

صفير زملر غالييري

MOUNIRA AL SOLH

Elyssa, ela, hela, Elyssa, I myth you more

September 3, 2026 – mid-January 2027

Sfeir-Semler is proud to present Mounira Al Solh's third solo exhibition in our Hamburg spaces, comprising paintings, textiles, ceramics, works on paper, video and installation. Moving fluidly between media, Al Solh develops an expansive practice in which drawing, writing, embroidery, colors, film and objects bring personal narratives and collective histories into relation. Rather than adhering to distinct categories, she intertwines the intimate and the political, combines humor and tragedy, and blends fiction and testimony to retell stories of displacement, memory, resistance, and belonging. Often drawing on language and gesture, she creates a distinct register through which these narratives unfold.

The successive crises that have marked contemporary Lebanon in recent years (the severe economic crisis that began in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic and Beirut port explosion in 2020 and ongoing wars) led Al Solh to turn towards the ancient world as a way of processing the present and considering how individuals and societies might endure, transform, and move forward during catastrophe. Her representation of Lebanon at La Biennale di Venezia in 2024 constituted the first chapter of her engagement with the foundational myths of the Phoenician world, particularly those rooted in the ancient city of Tyre.

Focusing on women whose stories have been shaped and often subordinated by predominantly male histories, Al Solh revisits the figures of Europa and Elissa, or Dido. According to Greek mythology, Europa was abducted by Zeus from the shores of Tyre and later gave her name to the European continent; Elissa, meanwhile, is said to have fled Tyre and founded Carthage. Both figures appear in the exhibition, their stories offering different accounts of departure, exile, and transformation. In revisiting these myths, Al Solh recasts women traditionally portrayed as victims or tragic figures as protagonists of their own histories. The conflicting versions of Elissa's story, from heroic founder to tragic figure in Virgil's Aeneid, also bring into focus the ways in which histories are shaped, transformed, and transmitted by those who have the power to tell them.

The exhibition presents a wooden fishing boat installation that evokes Tyre's longstanding relationship with the sea: a source of sustenance and livelihood, but also a route of departure and passage. Around the boat, glazed ceramic masks, inspired by Phoenician amulets and funerary masks,

line the walls. They embody the paradox of communal life, where intrusion and surveillance coexist with protection, belonging, and collective strength. Al Solh also presents a series of embroidered textiles depicting murex shells, a reference to another Tyrian myth and an emblem closely associated with the ancient city's production of purple dye. A symbol of birth, beauty, and fertility, they become vessels offering voyage to distant shores, while the act of embroidery introduces another form of transmission, one carried through the hands and labor of women.

Several new and recent paintings complete the presentation. A central large-scale canvas depicts Elissa's voyage with her male companions and the women she is given upon reaching Cyprus to help found Carthage. This detail quietly exposes the ways in which women's bodies have historically been exchanged, allotted, and absorbed into narratives of nation-building. As in much of Al Solh's work, anachronistic or seemingly incongruous details, a rocket, a breast, or a boat sailing on a carpet, disrupt historical chronology and collapse temporal distinctions. Ancient figures inhabit a visual world that is recognizably contemporary, while images of the present acquire the distance of myth. Some works incorporate textile and embroidery into the canvas, while others reference cycles of life and death, from ancient extinctions to contemporary bombings, and the strata of the buried dead on which civilization is built.

Moving between ancient myth and contemporary experiences, Al Solh brings the past and present into uneasy proximity. Imagining continuity at the heart of rupture, she inhabits the gaps within historical episodes, reclaiming in the process the lineage of women from whom she descends, and recovering their bodies and myths from centuries of patriarchal narration.

Mounira Al Solh (b. 1978, Lebanon; lives and works between Beirut and Amsterdam) is a visual artist and professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. Al Solh has had numerous solo exhibitions worldwide. In 2017 she was part of Documenta 14, Kassel and Athens, and in 2024, she represented Lebanon at the 60th Venice Biennale. Her work is in the collections of Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Mathaf, Doha; Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht; the Art Institute Chicago; and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam among many others.