

Intimate Space

Rana Samara

Zawyeh Gallery

Ramallah, Palestine

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Intimate Space

I have always been intrigued by both the stories and untold silences women transfer from one generation to another, in particular from mothers to daughters. Women hide great stories and if you give them the opportunity they will make great storytellers. Intimate stories and female wisdom through experience are the sources of inspiration for me and for my practice. That said, perhaps my own experiences are a latent inspiration too. I grew up in a typical Palestinian family and consequently spent most of my childhood and teenage years observing and analyzing social and gender relations. I came to understand how precious, yet also suffocating women's roles as carers and nurturers can be.

My first academic experience with the visual arts was at the Palestine Technical College in Ramallah where I completed a two-year diploma in graphic design. However the program did not fulfill my desire for knowledge. In the theory lectures we always touched upon Contemporary Art, and it made me want to explore this area in greater depth. I therefore applied to the International Academy of Art in Palestine to study BA Contemporary Visual Arts. It provided me with the opportunity to develop a broad scope in the understanding and practice of visual arts across the medium of photography, installation, painting, video, social intervention and theoretical studies.

Women, gender and sexual relations comprise the backbone of my work; It all started after a walk in Al-Amari refugee

camp where I began wondering about the sex life of couples living in such a condensed spaces that affords them almost no privacy. This privacy is especially difficult to achieve considering the large size of most Palestinian families and the cramped proximity in which neighbours and families live to each other. In my research I investigate the social contexts of sexuality in which I rely mostly on my personal relations with various women I met. I have intimate and continuous conversations with them about virginity, intimacy, sexual desire, gender norms, their convictions and relationships and roles vis à vis the younger generations and these conversations form the cornerstone of my research for my practice in which I utilize various forms including painting, video, installation and also embroidery. My practice currently focuses on painting, both for potential of the medium as well as its historical references and contexts.

My current body of work focuses on the question of women's bedrooms, which reflect a woman's social class, sexual life, the amount of privacy they have and at times can even resemble a crime scene. I explore the question of where we are positioned as a viewer to these rooms and how through voyeuristically intruding on the scene we are able to sense the lives of the women who inhabit and perform their sexuality in these rooms and the relationship between place and social norms. Currently I am working on body of work which focuses on the question of virginity.

As Palestinian society is predominantly conservative, virginity is extremely important and proof of it is still sought by the groom's family. This proof usually takes the form of a blood stained handkerchief that is shown to the women in the family after the wedding night. For this project I gave 50 handkerchiefs to different men and women and asked them to embroider upon them their views and understanding of this longstanding tradition. Working across different mediums and forms enables me to explore intimate and taboo questions of female sexuality in my society.

My recent research moves these above questions into the realm of public space and how it can become an intimate one within seconds. I wonder what kind of intimate situations are born in a space and how many stories there are to share and I am keen to explore how this manifests in different places, contexts and corners of public space.

Since my graduation last year from the International Academy of Art in Palestine, I have continued to work on the abovementioned themes in my artwork. I have recently showcased two of my artworks at the French- German cultural center in Ramallah in the exhibition "Disrupted Intimacies" which brought together a selection of artworks from the graduates of the International Academy of Art for the first time. The selected artworks focused on the abovementioned conversations I had with women on the

subject of social taboos – female sexuality, virginity, intimacy, sexual desire, and gender norms – and these were shown through the medium of large- scale painting of domestic spaces.

I also taught part time courses at the academy to first year students studying the BA in Contemporary Visual Art. Additionally, I was nominated to participate in a public art workshop in Beirut with Palestinians from refugee camps. These experiences have increased my interest in the pursuit of a professional career as an artist for which I believe post-graduate study is an essential aspect. I have now been accepted to study MA Fine Art and Theory in Northwestern University in Chicago and this has come at a pivotal point in my career where it will empower me in the development and evolution of my work.

Rana Samara



Intimate Space III, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 165 x 200 cm



Intimate Space IV, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 170 x 170 cm



Intimate Space V, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 171 x 201 cm



Intimate Space VI, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 155 x 292 cm



Intimate Space IX, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 170 x 290 cm



Intimate Space X, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 208 x 323 cm



Intimate Space XI, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 208 x 400 cm



Intimate Space XII, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 163 x 303 cm



Intimate Space XIII, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 210 x 217 cm



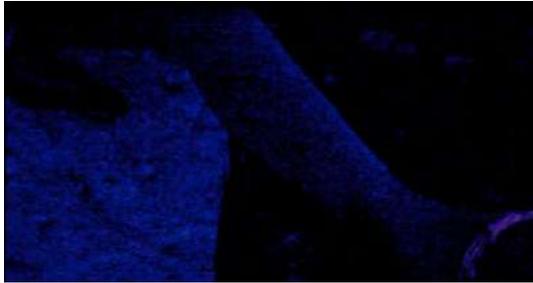
Intimate Space XIV, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 208 x 416 cm



Intimate Space XV, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 209 x 180 cm



Intimate Space XVI, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 208 x 276 cm



My Daughter

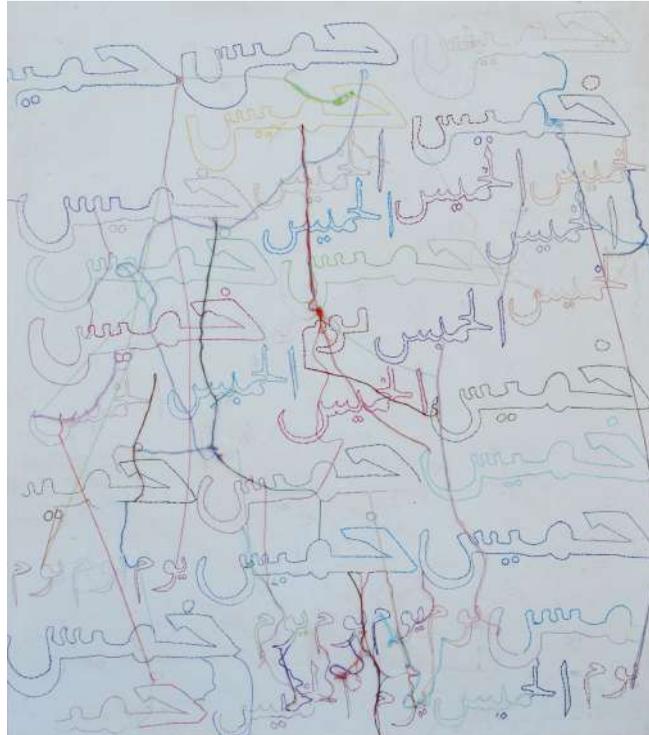
Video

Duration: 3 minutes

In this work I cast light on children's sexual education and how they sub consciousness is affected by orders based on what is culturaly and religiously accepted. My daughter performed the piece hence the name.

<http://vimeo.com/115895192>

password: rana123samara



Thursday, 2013, threads on canvas, 138 x 117 cm

In this project, I was exploring sex-related expressions in society and I discovered that the word Thursday (Khamees in Arabic) holds a different meaning for married couples, as it is the day before the weekend.



Oven Mitt I
15 x 15 cm
2014



Oven Mitt II
15 x 15 cm
2014

In this work I wanted to use a domestic object women are familiar with and use regularly. Like the handkerchiefs, I gave some to several women and asked them to sew anything they desire on it, and I received different responses including sketches of sex poses.



Virginity Kerchiefs, installation, 2013 (40 pcs, 35 x 35 cm each)

As a conservative society, virginity is extremely important and proof of it is sought by the groom's family. This proof is usually a blood stained hand kerchief that is shown to the women in the family. For the project I bought 50 handkerchiefs and gave them to 50 men and women to express their opinion and understanding of this tradition.



Rana Samara (born 1985, Jerusalem) is a Ramallah-based artist and a recent graduate of the International Art Academy, Ramallah (2015).

Samara's current body of work explores societal norms; gender roles, sexuality and other factors associated with modern Palestinian society. Her work focuses on the less obvious factors that underpin the daily lives of Palestinians, especially the lives of women who reside in overcrowded refugee camps and rural communities - women whose lives continue blighted by conservative traditions.

Focusing on marital intimacy, Samara demystifies many social taboos and translates these onto large, bold and colorful canvasses that are both remarkable social statements and beautiful artistic constructs.

Samara is a highly inquisitive, courageous and determined woman. These characteristics propelled her – in the first place - to pursue a bachelor's degree in Fine Art as a mature student from a conservative background with a young family. Her passion for art and formidable determination has led her to once again pursue further studies. In recent weeks, she travelled to Chicago to commence a two-year MA in Fine Art and Theory at Northwestern University.

Samara has taken part in workshops and projects in Lebanon, Jordan and France. She has also participated in a number of group exhibitions in Ramallah and Jerusalem over the past two years.



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