

**Rainbow
Clearance
and
Other
Paintings**

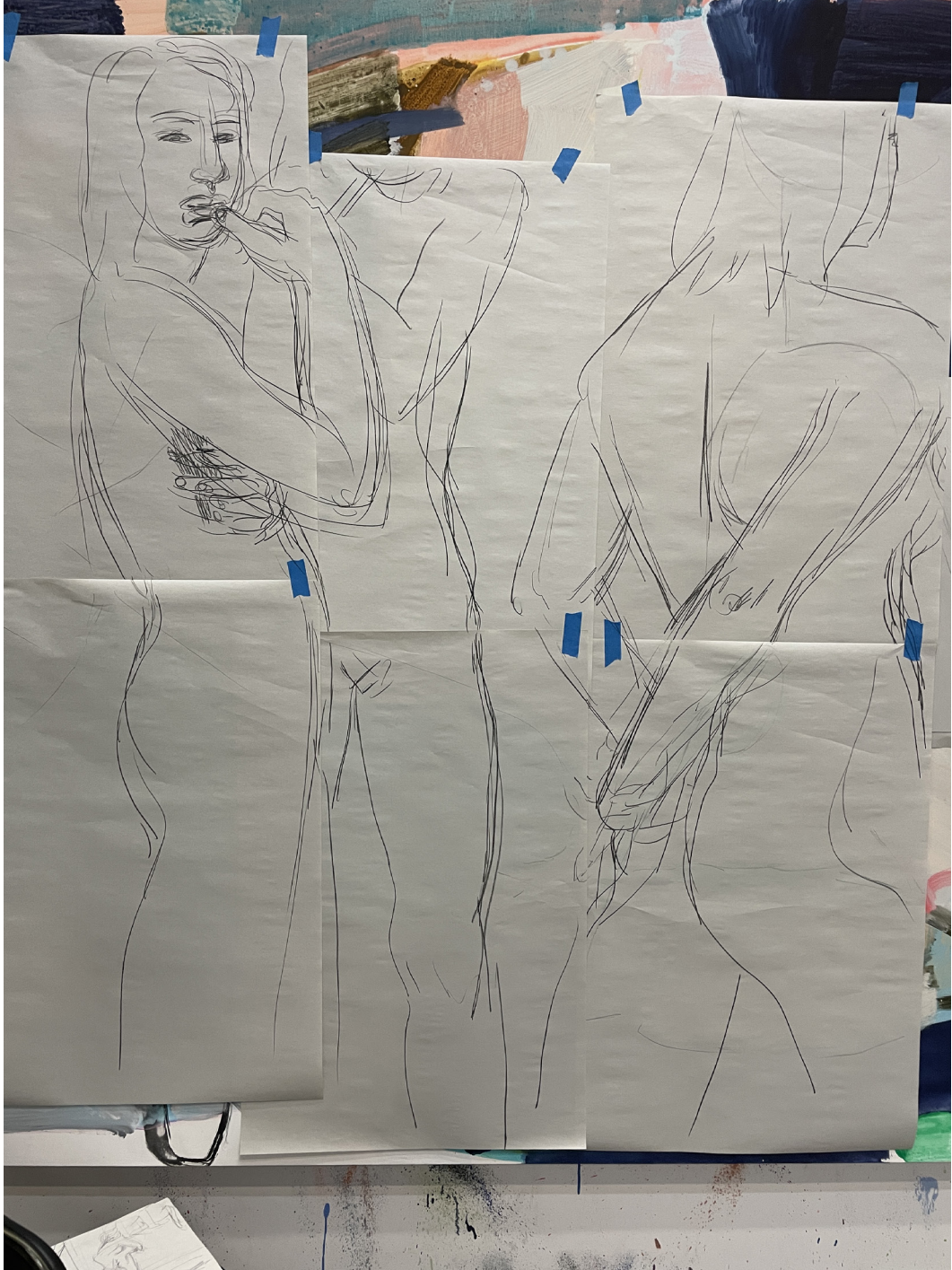
Sarah Awad

Exhibition Date

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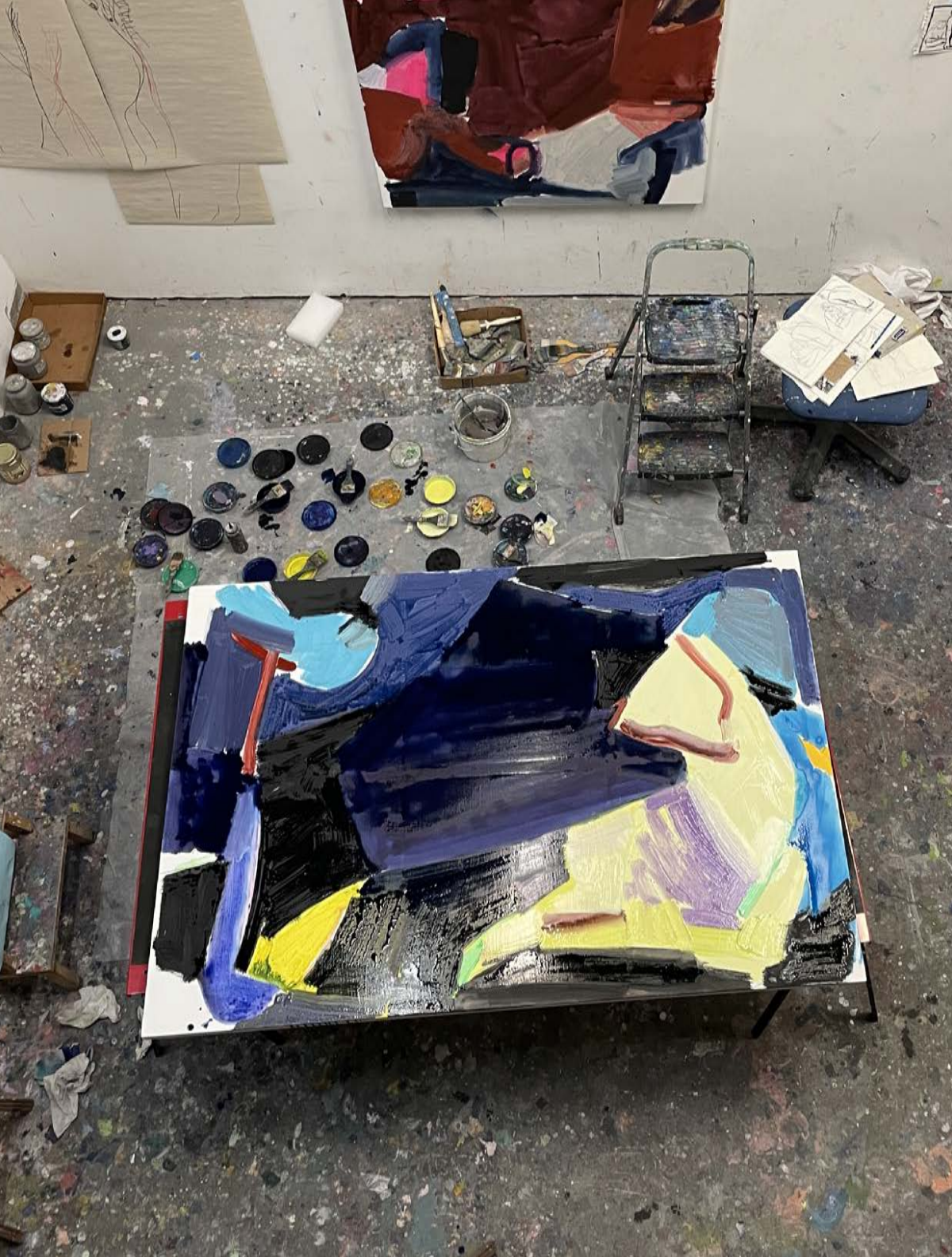




















Text by
Myrna Ayad

Something about the swathes of colour in Sarah Awad's paintings compels the eye to excavate forms that are otherwise unseen or missed. It's a visual exercise akin to cloud spotting, replete with the satisfaction of identifying, or rather, imposing a shape on a shape. Awad's paintings both allow us to wonder and offer us precious nuggets about the secrets they hold—secrets which aren't kept by the artist, but rather, those which are projected by one's inner self.

For her first solo exhibition outside her home state of California, Awad presents *Rainbow Clearance and Other Paintings*, a show comprising 12 canvases at The Third Line. With many paintings rendered in large-scale—a preference on the artist's part to allow an interpretation of colour and form—the collection is dense with colour and takes on the theme of isolation. It isn't isolation in the sense of remoteness or seclusion per se, but rather in the function of looking outward and inward, or as Awad puts it: "The way the paint can allow you to see through something to see something else that is coming from the form of the work." Awad maintains, however, that the paintings are void of narratives, "but hold gesture, body and colour" and are intended to be "open-ended" in their interpretation. "They are figurations, not illustrations," she asserts.

There is a vigour in Awad's charged and obvious layering, and a dynamism to her grouping of colours—on a palette, they may seem disharmonious, but on her canvases, they are utterly captivating. Colours excite her, especially those that one assumes do not go together. "One fundamental aspect about colour is its relation to other colours. I am aware of colour relationships and the spatial relationships that happen," she says.

Time and again, Awad refers to these 'relationships' as collisions, largely because she intends on colours and materials to make impact. The painting begins life flat on the ground at

first and Awad then constructs it with transparent washes. The emerging shapes and colour relationships dictate the painting's aesthetic direction, "allowing the materials to bleed and develop different edges" and it is then hung on the wall where the figuration, or rather, "the collision" is imposed. "The forms that are happening will inform the figures," explains Awad. "I don't know what it will be, nor do I know who the figures are."

Painting that interests her contain scenarios in which "there are things behind that come forward, and things that are forward recede. That's where the confusion of space comes in," she says. *Disappearing Act* features a turquoise shape in the top left corner; at once transparent and light, it both reveals mark-making underneath and accentuates the neighbouring maroon. The eyes are led towards the centre and suddenly, the forms outline the bowed head of a woman. It is almost as though Awad carved a shape from the canvas, or as she puts it: "punched back a hole and brought a positive space in a negative shape." The identification of the figure automatically induces a visual desire to discover more forms; the fact is, there can be as many as one would like to imagine.

The interest in, and desire to convey a sense of possibility stems from Awad's background in mathematics, having earned a bachelor's degree in the field in 2003 from the Claremont McKenna College in California with a view to pursuing a career in the realm of engineering. "I think that is the more interesting question in my work – on an unconscious level, the underpinning is about solving something, questions that have to be solved in an elegant way," she explains. "It's deeply tied to proofs." Though she had minored in studio art, the constant quest for colour exploration led her to achieve an MFA from the University of California in Los Angeles in 2011. It was during this time when Awad began reusing old canvases in an attempt to both superimpose and excavate all at once – as though constantly on a mission to investigate. "It's not too different from what I do now," she says. The want to solve 'colour proofs' begets another mathematical facet to Awad's oeuvre: the seeming geometric structure that her paintings present. It is clear to the eye that the figures are fragmented, that the pictorial expanse is abstracted, and yet a form of colour blocking constructs the canvas, which, coupled with the layering, offers the composition an assembly that seems at once organised and spontaneous.

The energy is electric, and yet, however systematic the configuration appears, it is guided by Awad's instinct and that is solely led by trial and error. What looks like a vibrant arrangement is the artist's continuous attempt at solving textural and colour riddles on her canvases. Thankfully, those have endless possibilities, meaning Awad's journey is a life-long exploration in colour and materiality. "If I understand it, then it loses its power," she says. "The same palette can yield different colour combinations and that is limitless."

Another impact is the figure, which she discovered during a life-changing trip to Florence in 2001 that cemented Awad's commitment to art and exposed her to classical art in a manner that continues to influence her painting today. It is from the seat of the Italian Renaissance and modernism where Awad's female figure stems and which initially appeared as a singular subject, "coming from the male relationship to the female body as a muse." Over the years, that has evolved into multiple figures and bodies in conversation with each other through colour, examples of which are *Limbo*, where three bodies somehow appear and disappear and *Unfurl*, *Unfathom*, *Unfree* whose two figures turn their gaze to the viewer.

There are multiple conversations that the bodies can have with one another, and while an aura of sensuality drapes Awad's canvases, there is also an inimitable sexual tension that stealthily forces the viewer into a position of voyeurism, such as in *Soothsayer*. "That is intended," confirms Awad, who is confident in rendering the female body because "it is a body and gestures that I recognise." Being a woman means she knows what the female body looks like, the manner in which it sits, the intimacy of its gestures and how the body holds itself. Because Awad is led by instinct and material, the form of her figures is wholly organic and flows like the paint with which it is made. Even if the figures were to be removed or further blurred from the canvas, they may still appear because of the sheer power that Awad wields over the eye, commanding it to unearth a form amidst colours. It is the viewer eager to see.



Night Vision, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
182.88 × 167.64 cm



Rainbow Clearance, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
213,36 × 167,64 cm



Phantom Web, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
152.4 × 167.64 cm



Third Eye, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
76.2 × 68,58 cm



Cosmic Harmonizers, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
167.64 × 213.36 cm



Disappearing Act, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
167.64 × 111.76 cm



Limbo, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
152.4 × 121.92 cm



Sun Conducting, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
91.44 × 137.16 cm



SoothSayer, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
96.52 × 106.68 cm



Unfurl, Unfathom, Unfree, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
127 × 96.52 cm



In Tune, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
127 × 96.52 cm



Neon Pulse, 2022
Oil and Vinyl on Canvas
167.64 × 111.76 cm

About Sarah Awad

Sarah Awad (b. 1981, Pasadena, CA) has had solo exhibitions at Night Gallery, Los Angeles; Blossom Market, Los Angeles; and Diane Rosenstein Gallery, Los Angeles. She has been included in group shows at Night Gallery, Los Angeles; LA Louver, Venice; V1 Gallery, Copenhagen; Long Beach City College Art Gallery, CA; and Galerie Ernst Hilger, Vienna. Awad is the 2011 recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation MFA Grant and her work has been reviewed in *Artillery*, *Modern Painters*, *Art in America*, *Artsy Editorial*, *ArtScene*, and *New American Paintings*, among others. Her work is in the permanent collections of Dallas Museum of Art, TX; The Britely, West Hollywood; and Hotel Figueroa, Los Angeles. In 2022, she will be featured in group shows at PRJCTLA, Los Angeles, and Chan Gallery, Pomona. Awad currently teaches on the faculty of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at UC Irvine and is based in Los Angeles.

About Myrna Ayad

Myrna Ayad established her namesake consultancy in 2018, focusing on art advisory, cultural strategy and book publishing and is recognised as one of the Middle East's leading cultural commentators. From 2016–2018, she was Director of Art Dubai, the region's foremost international art fair. Preceding this, she wrote on regional art for The New York Times, CNN Online, The Art Newspaper, Artforum, Artsy, Artnet, Wallpaper* and The National, among others, and contributed to artist monographs and exhibition catalogues. Ayad was Editor of Canvas, the premier magazine for visual art from the Middle East from 2007–2015, where she oversaw the production of the title's affiliate newspapers, catalogues, and luxury art books. Over the years, she has served as a panellist and moderator and sits on the committees of cultural organisations in the region. Based in the UAE for four decades, Ayad graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration in 2001 from the American University in Dubai. She lives in Dubai with her husband and two children.

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