



ABDUL RAHMAN KATANANI
THE STORY PORTALS

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عند أبواب الحكاية
هل أسمىكِ النهاية
أم أسمىكِ البداية؟
سأسمىكِ البداية.

محمد درويش

After the End

There is a beginning, a point of change, and what comes after.

When I visit Abdul Rahman Katanani at his studio to the south of Beirut, the first thing I see is a lemon tree from Jaffa. There are pomelos and avacados and bees, and in the early December sun, the place feels like home.

I begin in uncertainties, a sense that the exile before me is more material than intellectual, although the intellect is certainly at play. I begin with words.

I have to begin, although it seems this has already happened. We are in the middle of time, already here, and the world is ended. The question is only what comes next, what comes after the end. This statement is not some poetic ruse, but has rather become a truth of sorts, or at least a common thought. After the end, life goes on.

More than a year before the pivotal events of October 7 2023, Palestinian artist Abdul Rahman Katanani began a series of monumental weavings inspired by traditional Palestinian embroideries (Tatreez) depicting the Gates of Jalil. The creation of a physical sense of resistance through the manipulation of hard or 'difficult' materials is core to Katanani's practice, and the introduction of traditional embroidery provides a means to explore such besotted handwork in more depth, a soft yet stable structural ground for the resistance to come.

Katanani's current series contains nine sculptural objects, weavings or embroideries. Taken together these works trace a deep shift in the internal world of the artist that has closely mirrored external events in the region. There is an interiority in this work that is not at odds with his subject. His world is shaken and this shaking is made manifest within the series. There is nothing clearer, nothing more honest than to be shaken and to allow this to become evident to the world.

Perhaps such honesty is all that is left, after the end.

Monumental in scale, yet Katanani's sculptural weavings hang serenely from the ceiling of his large industrial studio space. They are decidedly sculptural objects, hovering between industrial menace and quite formal painterly abstraction, but with a lightness of touch that is all Katanani. Become even a little familiar with his works and it will be clear that the lace-like grace that his work inhabits in the face of brutality, hardness, crunching machinery, is absolutely integral to his vision. However hard a material, the industrial origin, barbaric use, Katanani can take this hardness and gift it new life, in an astonishing re-birth that does not take away from materiality, but rather, in his careful manipulation, his handwork, holds up the material as simultaneously resolutely itself and as something quite new, incidentally or not, somehow opposite to its intended use, and more, as full of joy and life.

In the often-disconnected artwork of our time, the awkward reaching for place, home, feeling, this work is clear, rooted from deep within the artist, a unique and powerful sensitivity to place, material and experience combining in moulded, woven, sculpted, handled creations, that speak to the human in the languages of the art of the region and its multi-layered histories.

The first two tapestries follow a similar structure to traditional Palestinian embroidery, shedding formality with a subtle shift in meaning, a considered continuation of the shift from agricultural work

wear to symbol of political resistance. In Katanani's early weavings, those of the world before October 7, there is a lightness, a shimmering armour-like quality, a textile feel. A neatly woven barbed wire base layer is overlaid with another layer of the same material, metallic cross-stitch additions, creating the traditional symbolic values, adding weight and intention.

The making of these works echoes the way such weavings were made after the Nakba, and the continuing forced migration of the Palestinian people from their lands and homes, the need to make new machines, re-think traditions, create new ways to make as well as new imagery that could account for and reflect a new reality.

In his studio Katanani has created bespoke machines to weave the barbed wire that is his chosen material, traditional looms made tough for purpose. For the second layer of his weaving he fashions a simple wooden tool around which to wind barbed wire, holding it stable in a cross, then adding a small, metal clamp to secure the form and create structure. His relationship with his materials is a considered delight and fascination at the possibilities of bending, forming, making, shaping.

In these first weavings some symbolic parts are intentionally missing, removed or never added, a nod to the loss caused by war. As the devastation continued it became clear to Katanani that this loss was much larger – that in fact everything was gone, the entirety must be re-made, re-imagined. The symbolic order had to be broken entirely.

The third embroidery was created during and after October 7, a cataclysmic shift occurring in the real time of production, and the following five works shift into a new realm.

The old world is gone, begin again.

In these five works there is no weaving, this meditative and repetitive process replaced by the manipulation of sheet metal, machinery, carefully layered, at changing scale, welded edges, hard screws. The mode of attachment here is definite, abstracted further in process as well as subject from the traditional patterns from which the work began. Yet each welded weaving retains a story beginning in the past and ending right here in the present. The motifs are clear; house, grave, pine, and the materials from which these forms are cut are equally clear, caterpillar machinery, petroleum barrels.

In one work, an amulet motif, protection from evil. In Katanani's version of this motif a large, bright red metal amulet is attached centrally to the material below. Also sheet metal, the ground for the amulet piece is formed from Castrol oil barrels. A plethora of bullet holes puncture the surface, finding a way everywhere except where the amulet rests. The bullets hit everywhere but the place the oil is, the foundation of the regional conflict laid bare.

This is the new symbolic, a new reality. Such symbolism is brutal, honest, old and new. This must be documented, the brutality of the era, the depth of pain caused at the service of money and power, and the resistance of the people, the new way, and the old. The new.

This work is the new way, the old world is gone.

Katanani looks at one of his works in his studio. It is Gaza from the air, he says, the grey, the sense of destruction. He has taken his ancestral world and inhabited it, created something new from the materials that are part of his connection to place; welded metal, petroleum cans, barbed wire.

While the work of Katanani does refer most clearly to the Palestinian conflict, there is a wider, regional

awareness at play, an interconnectedness in which the place of Lebanon is also of significance, both in the life of the artist and more broadly. In a war that can split and divide people as well as place, there is yet a space for contact in this this woven, hammered, history. Connected through complex and difficult events that at times repel a common ground, Lebanon and Palestine are yet directly connected through this history of conflict. Further, Lebanon, with its unique and diverse intermingling of cultural, religious and ethnic identities, living together freely, if not always harmoniously, has long been a site of connection and contact. It is perhaps no surprise that it is in Beirut, in a place like Saleh Barakat Gallery, that a Kurdish artist from Iraq, or a Druze artist from Soueida, or a Palestinian artist like Katanani, find a place to express the situation of the Levant, expressing the alternative narratives of local communities, that are rarely, if ever, heard. It is in this situation that art can become a critical source in the search for understanding of a place and an epoch.

The last piece in this monumental series returns to the loom. This is the largest weaving, taking us back full circle to the pre-October 7 moment, to the first two tapestries, and then forward again in time to now. Life goes on, the fundamental change within, the shift in symbol, material, and then, the return to a root, an embodied memory.

After the end, life goes on

Katanani has taken the tragedy of the Palestinian people towards a new meaning, transforming again the traditional struggle into a symbol of identitarian survival, and spiralling organically toward the wider regional conflict. His sculptural interventions offer new symbols for Palestine and the wider region, a pointed, yet sensitive warning to the wider world. This is a world exposed as without ethics, a shift in the world order, or at least in a common understanding of that order. There is an honesty in the layering of material, the connection of traditional symbolic with the current reality, explored through a stubborn materiality. In the contained and resolute placing of one particular material onto another, connections are made that speak to the eye as well as the intellect. There is a courage here where words and institutions have failed, continue to fail, a continuation of art, and of life, in the face of absolute chaos. The understanding of life as chaos. In this knowledge, we might say, the drama to come is for the west, resting within an idea of order that no longer holds up to scrutiny, perhaps even from within.

After the end, life goes on.

Amy Todman

A Patron and an Artist Weaving History into the Present

Katanani's metal tapestries, tentatively titled *The Story Portals*, are the outcome of a unique collaboration where tradition meets innovation. Inspired by the cultural significance of Palestinian embroidery, a dialogue emerged between a patron and an artist – Dr. Basel Dalloul, founder of the Ramzi and Saeda Dalloul Art Foundation (DAF), and Abdul Rahman Katanani, a Palestinian visual artist renowned for his innovative transformation of industrial materials into powerful statements addressing discrimination, border lines, resilience, and displacement.

During a collaboration with Inaash, a Lebanon-based association dedicated to preserving Palestinian embroidery, Dr. Basel Dalloul acquired a collection of 10 embroidered tapestries, 7 of which are titled Al-Jalil – derived from بوابات الجليل, Bawabat al-Jalil in Arabic, meaning Portals of Galilee. These traditional textiles were once used as decorative flaps instead of doors in old Palestinian houses, pleasingly inviting visitors to enter one's home. They are deeply rooted in Palestinian culture, symbolizing hospitality, craftsmanship, and community heritage.

Reflecting on their usage and cultural weight, Dr. Basel recalled Katanani's earlier work, his solo show *Brain Storm, 2019*, at the Saleh Barakat Gallery, where Katanani created a real-life model of overcrowded and tight spaced houses of refugee camps. He built an immersive installation with doors, windows, and alleyways made out of crude oil barrels, corrugated metal sheets, brass gallons, and wooden studs.

Dr. Basel suggested that Katanani create a similar installation using embroidered tapestries as flaps, replacing the previous metal doors. As a response, the unorthodox artist suggested starting a completely new project with Bawabat Al-Jalil tapestries as a point of departure. Seeking to push boundaries, Dr. Basel proposed a challenge: could embroidery – so closely tied to fabric – be recreated in metal? Katanani accepted the challenge and began experimenting, using his knowledge of industrial materials to develop new techniques for implementing metal embroidery.

Seeing the potential, Katanani embraced the opportunity to merge his personal history with his creative practice. With a deep connection to embroidery through his mother – who had worked with Inaash – and his familiarity with metalwork, Katanani began experimenting. Driven by the challenges of working with such demanding mediums, he developed bespoke tools, including modified wooden boards with equally distributed nails to stabilize and wind barbed wire, adapting traditional looms and weaving methods to the demands of his raw materials.

Katanani created cross-stitched patterns using barbed wire strings instead of silk or cotton threads – which was the classical and conventional method by which Palestinian embroidery was woven. He incorporated motifs inspired by Palestinian traditional embroidery – such as the Cypress Tree, Canaanite Star or Bethlehem Moon, Date Palms, Cow's Eyes, Triangular Amulets, and Feathers.

Through a visionary evolution of this concept, over nearly two years, Katanani transcended his initial creations to produce works that serve as portals to an unknown present or future, evoking a realm of endless possibilities.

Katanani used oil barrels to execute other metal portals. He sourced oil barrels from junk yards – sometimes purchasing them directly – and worked the material with precision. Using metal shears to cut the barrels open and flatten them, he stencilled intricate red, blue, gold, and silver patterned shapes

geometric motifs of Palestinian cross-stitch embroidery – a tradition that narrates and documents the history of a people whose land, livelihood, and memories were stolen from them.

The resulting works reflect tradition and transformation, merging fragile craft with the enduring strength of industrial materials. The Story Portals are a testament to the dialogue between a dedicated patron and a talented artist, heritage and innovation, past and future, material and memory. They stand as a powerful symbol of resilience, and a doorway to salvation.

Courtesy of the Ramzi and Saeda Dalloul Art Foundation (DAF)



Al Jalil I
Embroidery by Nazmieh Salem
2014



Al Jalil II
Embroidery by Jamileh Salem
2014



Al Jalil IV
Embroidery by Intissar Chehabi
2014



Al Jalil V
Embroidery by Nawal Audi
2014



Al Jalil VI
Embroidery by Jamileh Abdel Aal
2014



Lydda & Ramle
Embroidery by JNisrine Ramadan
2014



Beer el Sabeh I
Embroidery by Mountaha Chahrouh
2014



Beer el Sabeh II
Embroidery by Samira Abou Laila
2014

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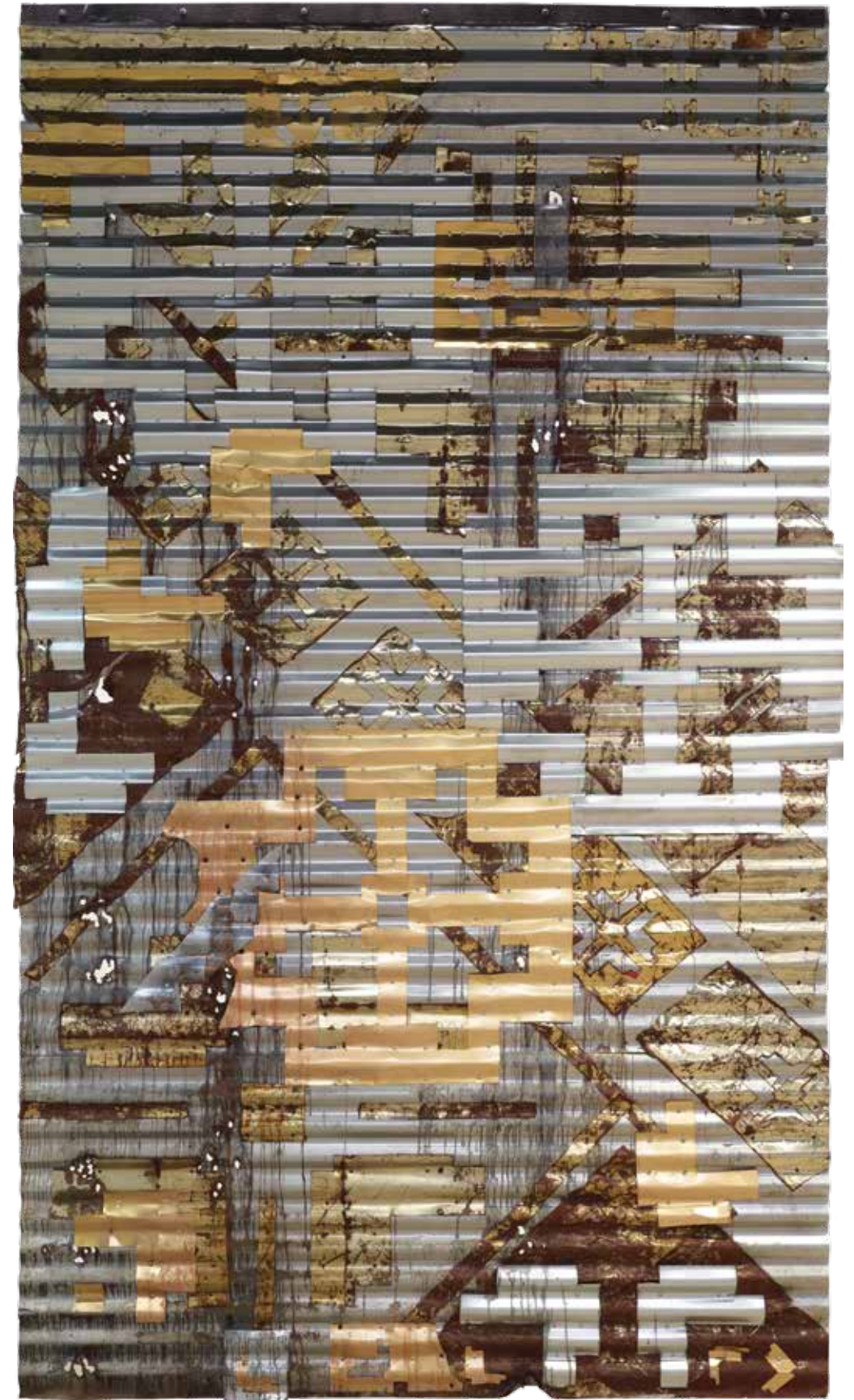
أبواب الحكاية





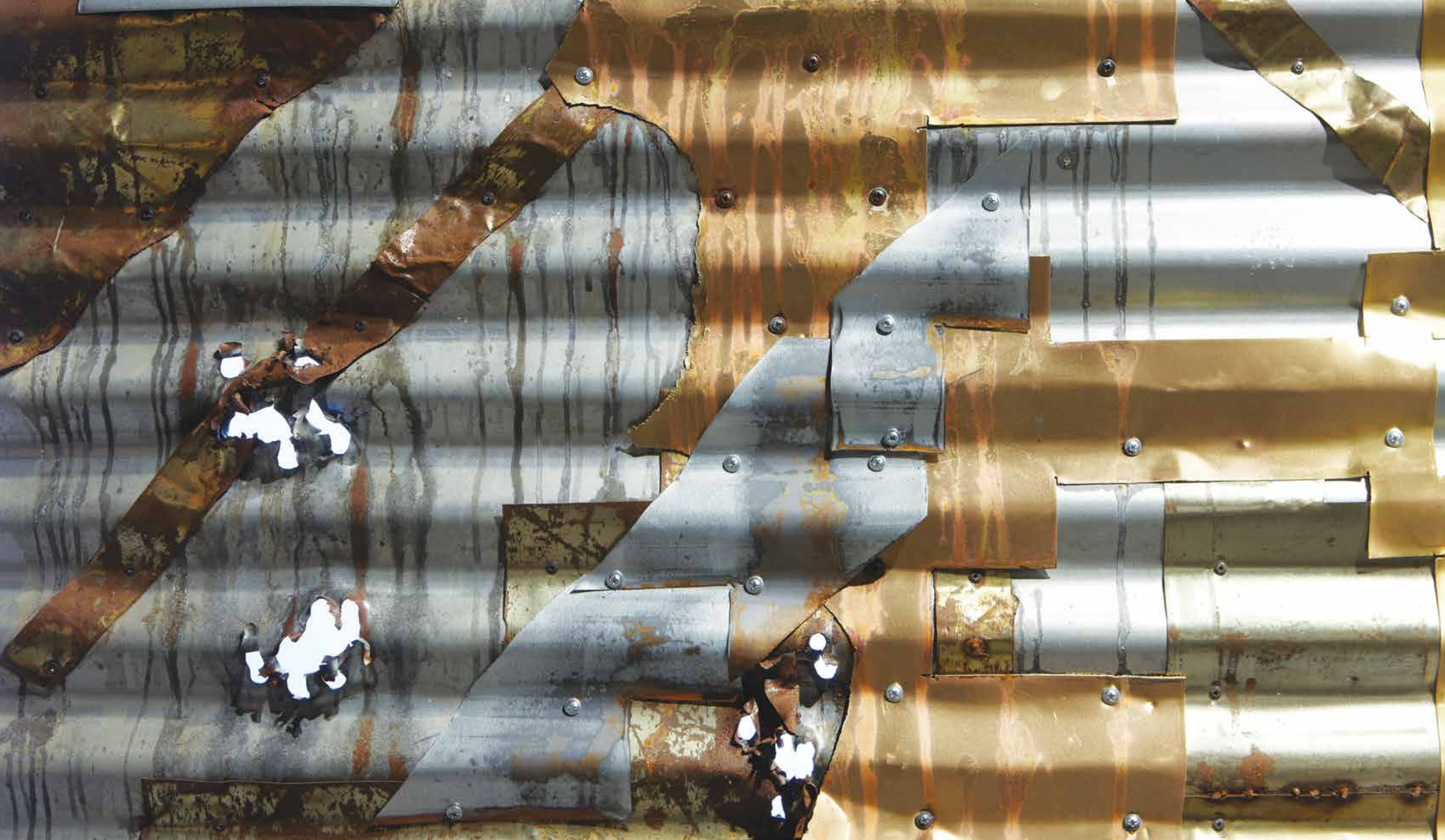
Amulet

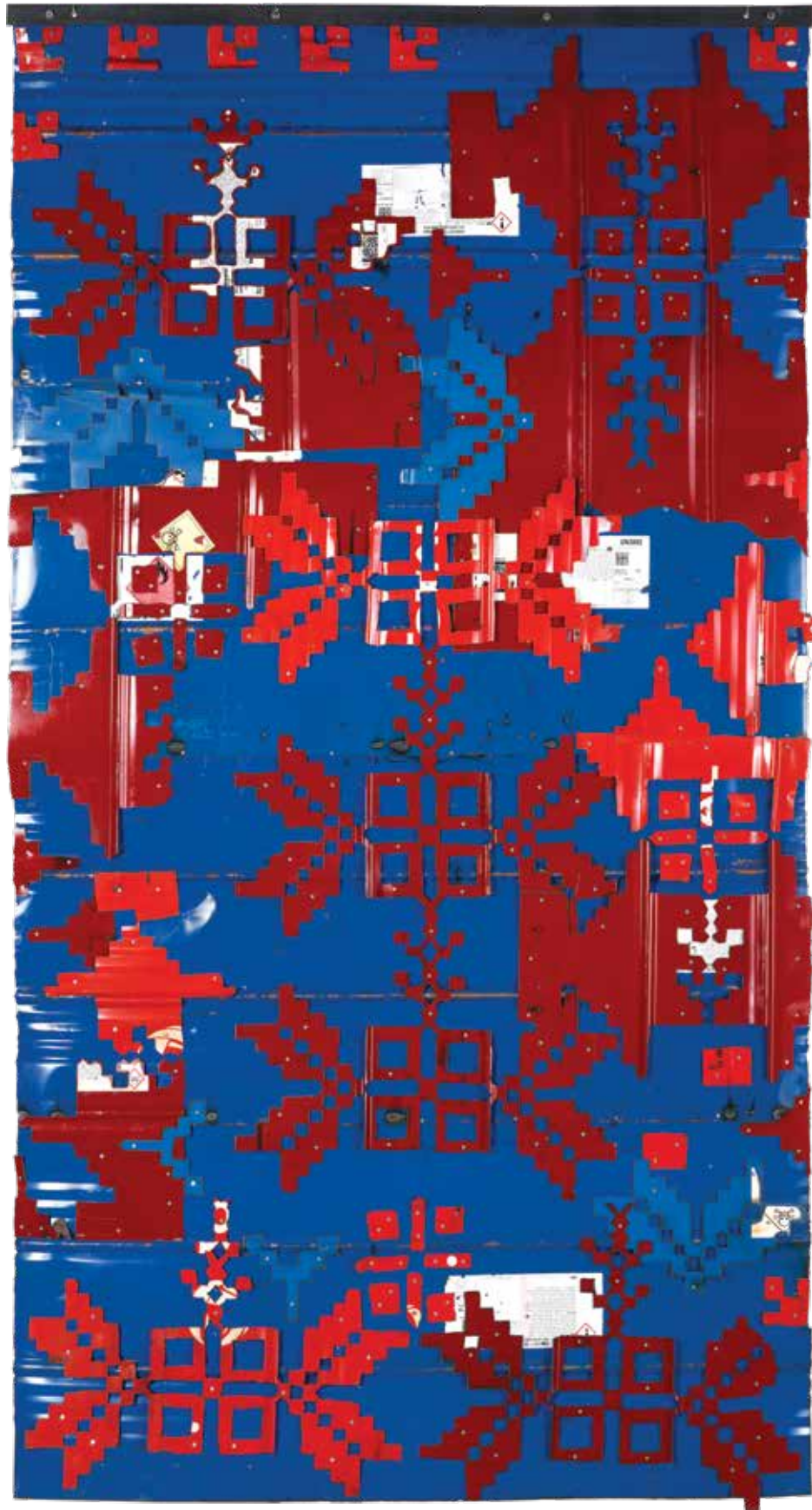
333 x 179 cm
Petroleum barrels
2024



Eye of the Camel

346 x 206 cm
Corrugate metal/copper sheets
2023





Olive Branch

340 x 181 cm
Petroleum barrels
2023

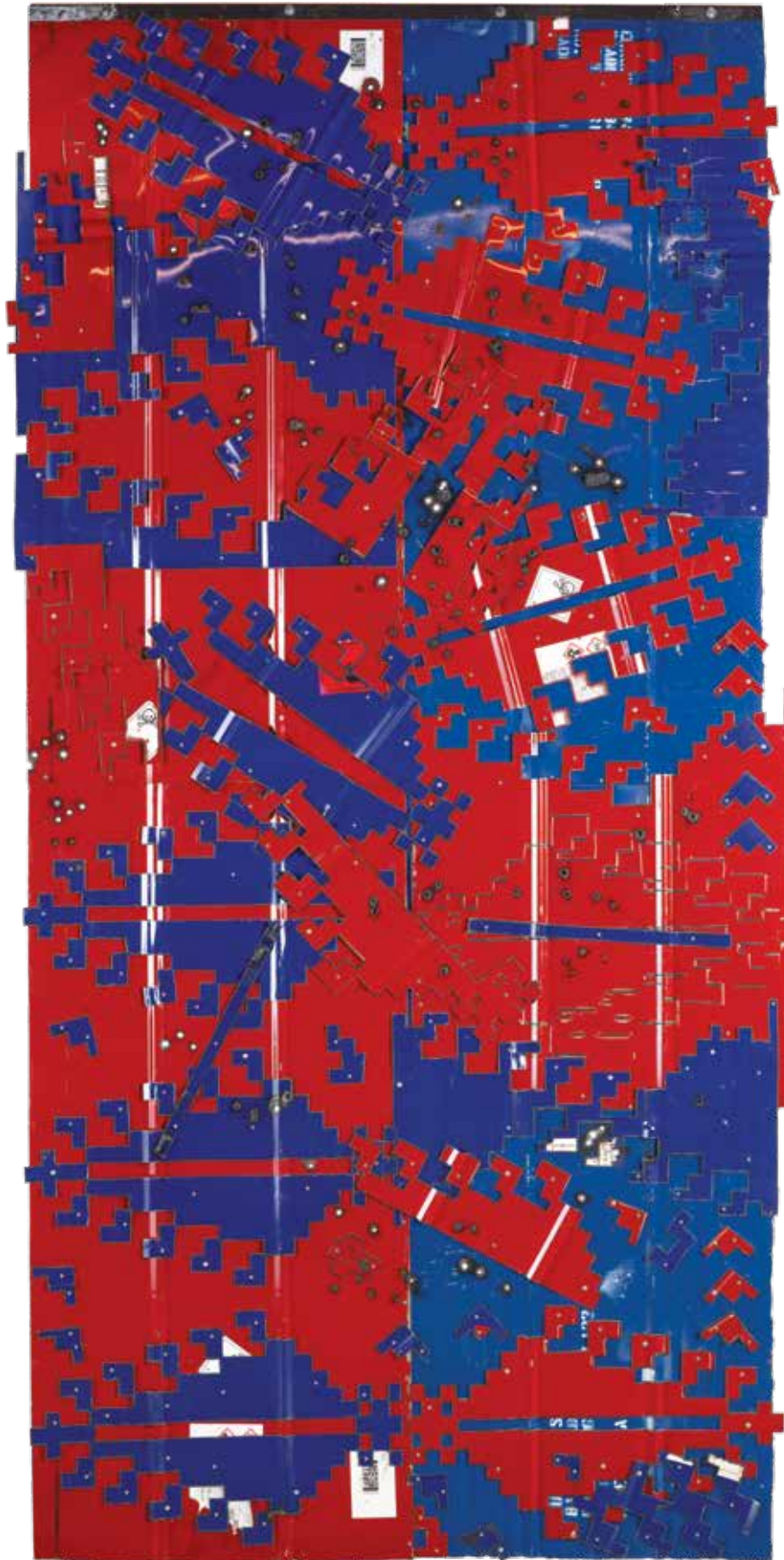


Palm Tree

335 x 175 cm
Barbed wire
2023

Forest

354 x 172 cm
Petroleum barrels
2024



The Cliff

333 x 182 cm
Petroleum barrels
2024





Cities

332 x 186 cm
Petroleum barrels
2024













Gaza

330 x 182 cm
Barbed wire
2024





Artist's Studio

Photo © Omar Katanani



Bottom of the coffee cup

Variable dimensions
Barbed wire
2024

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

Large handwritten text forming a complex, multi-lobed shape.

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

Handwritten text forming a small, dense cluster.

About the Artist

Abdul Rahman Katanani was born in 1983 in Sabra, Lebanon and lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon. He holds a diploma of Fine Arts from the Lebanese University, Institute of Fine-Arts (2007), and a masters of Fine Arts from the same institution, awarded in 2013. Since graduating Katanani has participated in many solo and group exhibitions in Lebanon and internationally, as well as regularly attending international residency programmes. Selected recent solo exhibitions include *Rituals*, Gallery Magda Danysz, Paris, France (2021); *Self Portrait Total*, Gallery Analix Forever, Switzerland (2020); *Brainstorm*, Saleh Barakat Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (2019); *Hard Core*, Gallery Magda Danysz, Paris, France (2017); *Resilience*, Gallery Analix Forever, Genève, Switzerland. (2017) and *Olive Forest*, Anglet Municipality, Biennale d'Anglet, France (2016). Most recently he was resident at AMI, Geneva, Switzerland (2020) and Beit21, São Paulo, Brazil (2021).

Among his many group exhibitions, notable recent contributions include; *Women In War: Palestine*, Intisar Foundation, CAP, Kuwait (2024); *A Breath of Summer*, Saleh Barakat Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon (2024); *On the Human Comedy*, Mina Image Center, Beirut, Lebanon (2024); *Hope in an Age of Distopia*, DAF, Beirut, Lebanon (2024); *The Little Prince of Gaza*, DAF, Beirut, Lebanon (2024); *Arab Dialogue*, Gallery Misr, Salah Al-Din Citadel, Cairo, Egypt (2023); *Fous Moi La Paix*, Analix Forever, Geneva, Switzerland (2023) ; *L'Arbre Dans l'Art Contemporain*, Musee de l'Eau, Pont-en-Royans, France (2023) ; *Exode l'Exposition*, Villa St Raphael, France (2022); *Saison d'Art*, Domain Chaumont sur Loire, France (2022) ; *Lumières Du Liban*, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France (2021). Katanani's works are also held in a number of significant collections including; Accor Hotels, France; Boghossian Foundation, Brussels, Belgium; Dalloul Art Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon; Dar El-Nimer, Beirut, Lebanon; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar and the Philippe Jabre Collection, Lebanon. Two films provide further commentary on his work, *Le Lanceur de Pierres*, Christophe Donner, Paris, France (2013), and *Katanani*, Agathe Champsaur, Paris, France (2020). Two publications, titled *Hard core* (2017) and *Abdul Rahman Katanani, Parol d'artiste* (2023), were written by Barbara Poller and produced by Annalix Forever in France.



SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY

صالون البركات

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