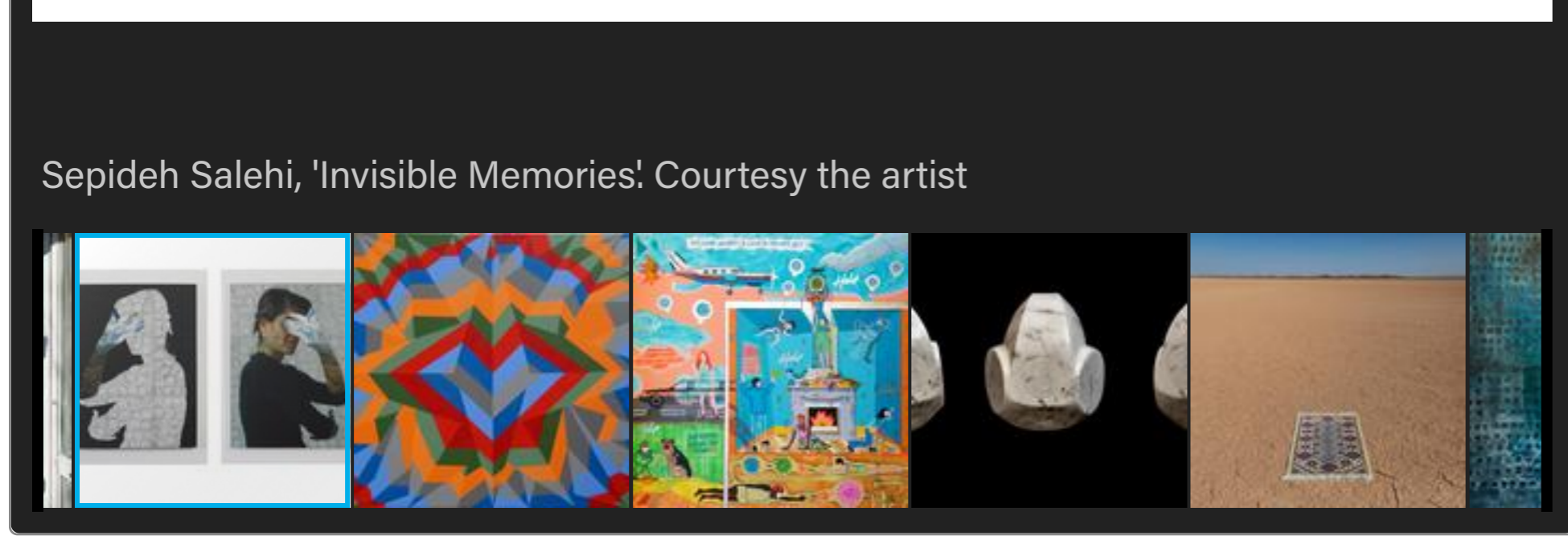
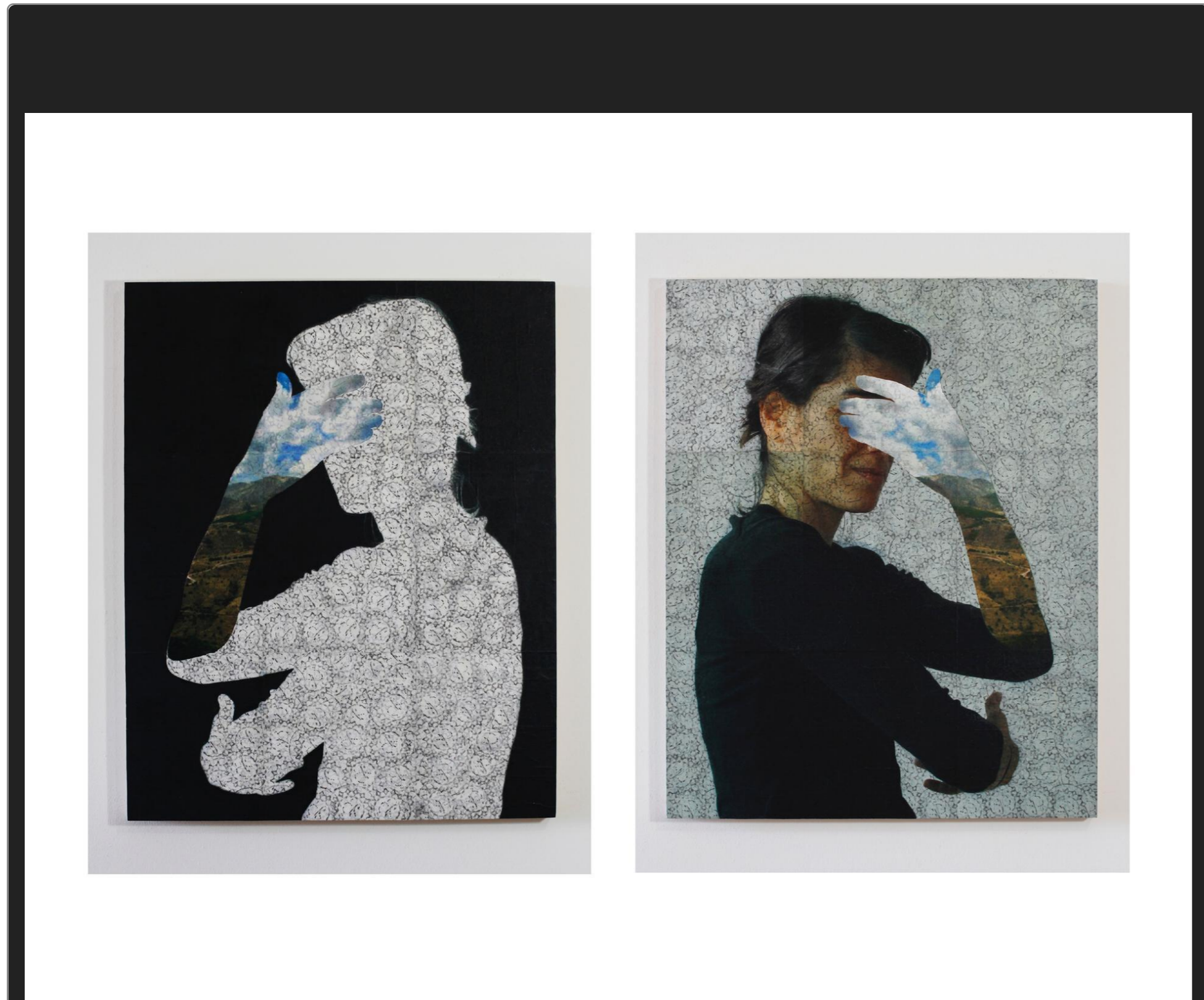


Art in Isolation: 39 Middle Eastern artists present work made during Covid-19 pandemic

The exhibition by Middle East Institute's Art Gallery includes 53 selected works from an open call in June and is available online



Alexandra Chaves
October 1, 2020
Updated: October 21, 2020



"Every day is different. One day, I'm happy. One day, I'm sad. One day, I'm anxious. The next, I'm OK. The next, I'm hysterical. The next, I'm scared. But what comforts me is knowing that I and everyone on the planet are going through the same thing."

These are the opening lines of Carol Mansour's *A Covid-19 Diary*, produced during Beirut's lockdown following the outbreak of Covid-19. The documentary filmmaker is one of 39 Middle Eastern artists featured in the Middle East Institute (MEI) Art Gallery's exhibition Art in Isolation: Creativity in the Time of Covid-19, which opens in Washington, DC, on Thursday, October 1.

In her five-minute slice-of-life video, Mansour blends scenes of the Lebanese capital's desolate streets with voice notes from friends talking about their anxieties and fears in the wake of the coronavirus. "My fear is that everything will go back to the way it was before corona, and we have not learnt anything," she says. Particularly wrenching is the fact these concerns were voiced before the devastating blast in Beirut on August 4, which has led to more uncertainty in Lebanon.



Her work, alongside those in the rest of the exhibition, was selected by MEI after it issued an open call for artwork submissions related to Covid-19 in June. The institute received more than 200 for art, which MEI's curator Laila Abdul-Hadi Jadallah narrowed down to 53 works.

Artists from Morocco to Yemen are included in the show, which consists of painting, sculpture, photography and video. Thematically tied together by the pandemic, the works explore isolation, as evidenced in portraits by Rania Matar.

Lebanese-American Matar, who received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2018, captures a couple and family in quarantine, gazing into the photographer's lens from behind a barrier, a door or window.



Rania Matar, 'Minty, Kayla, Leyah, Layla, Cambridge, Massachusetts': Courtesy the artist

Yemeni artist Asim Ahmed, who lives in Aden, presents two women looking out from the windows of a decrepit building. The pensive image - with slivers of crumbling infrastructure revealed in the background - tie together the realities of living in war while facing a deadly health crisis.

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More abstract pieces include Sina Ata's #796, a canvas filled with varying blue hues, and Emirati artist Ebtisam Abdulaziz's paintings that combine geometry, mathematics and colour.

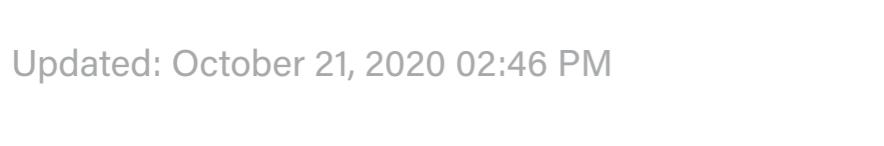
There is also the material-based work of Athar Jaber who created the marble sculptures *A Mask for Life*. These masks were donated to the UNHCR for a Covid-19 fundraising initiative.

Among the more whimsical works are Mous Lambrat's photographs and Ilyes Messaoudi's collage-like work *Help*, which depicts a surreal world with subjects floating away on coronavirus balloons or burrowing underground with them.

The exhibition is both physical, with visitors needing to book an appointment beforehand, and virtual, on MEI Art Gallery's website. The show is on view until Wednesday, January 13. All the works are for sale, with majority of proceeds given to the artists.

More information is available at mei.edu

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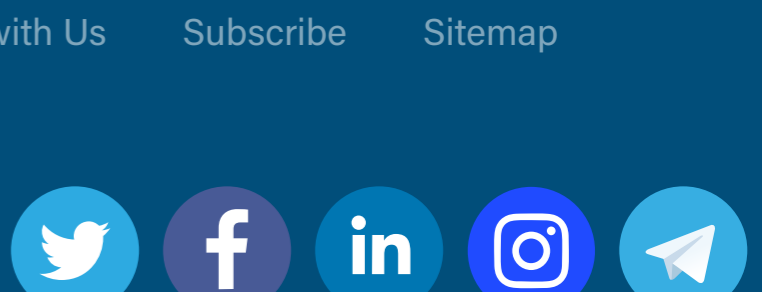


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