

MAYSALOUN FARAJ
CERAMICS



Baghdad I Boats and Burdens Earthstone and Black Velvet 35x45x9cm 2008

VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM RESIDENCY PRESENTATION
MAYSALOUN FARAJ
Selected Ceramics

In clay, I bond with cathartic earth to heal and be healed, craving serenity and order through restiveness and chaos. My art is an attempt to capture stolen dreams, innocence, pain and beauty lost with imagination with love.

The sculpture of Maysaloun Faraj acts a springboard into a language without words. Her pieces are delicate and lyrical - silent letters in a lifelong correspondence with the divine. They incite profound reflection on the endless possibilities of matter in relation to the universe, as well as embodying the artist's unstoppable sincerity, which passes fervently through sinuous twists of bronze before settling more restfully in slender tablets of clay.

There is a ripe and startling physicality to the sculpture even though on the surface each is fragile, fragmented and often executing an impossible balancing act: Golden Bird (2008) features fragments of white earth-stone carefully arranged one upon the other and exquisitely tipped with gold as if a seal to a sacred scroll.

I'jaz (2012) presents a thin column of bronze that weaves its way skywards, stretching almost to breaking point but never once toppling. In its endurance, the riddling

structure resembles a calligraphic dance, rising in a swaying path towards the void in the heat of risk, ecstasy and triumph.

The innocence and magnificent naivety that ebbs from the sculpture comes directly from its continual aspiration towards simplicity. There is a feeling that the artist is constantly sifting and extracting any distraction to her work's essence so that each line, each hue, is entirely a product of necessity.

She compulsively puts her materials to the test, intensely working them in such a way that sees her master her own hand, erasing any obvious signs of human intervention and forging pieces that appear deliciously untouched, but arranged with great skill.

It is striking that both the fired earth-stone and the cooled bronze consistently manage to retain their soft suppleness while bearing force in their crisp lines as well as in the slow, strong bends of the material. Even though the shapes

making up each sculpture tend to assume their own mysterious order, the unusual harmony of line and colour invariably points at a sense of wholeness, of plenitude. And the balance of elements, though at times in apparent defiance of gravity, is all the more marked for its successful amalgamation of apparently discordant parts.

One particularly recurrent motif - the thin white crescent resting atop a block of clay - hints once again at the universal nature of Faraj's approach, her referencing of works by a generation of Iraqi artists before her, including Jewad Salim, and much further back in time, to the symbols as well as techniques explored in the visual cultures of Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Asma Allah al-Husna (2008) is a clay work in which Faraj specifically draws upon a method of Mesopotamian printmaking dating as early as 5000BC. This awareness of her cultural heritage grounds her practice in "the evolutionary thread of art in





Iraq” to quote Lorna Salim; the personal, intimate nature of her sculpture creates an atmosphere of accessibility and openness, allowing new viewers with no previous knowledge of Iraqi history or art to join that same dialogue with ease. And ultimately, this fusion of ancient and contemporary is well-suited to Faraj’s aspiration to contribute, through her art, to defining the identity of a culture and a people.

As a whole, the artist’s oeuvre reveals a vision that is luminous and progressive. Each sculpture offers a distinct sensation of oneness dissolving, transforming then redefining itself, first into clay, now most recently bronze, in an ongoing act of material purification. As a series, they tell wordless stories of how the brokenness of things is in fact the necessary beginning of journey towards greatness, with former wounds evolving into sacred scars, testifying to a life fully lived, and within that - a verve, a glimpse of the divine.

Kate Busby*
Barcelona 2012

*Kate Busby is an alumna of Oxford University and a freelance writer. She has worked with Milton Keynes Gallery, Edge of Arabia, JAMM Art and regularly publishes articles on contemporary art. She currently lives and works in Barcelona where she is a co-curator at the Madame La Marquise art space.”



Far left:
**Confined: Um
Abbass and Abu
Abbass**
Earthstone
43x19cm
2003

Top right:
**Embrace: Al-
Samee’ ‘The All
Hearing’**
Asma Allah al-
Husna
Earthstone and
Velvet
48x19cm
2008

Maysaloun Faraj
at **Putney School
of Art and Design**
2017



Al-Melik Al-Qud'dous 'The King, The Holy'
Asma Allah al-Husna
Earthstone, Glaze and Gold
12x49(d)cm
2008



Ainaki Ghabeta
Nekheel II 'Your
Eyes Art Two Palm
Forests' Boats and
Burdens
Earthstone, Amber
Glaze and Gold
29x40x10cm
2008



Allah Nour al-Samawat wal-Ardh
'God is the Light of the Heavens and Earth'
Earthstone, Amber Glaze and Gold
32x20x10cm
2008



Pots for Peace I
Earthstone, Glaze and Gold Lustre
25x25cm
2008



Boats for Peace
Boats and Burdens
Earthstone
50x46x10cm
2007



Golden Bird
Boats and Burdens
Earthstone, Glaze
and Gold
24x20cm
2008



Ainaki Ghabeta
Nakheel I
*'Your Eyes Are Two
Palm Forests'*
Earthstone, Glaze
and Gold
42x32x7cm
2008



Golden Boat
Boats and Burdens
Earthstone, Glaze
and Gold
27x35cm
2008



Yal'li Imdha'i Watan 'He Who Has
Lost His Homeland' Boats and
Burdens
Earthstone and
Velvet Glazes
25x55x10cm
2009



Cylinder Seals made for the series *Asma Allah al-Husna* 'The Ninety Nine Names of God' Earthstone 3(h)x1(d)cm each 2007



Maysaloun Faraj at the Putney School of Art & Design shaping a coiled pot with her indespeible metal kidney! 2016