

Rasha Omar
Dilmun
November 17, 2023 – January 27, 2024

In her first solo exhibition at Jan Kaps, Rasha Omar presents new paintings from her ongoing series Dilmun and a sculptural installation comprising broken glass, a child's drawing and a torn passport.

Born in Damascus, Rasha Omar experienced the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 and was 23 years old when she left the country. In her work, the artist of Kurdish descent explores the dichotomy between the utopian aspirations of civilization — embodied by the Sumerian myth of Dilmun— and the complex reality of conflict and migration. Drawing on her personal experiences, her art is not only a testimony to the effects of war, but also a meditation on relief and resolution. The paintings are both somber and self-assured: while reflecting traumatic experiences and memories, her compositions dissolve into topographical landscapes.

For Rasha Omar, these paintings juxtapose the experience of a conflict that has driven more than 14 million people from their homes with happy memories of the time before the war. The portraits are inspired by the memory of Rabee, her 11-year-old neighbor, who was like a brother to her. During the daily bombings in 2013, the family was forced to leave Damascus. They wanted to take Rabee with them, but his father feared the journey to northern Iraq would be too dangerous as many of the refugees were under attack. When they arrived in the northern city of Qamishli the next day, they learned that Rabee had been killed by a bombshell outside their house.

In the exhibition Dilmun, the artist brings together the soft edges of her paintings with the hard and crumbling edges of her installation made of broken glass—reminiscent of cityscapes, ruins and waves. Between the shards of glass, the artist has placed individual pages of her now void Syrian passport and a drawing she made at the age of six. With her current travel document, issued by the Austrian government, she can travel anywhere other than Syria. Her childhood drawing, which was intended for an exhibition that never took place, shows a group of smiling fruits.

Like bird's-eye views of verdant landscapes, where one form merges into the next, her pictures are reminiscent of the peaceful Sumerian paradise of Dilmun. "No one here says: 'My head is sick'," reads a poem, which was recorded in cuneiform script on a clay tablet around 4,000 years ago, "no one here says: 'I am an old woman'" The script describes a non-violent place without illness or death. The myth can be understood as an earlier version of paradise narratives such as the Greek Garden of the Hesperides or the Bible's Garden of Eden. These parallels are a testament to the way in which, for millennia the Middle East was a breeding ground for the cross-fertilization of cultural ideas that grew into branches of their own, sometimes outliving their now-forgotten origins. Rasha Omar's work reflects the transformative effect of assembling fragments into something new.

After all, the name Rabee also means spring in Arabic.

Jan Kaps
Lindenstrasse 20
50674 Cologne

info@jan-kaps.com
www.jan-kaps.com
+49 221 828 202 12

Rasha Omar
born 1989 in Damascus, Syria.

Rasha Omar has previously exhibited her work at various venues in Syria, Iraq and Vienna. She has studied at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna and the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus.