan'), who sought social justice and equal distribution of national resources through a series of civic protests on the streets of the country. Many of my intellectual friends were killed or injured in these terrorist attacks and this horrible event left incurable wounds on my soul. After that, I saw everything in the colour red. The *REBIRTH OF THE REDS* is a multi-medium series, which includes paintings, video art and a live performance, and I was able to create more than 40 different sized paintings in four parts that contain various narratives.“ - *Mohsin Taasha*

Invisible Power – Striving for Femininity and Identity

Throughout history, the identity of women and their role in society have been influenced by political and social factors. Patriarchy, religion, colonialism, and political systems have consistently exploited femininity, often stripping women of their identity and relegating them to a secondary gender role. Despite this, women have continuously fought against these forces throughout different historical periods, striving for the recognition of their female identity and their pivotal role in a patriarchal world.

The concept of *Invisible Power – Striving for Femininity and Identity* aims to bring to light the strength, identity and resilience of marginalized groups who have been historically discriminated against due to various societal factors that obscured their influential roles. In the context of Afghanistan's history, women in Balkh, the former capital of the Bactria Empire, once held positions akin to revered goddesses, worthy of worship and possessing divine status. However, social, political, religious shifts, as well as the subsequent impact of colonialism have resulted in women losing their divine status and to endure centuries of subjugation instead, to the extent that they are relegated to the confines of their homes in current times.

Today, Afghan women face complete marginalization, lacking even the most basic human rights. These restrictions stem solely from their gender and identity as women. Under the rule of Taliban, there is no room for the acceptance of this identity. Afghan women, echoing the struggles of the past, continue their fight to reclaim their lost identity and challenge the most misogynistic forces in history, advocating for bread, work, and freedom to regain their rightful place in society.

This exhibition celebrates the power of femininity, identity, and resilience, showcasing diverse perspectives and narratives. It aims to encourage introspection and dialogue on these themes, shedding light on the struggles and strengths of women in the face of historical adversity and ongoing challenges.

PROGRAM

Duration: 08.12.2023 – 14.01.2024

Sun., 10.12.2023, 2:00 pm

Artist Talk with Rada Akbar, Leila Mousavi, Mohsin Taasha (digitally),
moderation by Sara Nabil (ENG)

Sat., 16.12.2023 Curatorial Tour with Sara Nabil,
3:00 pm ENG, 4:30 pm DARI

Sun., 14.01.2023 Curatorial Tour with Sara Nabil,
3:00 pm ENG, 4:30 pm DARI

Closing time: 23.12.2023 – 03.01.2024

Opening hours: Thurs. – Sun., 3:00 – 7:00 pm

Goethe-Institut in Exile is a project space in the Kunsthaus ACUD (Berlin) and defines itself as a place of encounter, networking and visibility for cultural partners and art initiatives from countries where the Goethe-Institut can no longer be physically active. It offers a stage and safe space for communities in exile and provides information about the local cultural scene. After Ukraine and Iran, the current country focus is Afghanistan, followed by Belarus, Sudan and Syria.

 [goethe_institut_im_exil](https://www.instagram.com/goethe_institut_im_exil)

 www.goethe.de/exile

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