

Cabrogal gulbangadyu
ngurrayin wadyimanwa
Fairfield City Council
Ganunigang wagulra
gulbangadyidyanyi
miwanaba Dharugngai yura.

Fairfield City Council acknowledges the traditional country of the Cabrogal of the Darug Nation and recognises their ongoing relationship to land, place, culture and spiritual beliefs.

FCMG pays respects to Elders, past and present, and acknowledges the importance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play within the Fairfield community.







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### FOREWORD

Fairfield City Museum & Gallery (FCMG) acknowledges the stories and contributions of people who have travelled and settled on this land in our community. Our region has welcomed and become home to people from all corners of the globe, creating it as one of Australia's most culturally rich communities.

Like many projects that FCMG creates, re-member, developed from a series of conversations with artists, community and creative art workers living and working in western Sydney. Two conversations in particular, the first with Alissar Chidiac, a well-respected artist and cultural worker, Alissar is the Creative Producer at Arab Theatre Studio. The second, with Nicole Barakat, whose community engagement practice focuses on exchange, storytelling and skills. The first conversation led me to the second and it was from there the seeds of re-member were planted.

Fast track past two covid-19 lockdowns, FCMG proudly presents a group exhibition by artists living and working in western Sydney, whose own personal histories connect to the SWANA region (South West Asia and North Africa). re-member encapsulates the artists' personalised stories, art making and artistic practices share a common story about the connection between us and land, identity, displacement, memory and loss.

Carmel Aiello
Coordinator Fairfield City Museum & Gallery

**re-member** gathers artists and communities with ancestral threads stitched within the South West Asia North Africa (SWANA) region, who find themselves in this time and place, on the stolen lands of the sovereign First Nations Peoples of this continent. We are of Assyrian, Armenian, Amazigh, Lebanese and Iranian diasporic communities and lineages.

As artists and makers of culture, we are devoted to a return to our SWANA ancestral practices and ways of knowing, at a time when they are being erased, appropriated or simplified.

Here, we share our practices of re-membrance; our inherited cultural knowledge, accessed through intentional listening, convening with our ancestors, our body memory and locating and using our voices.

These practices offer us healing restoration from the impacts of displacement and assimilation and, in turn, deepen the possibilities for how we build connections, reciprocities and solidarity.

We invite you, with warmth and love, to re-member alongside us.

To re-gather your own ancestral ways of knowing.

Re-membrance is a practice that moves us back into the collective and reminds us that our relationships with each other and the earth are vital.

**Artists** Annukina Warda, DJ Gemma, Joanna Kambourian, Maissa Alameddine, Nazanin Marashian, Olivia Nigro, Zeina Iaali and Marian Abboud

**Curator** Nicole Barakat



## INTRODUCTION

Creating and re-membering on someone else's Country, whilst it is occupied, requires deep reflection and intention.

#### As Olivia Nigro so beautifully articulated;

"Our own healing and restoration from the impacts of our own displacement and experiences of colonisation and assimilation, deepens the possibilities for how we build connections, reciprocities and solidarity with the sovereign First Nations peoples of this continent and First Nations people globally, including our own communities in our homelands and diaspora who lead a relentless movement towards decolonisation, land back and justice for themselves and the earth."

I sincerely Acknowledge that we are gathering and re-membering in this project, on the lands and waters of the Cabrogal People of the Darug Nation and pay my respects to Darug Elders of the past and present. I sincerely extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who engage with our exhibition.

Being invited to curate a show is a huge gift and a responsibility. The seed for this show was planted quite some time ago, in January 2020 at the opening of Isma', a group show at firstdraft with myself, Zeina Iaali and Shireen Taweel. Carmel Aiello mentioned that she would love to see a group show at Fairfield City Museum and Gallery. A few months later, after covid lockdown number one, I ran into Carmel again at another opening and she persisted. Which I am very grateful for! I am also grateful to Alissar Chidiac, Creative Producer at Arab Theatre Studio (one among many many other roles and titles in the arts and our community) for recommending me as a guest curator for this show. It has been a pleasure to work with Carmel. She has ensured that we are all so well supported and made sure mine and the artists' visions are realised.



The title 'curator' intimidated me, but I quickly remembered that I am an artist, I have a long history of collaborating with communities and working in arts education. Curating is about bringing stories together. I thought of my own experiences with curators I admire and respect, my deep gratitude to all those I have learnt from, especially Emily McDaniel, Wiradjuri curator, writer and educator, as well as Alissar Chidiac. Both have taught me how to curate and centre communities' voices and perspectives. So I asked myself, who are the people in our communities telling stories and practicing re-membrance? Why are these stories important to share now, in this time and place?

A year ago, in this place, in Fairfield, people were harshly locked down, they were vilified. They had the military knocking on their doors to ensure they were isolating because they had covid. Here we are, a year later and I don't believe there has been an apology to those people and these communities, for what they went through. We need to acknowledge that we are sharing these stories in a place that has had a recent traumatic experience. This show is also important to celebrate, acknowledge, honour that our cultures are very old and our communities need to be respected.

Ancestral re-membrance is a vital practice in my everyday life and in my art making. It is an area I am passionate about and have been dedicated to in my own communities here and with global SWANA communities for the past five years. This exhibition is rooted in the on-going re-membrance work of the SWANA Ancestral Hub and the (re)Gathering our Ancestors project, led by USA/Lebanon-based cultural practitioner and my dear friend Layla Feghali. I have been working with Layla and been a member of this global collective of multi-ethnic, SWANA people since 2017. These projects gather and archive cultural and ancestral songs, stories, art, medicines and paradigms of practice in order to honour and re-centralise this wisdom. I am honoured to be able to share a conversation about re-membrance and creative practices between myself and Layla in this publication.



On this continent, I witness so many SWANA artists working in ways that are transformative and nourishing for our collective wellbeing. I wanted to create anopportunity for artists to make new work and to share some of these stories withbroader communities. I also would like to acknowledge the artists, voices and stories that aren't here in this show. While we are connected geographically and culturally, we are also not a homogenous group of people. We are incredibly diverse and unique peoples. There are so many stories that could have been included, but exhibitions have limitations.

This exhibition could not have come to fruition without a team of incredible people and their valuable knowledge, skills and labour. My heartfelt gratitude to all of the artists, their families and friends who have helped realise the artworks, especially Sam, Carmen and Michael for their installation support, to Carmel, Maria, Sandra, Gemma, Angela and all staff at Fairfield City Museum and Gallery.

Thank you to the installers, James and Leigh, Council signwriters and painters Julio, David and Frank, electricians Mitch and Shane, carpenter Nestor as well as Wassim and his team of cleaners. A special thank you to Aunty Gail for Acknowledging Country at our opening event.

Image: Document Photography





My sincere gratitude to Laura La Rosa, the designer who created the re-member 'look,' working tirelessly on our invitation and catalogue, banners and everything you see to promote the show. Thank you for your commitment to our project, your sensitivity and understanding and for creating a beautiful and welcoming collection of 'assets' (I am learning design-speak!).

Finally, my deepest respect and gratitude to all of the artists who are sharing their stories and practices with us. These stories emerge from deeply personal and sacred places and I am so honoured that you have all entrusted me to share these with our communities. Thank you Annukina Warda, DJ Gemma, Nazanin Marashian, Olivia Nigro, Joanna Kambourian, Maissa Alameddine, Zeina Iaali and Marian Abboud.

It is heart expansive to learn of the impacts that the process of making these artworks has had on each artist. I look forward to seeing the inevitable effects these stories and artworks and this exhibition will have on you. This exhibition centres reciprocity and invites you to re-member alongside us. To re-gather and re-connect with your own ancestral ways of knowing.

Nicole Barakat Guest Curator



# TENDING THE LIFE IN FRONT OF YOU: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN LAYLA FEGHALI AND NICOLE BARAKAT

Nicole Barakat (NB): Thank you for making this time and space to connect, Layla. I wanted us to have a conversation, instead of writing an essay, because all this re-membrance work, as I've learned from you, is centred around relationships. It's about connection and conversations, it's about those moments of being together. It's not about a theory in a book necessarily, it's real life. It's lived experience, it's an exchange of experience. I know we've had incredible conversations around art making and re-membrance, that's why I wanted to talk with you. More importantly I acknowledge that this work has come through my relationship with you and through the SWANA Ancestral HUB and has its origins far beyond this exhibition, and this moment in time.

**Layla Feghali (LF):** Thank you. I feel so honoured, I love an excuse to be woven into your world and your work and your community over there.

**NB:** Well, I feel like you're such a big part of this community, some people have met you in person, but not everybody has and you haven't been here, but I feel like we're not that far apart.

LF: Really. I feel so too. I feel very

connected to the Sydney community somehow. It's really something.

NB: I've called the exhibition, re-member, which at first, I thought was really obvious but people here aren't necessarily familiar with the concept of re-membrance. I wanted the exhibition to be a space of reciprocity, inviting people to engage with our work, and to bring something with them, and to leave with something that might inspire them to ask, what did my grandmother do? What are the practices that I can reconnect with, or that I can continue to engage with, especially at this time.

LF: That's beautiful. I obviously didn't create the word re-membrance. But I think that the way that I use the word or the way that I experience the word and re-member, definitely resonates with me in a specific way. Similar to what you said as we come from similar groups and communities and ways of relating to the concept.

Re-membrance is actually such an old part of our region. I was more familiar with re-membrance in the context of diaspora communities, reconnecting homeward and being in processes of decolonisation, culturally, through



the Chicano and Indigenous or Indigenous adjacent communities in California. I started to think through remembrance in that way of returning to things that have always been a part of us. Intentionally reclaiming our ancestral ways that have been intentionally suppressed or taken by colonialism. Re-membrance is really old for the context of our region. Re-membrance is also like zikr or like in Sufismi, it's the pivoting point of Sufi mysticisms around oneness and returning to oneness and awareness of oneness with God, with creation. The ritual of zikr means remembrance, the oneness of God and interconnectivity. For me, one of the aspects that motivated my direction towards this work was the extent and the level of fragmentation that I experienced rooted in trauma. You know, you're Lebanese, so you'll have some concepts of this. The civil war specifically, in my most intimate context, was such a huge, long, underlying part of my childhood, it wasn't in my house in an explicit way. I didn't grow up in a house where my parents spoke about the civil war all the time. I just knew that Lebanon was a place that existed, that my family existed in, but that I also couldn't go to for long stretches

of my childhood because of a war. As I came of age, I developed more of my own understanding or relationship with Lebanon. The first time I returned beyond my toddlerhood, when I could remember, it was fresh post-war Lebanon. It was the first year they had opened the airport. I remember so many sensual and visual feelings, really embodied, sensory pieces and snippets of that trip. It was really my introduction to Lebanon in a lot of ways, just being there in this very raw post-war moment.

As I came of age and I started to understand with more complexity, I became more conscious and more aware politically, socially and emotionally, I was able to weave threads together. So for me, remembrance, as in to re-gather or put back together dismembered parts of ourselves, just feels particularly necessary in the context of Lebanon and the Levant. I think the civil war in Lebanon was a moment of division and dispersal and intentional severing between communities in Lebanon and within the region. It's the divide part of the divide and conquer strategy, without getting into specificities. I really started to see and feel the fragmentation, the way that trauma

Which I think was really obvious in the case of our war, of civil war, which is different than like it is in Palestine, where there's an external occupier. In Lebanon, it was a civil war, it was internal fragmentation. Trauma actually severs us from ourselves. That's what dissociation is, that's what it means when we lose parts of ourselves, they go away. They become repressed or they leave, they detach in order to survive the impact of things.

Re-membrance becomes a reclaiming of all these things on the most intimate, personal kind of level. To me, it's healing and it's decolonisation and it's all these things. I always think about the story of Isis and then it feels even deeper. The story where Isis and Osiris are the good rulers of Egypt, where people live in peace. Their brother, who's very jealous and envious of their power, devises a strategy where he basically gets Osiris in a coffin, throws him up the Nile in a box and Osiris is in the dark, in the Nile and he's just floating up the river dying, he's dead. Isis goes into deep mourning and exile in her own land for a long time. Eventually, she goes on this long journey and gathers the strength through her mourning and also after

her mourning to go and reclaim Orisis' body somehow. She wants to find his body so that she can honour him, honour his death in ritual, but also pray life back into him. She ends up going up the Nile and all these places, and eventually ends up, where? In Lebanon! Byblos, which is just ten minutes away from my dad's village, where I am right now. She ends up there, where his coffin has floated onto the banks and embedded itself into a tree, which different people have different ideas of what tree this is.

When I went to the Temple of Abydos in Egypt, where this story is on the walls, they said, "that's a cedar tree". They showed me and they said, "inti min Libnan, you're from Lebanon, that's the Cedar tree, that's your tree!" And I said, oh, interesting, makes sense. She reclaims his body from the pillar, from the palace and then on their way back, just as she's entering the Delta, the place where the Mediterranean meets the Nile, her brother finds her and strikes the boat and scatters all of his bones back into the waters. Isis has to go and collect each piece, one by one. So she's collecting the dismembered bones, the scattered bones and she eventually brings him back to life and they do a lot of rituals, she reclaims his bones. There's one she cannot reclaim, which is his phallus, which gets eaten by fish. She and her sister mourn and pray over his body and the gods come and help them. Osiris comes back to



the earth. He's elevated to become like a deity of ascension and resurrection.

The whole story for me is like the sacred script of exile and diaspora and war and loss and grief and reclaiming and re-membrance. It is the process of remembrance, of picking up scattered pieces. You can't pick up all of them, but you piece them back together and they come back in some form because of the sacredness of your grief and of your longing, of your love, mostly, of your love and of your devotion to the integrity of life, to the integrity of the body, to the integrity of our pieces and to mending them back together.

It comes back in a form that's not quite the same, but it can sometimes be a more elevated form, pieces get lost, pieces get found. It feels like the sacred script that our ancestors left us, thousands of years ago around how to make sense of living in diaspora, of living in exile, of grief, of sisterhood, of love, of mourning and of all these really intense human experiences that we feel are a product of the modern world, but clearly have been in the script for our ancestors for thousands of years.

I feel like it brings purpose and for me, re-membrance, as a word, embodies so much, it's such a full spectrum of healing and reclamation but also renewal and recreation towards wholeness, towards oneness. Not wholeness in the sense that everything gets back in order, but wholeness in

the sense that we restore integrity to our essence. To its evolution, not to its old form, but to its aliveness, through our continued relationship and connection and stewardship of the bones, and whatever they become.

**NB:** That's it, our cultures are living, they are always changing and they have changed a lot over the last few thousand years and they are going to continue to change. I love that story. I'm so glad you brought it up because I remember hearing you retell it in the For The Wild podcast, which I've listened to twice because I loved it so much! I feel like these stories are stories for our time and our experience, but I think that would've applied to everyone who has heard them over these thousands of years. Right? Because like you said, these are not just experiences of this time. I don't know how to say it, but we're not the only ones in our lineages who've experienced this kind of disconnection and dismemberment. I guess that also brings about a sense of comfort in a way, because I feel like we have the means to continue our cultures and we have the means to continue practicing and re-membering. We might be scattered all over the place, but we can actually bring things back together. We have that way of continuing our cultures, the things that we need to survive for our very being and our bodies.

**LF:** Yeah. Yeah. I think the more I engage in this practice myself, or just in the practice of my life, the more I'm



alive. The more it feels like reclaiming specific practices or making cohesive knowledge available again. What my grandmothers truly embodied, which I definitely did not understand, or honour, or even see the wisdom in, until so recently in my life. Which was just that we don't always have to reach towards the past per se. What my grandmother did was just tended the life right in front of her.

My grandmother, even in diaspora, was like an embodiment of the earth, of her village for her whole life. You've done some beautiful projects with me about my grandma, which is really special. Both my grandmas are special, but I like to talk about Teta Renee because she lived in diaspora and she wasn't educated and her life wasn't about intellectual engagement with culture

in any kind of way. It was just very raw, you know?

She grew her ancestral plants because that's what she knew. She also just tended what was in front of her. She didn't really have philosophies about what she was doing. If there was a child in front of her, she fed them. If there was wheat in front of her, she made bread. If there was a plant in front of her, she took care of it. And that's all she did. If there was cloth in front of her, she stitched it, she just made life out of what was in front of her and what needed tending around her and her whole life was simply the practice of just doing that. There was no lofty philosophy behind things. There were no websites and public announcements, none of the stuff I do, you know? No like, 'Here's my



philosophy and here's the intention and here's the gathering of community on purpose around these ideas.' Like none of that, none of that heady stuff, just plain home tending care. The more I live, the more I know that her embodiment is re-membrance. It doesn't require knowing what happened then, it really just requires tending the life in front of you. And I feel between watching my grandmother and being around Indigenous elders, especially in my context, in the diaspora, especially from the Americas and some of the African diasporas. There was a period in my life where I was very lucky and blessed to be surrounded with a bunch of Indigenous grandmothers.

I'm not sure how I ended up in this sweet group where I almost would disappear when I was with them because I was the youngest. I learned a lot through the way that they related to each other about cultural knowledge. Between watching my own family and being with these other grandmas, I think that something really started to make sense to me; about the more basic, the better, you know, really just taking care of the life in front of you. The Indigenous grandmas would have the stories and the cosmologies and

understood the weight in those things, whereas my grandmother didn't even know how to really pray in a proper way. My other grandmother was like a master of prayer. She knew how to pray the rosary and she was much more mystical and trained on that stuff, an incredible dreamer. I have so much I'm indebted to her for teaching me on those more philosophical, mystical sort of levels.

These grandmothers I feel are the common thread between the wisdom that comes from the stories and the wisdom that comes from the body. Just tend the life in front of you, that is the re-membrance of everything, all that exists, in all those stories and all that existed before and after. It's also just what exists right now, life is what is sacred and it is the mystery. So you just tend what's in front of you. You don't need to do anything else. The knowledge is honestly, sometimes it's actually more of a distraction I feel, especially for those of us raised in Western societies. Who tend to be overly cerebral, which is why, as you know, I've especially loved and learned from the beautiful artists in my life. Like you all... I think the very embodied nature of creating brings you to that state. Creating is life, it is God, so you're in that mystery in this other kind of transcendent way, but also this really

simple way. I love that your community is creating more along these lines. You do what our grandmothers did. You're working with thread and fabric, the memory of those lineages, of the moment end up naturally waking up, you know?

**NB:** I can very much relate to that. A sense of being and just doing, because you have to. I feel like that's part of our survival as humans. You're talking about your grandmother tending to the things in front of her, because that's what she has to do. You have to make the bread when the wheat is in front of you, to eat and you have to sew cloth to wear clothes. I've talked about this exhibition as 'artists and makers of culture' because I also feel that unfortunately the term 'artist' has really been taken over by this capitalist idea of an art world and the need to make money, when actually, art practice is part of life. That's something that very much comes through with all the artists that I admire and respect. All the artists in this show are artists and makers of culture that actually just do these things as part of their everyday life. That's why I thought it was really important to bring these artists together because they're not making a work about re-membrance. They're actually practicing cultural and ancestral re-membrance and doing it in creative ways. It really resonates because it's not something that's complex and intellectual. It's something that's very much about practices that our bodies almost have to do. And not just bodies, I am a maker, so I

refer to the body, but also, our spirits. It is integral to our health and our wellbeing. Just as much as eating the food that nourishes us.

"My grandmother, even in diaspora, was like an embodiment of the earth, of her village for her whole life".

When I invited all of these artists to exhibit, I did that intuitively. I knew these artists' work, but I didn't think too much about it consciously. I just went with my gut and I was like, these are the people I want to be part of this show and everyone has come through in the sense that everyone is just practicing. Everyone is just doing this and this is part of their world. It's also like this opportunity to practice has reconnected them with certain aspects of culture, of ritual and family. I hope that also for the artists, it brings new ways of being or not new actually, old ways of being and bringing things back into their lives that they may have forgotten.

I recently saw this news interview with a young woman from Papua New Guinea. She lives in Australia and has facial tattoos and as a result, she was not allowed into a venue because they have a blanket rule on facial tattoos because they are (unfairly) associated with 'gang members'. She was talking about the revival of these practices for her generation because

her grandmothers were not allowed to practice these things. Now there's a whole movement of women who are practicing this cultural tattooing.

She made a reference to these cultural practices that have 'held their breath'. I love that idea of not being lost, but that they held their breath for some time because they weren't allowed to breathe. It was so beautiful, that concept, we haven't necessarily lost these things, but these things have just held their breath for this short period of time before they could actually breathe again. I think about the shock and the trauma of colonisation and war, and when you are in shock, your body does hold its breath. You do hold your breath, you do tense up, it was just a beautiful metaphor. That just made sense that these cultural practices have held their breath and now it's time to exhale and to breathe again. I very much resonate with that way of thinking because it is a time for these things to start breathing again. It is time for our cultures and our practices to start breathing again.

I'm a firm believer that if we can't reconnect to these cultural practices, then we are not going to be able to survive as humans because we need this reconnection for our very survival. This is where I feel like artists and people with creative practices, whether it's in art or plants or birth work or whatever it is, people who are thinking creatively and acting creatively are really the ones that are leading this return and in a way, reassuring our communities that it's okay. That it's time

and it's safe and that it's beautiful and that it's fulfilling and it is everything that we need right now to thrive.

# - Nicole Barakat and Layla Feghali in conversation July 2022.

Layla Feghali lives between her ancestral village in Lebanon and her diasporic home in Tongva-Tataviam territories (Southern California), where she was born and raised by her immigrant family. She is a cultural worker and plantcestral medicine practitioner focused on the re-membrance of baladi (land-based/folk/indigenous) lifeways and ancestral wisdoms from SWANA\*. Her dedication is to stewardship of our earth's eco-cultural integrity and the many layers of relational restoration and healing that entails.

You can learn more at
RiverRoseRemembrance.com
or visit River Rose
Remembrance on Instagram
and Facebook as well as
the online community
archival project she hosts at
SWANAancestralHUB.org

Instagram: @swana.ancestral

\*SWANA stands for SouthWest Asia and North Africa, a less euro-centric way to describe the region commonly referred to as the Middle East and North Africa.







## DJ GEMMA

Sounds between the cracks 2022 Sound piece Duration 2:30:54

I am re-membering the depth and ancientness of my own soul, that's been traversing this planet for many thousands of years.

I feel like a spirit that is standing in the same spot over centuries, being a witness. I can hear sounds that don't exist that are coming through the cracks from another time.

These sounds exist even if I can't hear them. They are there. I have put sounds in this piece that are there, even if you can't hear them, they exist.

Sound touches into re-membering parts of me that I cannot quantify.
Like unlocking cells that hold the sound of re-membrance.

# BIOGRAPHY

DJ Gemma has been inspiring audiences and making people dance for over thirty-five years. She utilises her position to expose non-western perceptions of sound and to subvert the limitations of mainstream dance music. Gemma creates atmospheres with music that transcend the body and move energies.

Gemma is best known for events including the legendary Club Kooky (1995 – present) including presentations at Sydney Opera House for Vivid in 2013 – 2022, Pluto Beat, Ya Leil, Club Arak (2002–2008, including the Club Arak CD 2006) and Club Bent at Performance Space. She has played within Australia at events including; Womadelaide, Biennale of Sydney, Bellingen Global Music Festival, Peats Ridge Festival, Tropical Fruits, Mardi Gras, Queer Screen, Sydney Festival and Feast Festival Adelaide, UNSW Galleries, Art Gallery of NSW and the National Gallery of Australia for the *Know My Name* exhibition.

She has also provided sounds for performance art events including Guillermo Gomez Pena's Museum of Fetishized Identities and Aerialize's Walking on Air and fashion designers including Akira Isogawa and Jennifer Hawkins. Gemma has also played internationally in Paris, Stockholm and London.



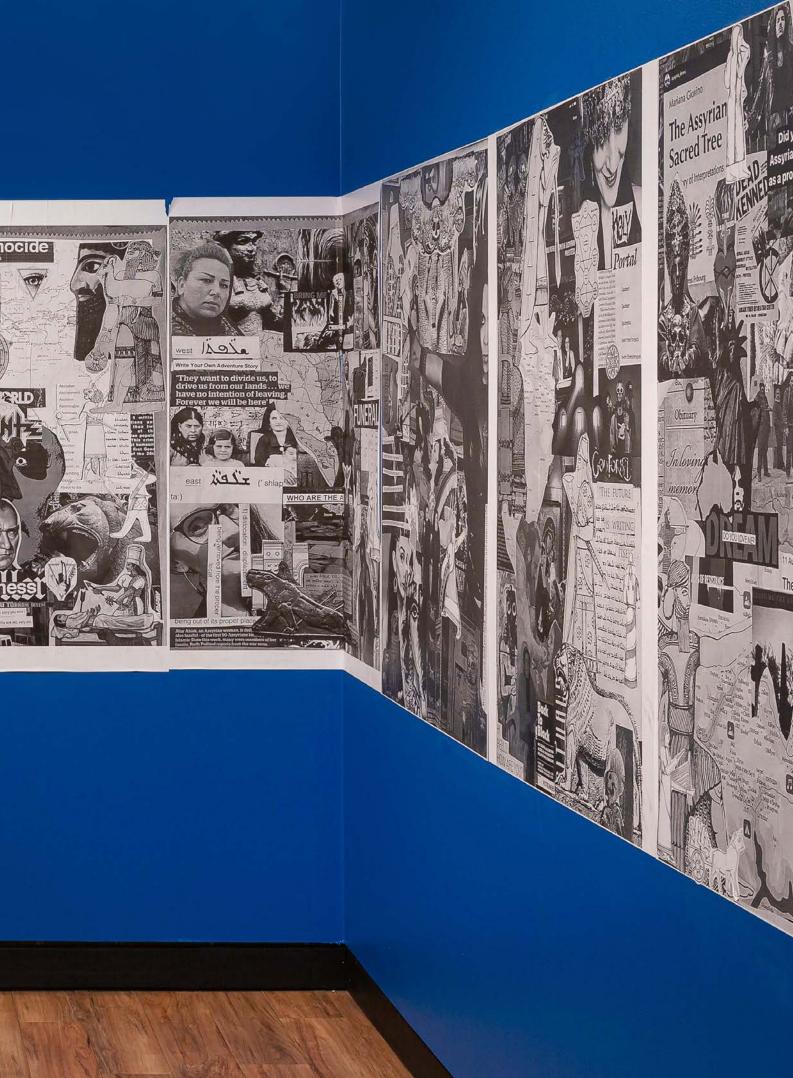






# **ANNUKINA WARDA**

Map of an Assyrian Terrain, 2022 2022, Print media, glue on paper Series of 7 prints, 841 x 1189mm



#### ANNUKINA WARDA

Where Do We Go Now But Nowhere
A Jewel in the Junkheap Hungry for God
Remnants of the Violation Wound
Shlap/ta
This is Irreversible
The Future is Writing Itself
Leave Me the Ashes of the Earth

Mapping Assyrian identity on my own terms has helped me make sense of who I am as a displaced person. I did not have the tools to do this until recently.

Charting displacement turned out not to be about borders, or nations or flags. For me, 'terrain' is not only about capital "S" statehood, but the smaller "s" kind. It is the assertion of my own sovereign identity without the need for a government to define it for me.

Mapping this terrain felt like engaging in a symbio-poesis, a co-created narrative with time and place. As an Assyrian person I do not understand myself except as linked inextricably to territory. This has been further complicated by the fact that I was born and raised in Fairfield, on Darug country.

The word for territory in Assyrian, or country, is Atra. The first question Assyrian kids get asked is where are you from? In one generation I saw the ability to locate ourselves to territory or to tribe, lost. When I ask young Assyrian people where they are from, or who their tribe is, they do not know the name, do not know the place, cannot point to a map and say, "My ancestors come from here." That loss erases tens of thousands of years of ancestral stewardship.

Mapping is not just an act of cartography. It has been more about collating a scrapbook of fragmented memories. For myself as a displaced Indigenous person, mapping my identity became a re-stitching of a puzzle without ever being offered the pieces.

This act of creativity becomes a compass for finding hidden treasure.

Growing up I never really knew "where I came from." The maps were gone and the names of the cities changed. Reference books are largely written by western scholars. Many build entire careers upon researching Assyrians and become "Assyriologists." I can't tell you how many times I have heard the phrase, "Assyrians have no country." We do have a country, we just don't have sovereignty.



Map of an Assyrian Terrain is a seven-piece series that combines my love for DIY misfit art, zine making, paste-ups and decolonial storytelling. I no longer believe that I need to be a fine artist or a scholar to be 'an authentic' Assyrian. I just get to exist.

Using my voice has been one way I resist becoming invisible. When I stop telling my story I become complicit in my own erasure.

#### Lenci

Allup

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GUTTERN

Dallar

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Wim

1 Van Tarre

Len



Lanunga

Meen

Ninna

BIOGRAPHY

Annukina Warda tends to the flame of her ancestors on the unceded territories of the Darug people in Sydney. Displaced from her country, Annukina explores recollection, recovery and renewal for an Indigenous community facing mass displacement from their traditional homelands, and cultural and linguistic erasure.

With the Assyrian myth The Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld as her frame of reference, Annukina grapples with the themes of memory, atra (country) and loss.

A long-time youth specialist, policy analyst and zine writer, Annukina uses techniques of collective storytelling, collage, and cut-and-paste decolonial map making to support a redefinition of Assyrian cultural identity on her own terms.

Her passion project, the Assyrian Priestess can be found on Instagram @the\_assyrian\_priestess or on Patreon https://www.patreon.com/theassyrianpriestess

Annukina Warda holds an Arts degree majoring in Gender and Politics and a Graduate Diploma in Education. She recently dropped out of Graduate School.

forests that won't regenerate



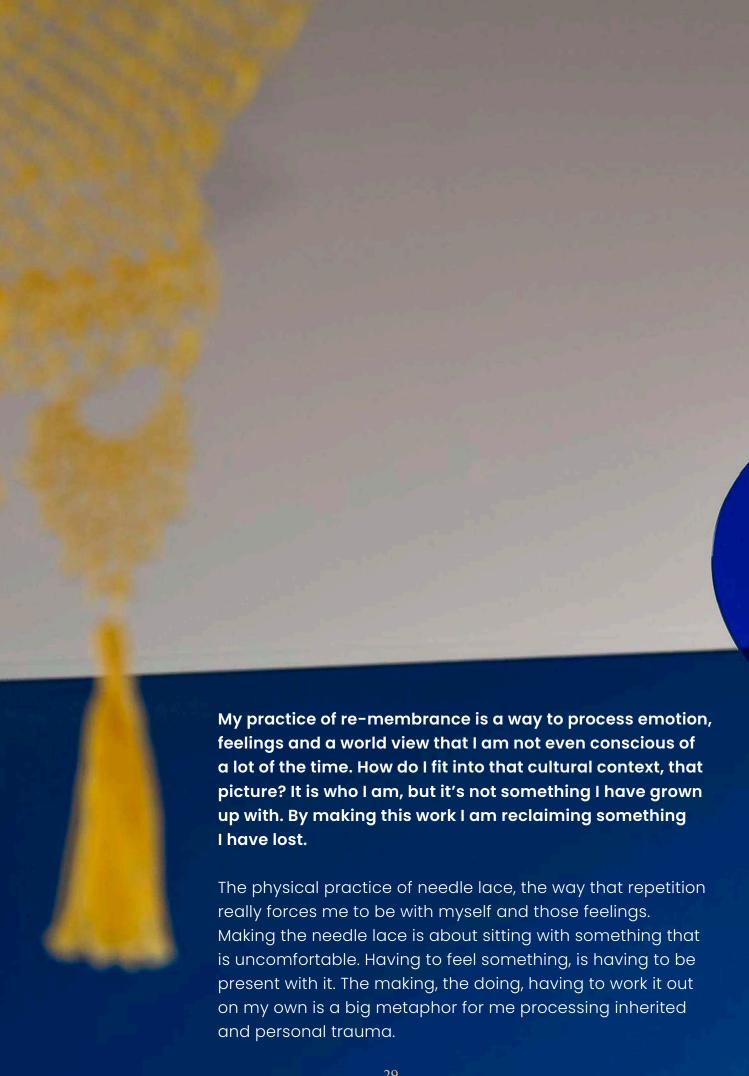
## **JOANNA KAMBOURIAN**

ancestral threads I (Arshalouys/Sunrise)
ancestral threads III (Massis/Ararat)
ancestral threads IV (Aniv/Wheel)
ancestral threads V (Shourchbar/Circle Dance)
ancestral threads VI (Arpi/Dawn)
ancestral threads VII (Loquat)
ancestral threads VIII (Rose)

Laser cut acrylic & cotton thread
Laser cut acrylic & cotton thread
Laser cut acrylic & cotton thread
Laser cut acrylic, laser engraved, cotton thread
Laser cut acrylic, laser engraved, cotton thread
Laser cut acrylic & cotton thread
Laser cut acrylic, cotton thread, screenprint

2022 Dimensions variable







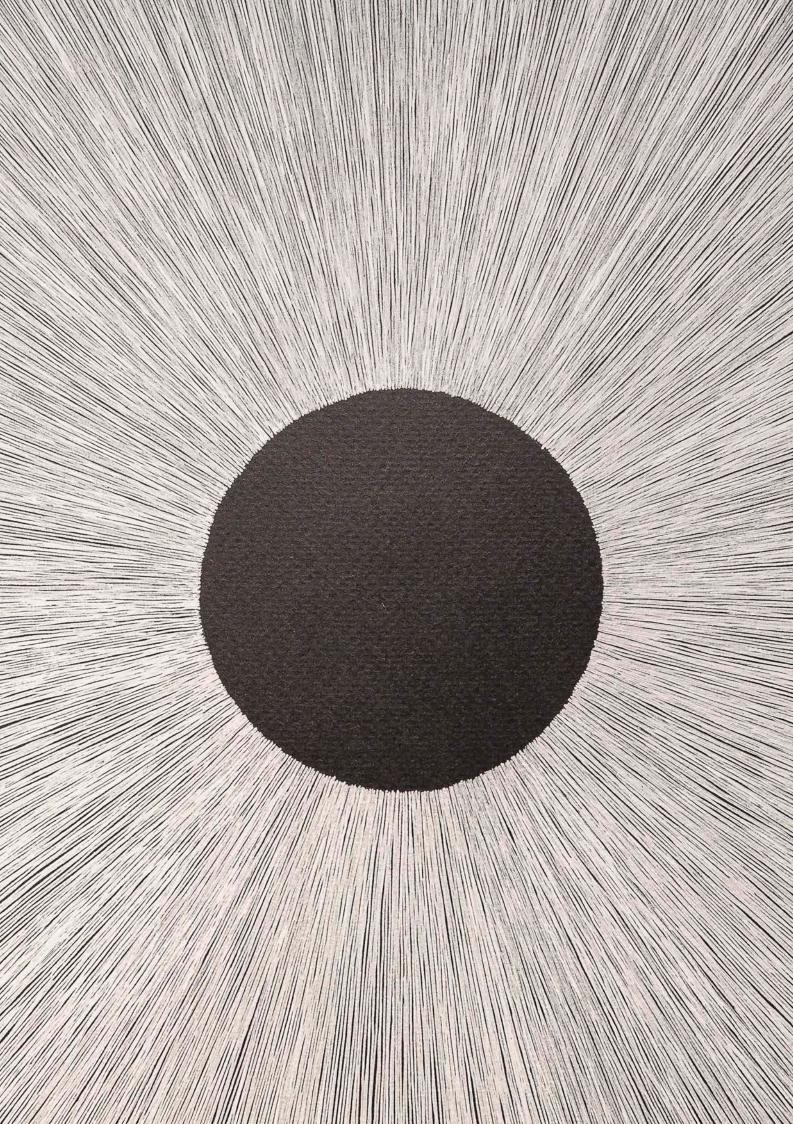
#### BIOGRAPHY

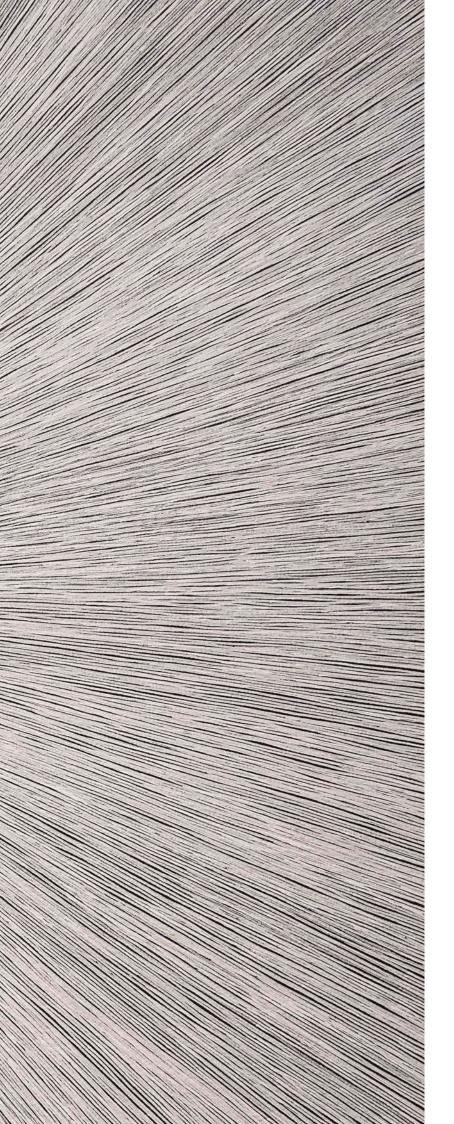
Born in 1976, Sydney, Australia, Joanna Kambourian is an Australian designer, printmaker and visual artist of Armenian heritage. Throughout her creative practice, she explores, experiences and examines the idea of 'hybrid hyphenations' within contemporary cultural and social identity. Joanna continues to document an ongoing journey, a search for identity and belonging from a post-colonial perspective that crosses generations and encompasses the diasporic experience. Her work illustrates this complex heritage through a multi disciplinary practice and celebrates her SWANA ancestry through contemporary cultural depictions.

A first class Honors graduate of the Visual Arts program at Southern Cross University, Lismore, Joanna also studied printmaking and artists books at the Pratt Institute, New York in 2006.

Joanna has over 20 years experience in graphic design, illustration and typography as well as being a practicing visual artist, experienced printmaker and founder of Lismore Art Space (2010-2018).

www.msbrownslounge.com.au @msbrownslounge @jo\_msbrown





### **ZEINA IAALI**

Meditation Illustration series 2022, white ink on black paper 50cm x 65cm

Image:: Document Photography



I started creating meditative works with repetitive marks many years ago when I was not in a good head space. I was isolated and the only thing I could turn to was paper and pen. I started drawing without thinking about the final image and just drew what I was compelled to do in that moment. When I create repetitive marks over long periods of time, I feel like I am working in an automated way. It is a physical and painstaking process that is done in solitude and an intimate space. Through infinite possibilities and the incidental nature of my work, I start to make sense of the subtle signs communicating to me. It's deeply personal. They are a spell to draw in and shield to protect. They vibrate and echo on planes that can guide to a higher state. The idea of contemplation is central to me. A meditative process that helps me to connect to my internal order as everything radiates and expands from the centre.



#### BIOGRAPHY

Zeina Iaali's parents migrated from Lebanon to Australia in the 1970s. Drawing on her training in Applied Arts majoring in Object Design, Iaali creates intricate sculptural works that employ a range of traditional and industrial materials including perspex, wood, clay and metal. Her work explores the shifting politics and representation of gender, referencing personal experiences and histories to reveal the conflicts, tensions and dualities of culture and identity.

Alongside her art practice, Iaali works as a secondary art teacher, and is also a member of The Refugee Art Project that showcases art by refugees and asylum seekers. Iaali is part of eleven, a collective of contemporary Muslim Australian arts practitioners and Hunar Symposia, which aims to decolonise ways of understanding zones of conflict through art.

@zeina\_iaali\_artist









### BIOGRAPHY

Marian Abboud works with family and participants from diverse communities to develop agency and socially responsive projects using curiosity as the springboard for cultural exchange and developing unique learning opportunities through creative expression. She is passionate about forging connections and creating meaning across perceived borders of place, language and identity. Marian uses multilingualism through movement, video, sound and text to develop live performances for civic engagement and social development.

Navigating themes of memory, loss and resilience. Her interests lie in oral histories, ancestral knowledge and collective mythologies. Marian's practice is the result of a constant attempt to translate internal psychological conflicts into physical experiences. Her works connect this individual awareness with the collective political and social environment. Although Marian's works develop from deeply personal and daily experiences, they often reference layered and complex history and point to universal experiences of sovereignty, geopolitics and migration.

Marian graduated from Western Sydney University with a Bachelor of Visual Communication. She has exhibited extensively locally and nationally and has collaborated on many dance and performance-based projects including Mona Foma in Hobart, 24 Frames, Carriageworks, her recent performance, *Not Her Reflection* a travelling performance at Artspace. Marian has worked as an artist-educator for the Art Gallery of NSW, Kaldor, A.C.E., UTP, Arab Theatre Studio, Save the Children and currently for Think + Do Foundation. Marian was a studio resident at Artspace for 2020 -2021. As well as Artist in Residence for UTS Library 2021-22, Marian is currently in residency in Germany for documental5 with Gudskul.























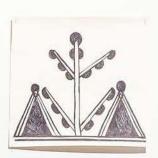


























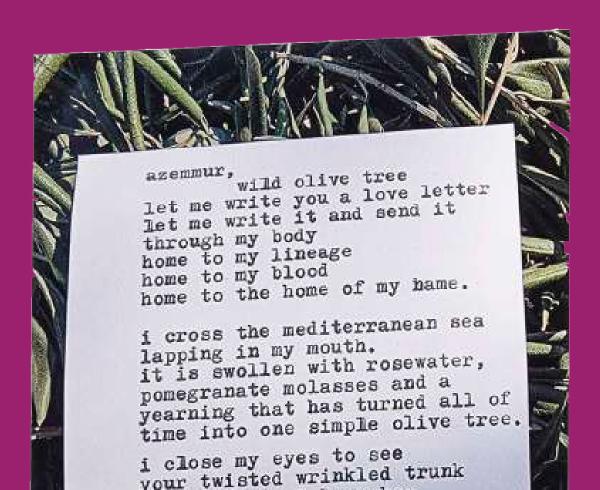
## **OLIVIA NIGRO**

Azemmur, let me write you a love letter 2020-2022, hand typed typewriter text on paper, drawing on paper and digital photography

Dimensions variable

This artwork was made in relationship and collaboration with an olive tree growing on the unceded lands of the Central Arrernte peoples of Mparntwe Alice Springs where I live as a migrant settler. I honour and pay respect to the Elders, ancestors and communities who have cared for this continent since time immemorial and the sovereign elements that sustain all life here. With every breath, I pledge my solidarity to the ongoing struggles for justice for all First Nations peoples in the global movement to end colonisation in all its forms.

When Nicole honoured me with the invitation to be a part of this exhibition, I took a deep breath into courage, knowing I would open an intimate window into my devotional life with my ancestral realm. This is a very private space for me, explored in the sanctuary of ritual, lovingly written about in my diaries, shared only with trusted kindreds. I am entranced, tested and healed by this realm every day. To share this with you is to blossom into a transcendent form of trust. For this invitation, I am grateful.





Nicole and I first met through our shared love for our late friend, Candy Royalle. Throughout 2020, we were part of a SWANA re-memberance collective facilitated by the stunning Layla K. Feghali in which we intentionally worked with plancestors to awaken lineage and the archive of inherited memories and knowledges held by the body. We delved deep with Zaatar (Oregano), Nefertum (Egyptian Blue Lotus), Maryamieh (Sage), Date and Baboonij (Chamomile). It was profound, excavating and transformative. All the while, I was longing for the same kind of ritualistic intimacy with my name sake. Where there is a spirit in a name, a medicine, a map, there is also a compass in the body. It was the map of my name and the compass of my body that guided me to azemmur. This is Amazigh language for the wild olive tree.

Surnames often hold information about family connections to land, lineage and in some cases, class position. Throughout my life my patrilineal surname, Nigro, has provoked curiosity, discomfort, questioning and the need to explain. My father was born in a small village, San Fele, in the region of Basilicata in Southern Italy.

This area has always hosted rich migration patterns along the Mediterranean Sea trade routes, and across the short distance from the coast of North Africa.

My family/name is descended from a place called Cap Nigro, which is in the northern part of Tunisia, along the border of Algeria. It is 700kms from San Fele as the crow flies. I learnt that Amazigh people from that area had their names stripped by Arab colonisers and replaced with Nigro before they were coerced into forced labour throughout the Mediterranean region including Southern Italy. The surname was designed to haunt their descendants so they could never escape this history. Olivia Nigro. This name does not haunt me. I carry it with a fierce love for my ancestors, a commitment to anti-colonial struggle and the blessing of belonging to the black olive. No matter how far I might be from my ancestral homelands, from Cap Nigro to San Fele, there is an olive tree within me that acts as an anchor. Azemmur.

In June last year, I moved into a new home in Mparntwe where there is a large olive tree growing in the backyard. My housemates told me that it was an ornamental olive and in the seven plus years they had lived there, the tree had never blossomed or fruited. My dear Croatian friend whose family have always cultivated olives, showed her mother the leaves and she said this was definitely a fruiting variety. Over the following months, with friends and in devotional solitude, I tended to the tree with love, care and ritual. I sang to the tree, prayed and vocalised, inviting the ancestral tree within to reveal its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, blossoms, fruits. I wrote to and with the tree, burnt leaves as offerings, distilled leaves for medicine, made olive leaf extract to share. I greeted the tree as an ancestor, peered into it as a mirror, listened to it for guidance. This artwork is a mosaic of these moments, the knowledge encoded in the poetics of these encounters, and the love letters they inspired.

For me, re-memberance holds an important space in the praxis of decolonisation and anti-colonial struggle. It locates you in the historicity of your own lineage and the responsibilities that come with that in terms of healing and accountability for intergenerational experiences including benefitting from migration and colonisation. I believe that in re-membering our own diasporic bodies, we enable deeper relationships of solidarity and reciprocity, with deeper integrity and listening to this land where we live. Re-membrance is a collectivist process. It happens in relationship and in spaces of kinship, with blood and cultural family and community, with kindreds and non- human kin, plants, animals, geographies and other phenomena. In my olive kinship, there are too many people and places to honour so I honour you all, you know who you are. In the words of Samia Sayed's incredible artwork, Remembering to never forget the olives you fed me (which you will see referenced), olive you!

Thank you for your life sustaining love.

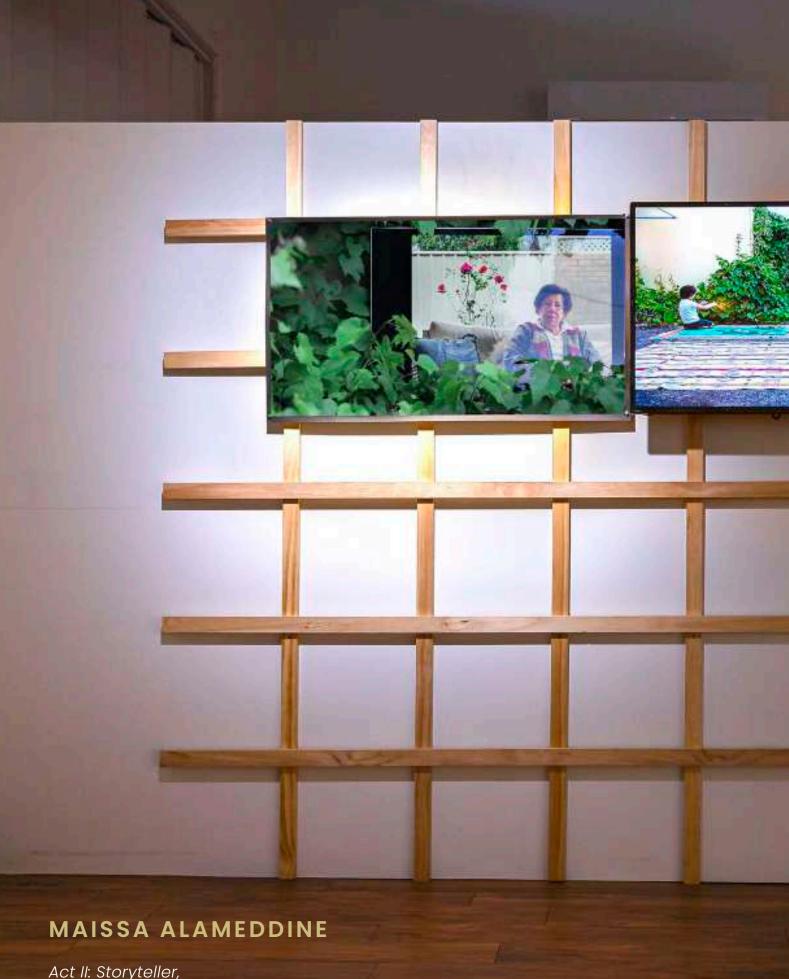




#### BIOGRAPHY

Olivia Nigro (they/them) is woven with paternal lineages from Southern Italy and Northern Tunisia and maternal lineages from Northern Ireland. Olivia was born in Warrang on the sovereign lands of the Gadigal People and was raised in Western Sydney. In relationship with First Nations Elders, families and communities across the continent, Olivia has been active over the past fifteen years for the return of stolen land, stolen children, stolen resources and an end to the systematic police murder of First Nations Peoples. Olivia is committed to weaponizing their skills as a writer, researcher, community organiser and media strategist in daily struggles for justice. Ritualistic creative praxis has been a deep well spring from which to anchor, nurture and inform these responsibilities with ancestral integrity and accountability to their own lineages.

In their artistic life, Olivia has metamorphosed through street poetry, spoken word and collaborative multimedia performance toward ritual invocation and decolonial writing and publishing. For the past eight years, Olivia has worked as a writer for senior First Nations researchers in the movement to decolonise health research. They are an active member of a community-controlled publisher based in Mparntwe Alice Springs called Running Water Community Press, which is devoted to truth-telling and storytelling from remote areas.



Act II: Storyteller, 2021-2022, print, eco-solvent pigment on cotton rag art paper, HD video, colour, sound, duration 7:04 min., aspect ratio: 16:9 loop Dimensions variable





## MAISSA ALAMEDDINE

My practice of re-membrance helps me find my place in the world, giving me a space to acknowledge the things that matter to me. Here, I am sharing a continued story of transference and inheritance, through a loss of connection, particularly during recent isolating times.

This story is an unresolved story, it is a process.

The scene is ready and is always set for connection, yet there is a disconnect. The carpet is laid out, the kids are playing, the love is happening, the waiting keeps waiting. It's beautiful to watch kids exist within that, to make their own ground, tell their own stories, make their own play. All they care about is the immediacy of that moment, yet all I care about is whether they will be nourished in this moment, and how.

My work is to prepare the scene, through art, food, culture. Growing plants that have memory associations, is part of it. It is harvesting for connectedness and community, possibly a manufactured community? My mother is here, their grandmother is here in the proverbial here of connectedness. She's sitting with us telling us the stories we want to hear. Isolation adds to the layers of memories and how we create them. Heritage that is close, yet so far, thanks to the ongoing layers and layers of living in diaspora.



#### BIOGRAPHY

Maissa Alameddine grew up in Tripoli, Lebanon and now lives on Gamaragal Country in Sydney. She is a multidisciplinary artist and vocalist working with various art forms such as photo/scans, video, sound design and live performance. Maissa's work explores the idea of migration as a chronic injury. She uses her voice as a provocation and a response. Maissa has been part of the contemporary Arab Australian arts community for over twenty years, performing with Arabic music ensembles, Western orchestras, and art organisations. She is a founding member and one of the creative producers of Western Sydney-based Arab Theatre Studio.

Maissa is currently artist in residence with Parramatta Artists' Studios Digital Residency. She has performed at the Sydney Opera House with Bankstown Poetry Slam, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Performance Space Carriageworks and at the Art Gallery of NSW. Maissa will be taking part in Rookwood Hidden Sculptures in September 2022. She will be working towards her Solo exhibition at firstdraft in May 2023.

@maissa @maissaalameddine





## NAZANIN MARASHIAN

Seeds of protection 2022

cotton/linen blend fabric, 110 clay amulets, acrylic paint, 110 beaded fabric amulets, esfand (wild rue seeds), Persian Blue salt, acrylic/cotton blend crochet umbilical cord
Dimensions variable

Seeds of protection evokes the power of ritual and prayer in daily life through the re-membrance of the practices of my maternal grandmother and great-grandmother. My mother shared a story with me from her childhood that has re-awakened within me the potent medicine that I carry through the epigenetics of the "seed" of the motherline.

My Grandmother would bless each of her children using esfand (wild rue) on day 3 and day 5 of each week. She had her own invocation and process where she would take the seeds and place them in the fold of her children's clothing and whisper her prayer of protection and then throw these seeds on coals. They would crackle and once the smudge would release she would pass this smoke over her children's heads front and back.

This was her way of casting a protective veil around her beloveds.

I wanted to bring these aspects of the ritual into my daily life and re-claim the power of prayer, the power of intention and the power of a mother's love for her children to endure in these uncertain times.

My installation brings forward aspects of this ritual and the crossing over between art and life. Each element of my work is imbued with a prayer for my life. This process of creating this work has drawn together a collaboration and shared storytelling between my mother and I.

Each particle of the work is a prayer. The creation of the work itself has drawn out many miraculous changes in my life. It feels like a portal has opened up in the creation of this installation connecting me directly to my maternal grandmother and the parallels between her life story and mine. Issues of security, health, upheaval, grief, healing and resilience have surfaced with this work. My mother crocheted an umbilical cord for



the spiral, representing the connection between the three generations, daughter, mother and grandmother. Each stitch carries a prayer and then woven together representing the red thread that binds us genetically as well as spiritually.

This practice of re-membrance of the power of prayer has invited true miracles and deeper connection in my life. This work has also drawn me deeper into investigating the role of esfand and salt in protective practices of my motherland. The seeds of esfand and the plant itself have many medicinal properties. I am fascinated with the ways in which these practices have survived and continue to be part of daily life in Iran, as well as here in Australia.

Deep gratitude to my collaborators Nahid Marashian and Abolgahsem Marashian for helping me breathe life into this work.

#### BIOGRAPHY

Born in Iran in 1979, I immigrated to Australia with my family in 1984 to flee the war between Iran / Iraq (1980-1989). In 2014 I founded the Iranian Women Visual Artists Collective-Australia (2014-2018) and set up a studio in St Leonards Creative Precinct. My formal education includes a Bachelor of Arts (Art History & Theory and Performance Studies) and a Masters of Teaching from the University of Sydney. I have exhibited for over 15 years in solo and group exhibitions in Sydney, Melbourne and Rome. My works have featured in the Women Beyond Borders project, Newtown Festival, Creative Conversations with Asylum Seekers and I have been a finalist in many art prizes, including the prestigious Blacktown Art Prize.

## **NICOLE BARAKAT**

## **CURATOR BIOGRAPHY**

Nicole Barakat is an artist, curator and educator living on Gadigal land. She works with deep listening and intuitive processes with intentions to transform the conditions of everyday life. Her artwork engages unconventional approaches to art-making, creating intricate works that embody the love and patience characteristic of traditional textile practices. Her works include handstitched and hand-cut cloth and paper drawings, sculptural forms made with her own hair, cloth and plant materials as well as live work where she uses her voice as a material.





re-member is the third exhibition Nicole has curated, others include Lacebook (2014 Peacock Gallery, Auburn), which won an Imagine Award (Engagement) from Museums & Galleries NSW.

Nicole has worked as an educator in the arts for almost 20 years, including lecturing in fine arts (textiles) at UNSW Art & Design (2003-2011) and working as an artist educator at the Art Gallery of NSW (2016-2018) and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (2013-present).

Nicole's experience includes twenty years of collaborative community-engagement where she sees respect and equality as the leading principles that drive an exchange of knowledge and skills. Projects include; Shadow Places (Narrandera, NSW 2016) for the Powerhouse Museum in partnership with the Cad Factory and the award-winning Sydney Festival event Minto: Live (2011) with Campbelltown Arts Centre. Nicole most recently created a collaborative artwork with the Rohingya Women's Development Organisation for the Powerhouse Museum's exhibition *Eucalyptusdom*.

Nicole's creative practice is rooted in re-membering and re-gathering her SWANA ancestral knowing, including coffee divination and more recently working with plants and flower essences for community care and healing.



**Artists** Annukina Warda, DJ Gemma, Joanna Kambourian, Maissa Alameddine , Nazanin Marashian, Olivia Nigro, Zeina laali and Marian Abboud.









# 9 July - 29 October 2022

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