

AZZA ABO REBIEH
THE UNLIVED



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The Exact Space of Feeling

Exactness (to thought)

*The work is exact
as word forms around thought.*

*

*Saying what
rare
capacity*

*

*exactly
what
to be exact*

*

*anyway, what is
exactness.*

Azza Abo Rabieh is a Syrian artist living in Beirut. Her work, sensitive and sensuous, moves with dexterity between painting, drawing and printmaking, her subtle shapes and lines developing in a seamless eroticism between technique and form.

Her work inhabits this world in a state of lightness, almost play, almost delicate, almost crude. In her exacting surfaces there is a truth to experience, to hope, to what could be if only we would see, feel, perhaps abandon ourselves to depth.

In one striking work, we see a form morphing gently as if underwater, hair-like, seaweed-like, waving gently as its elusive meaning shifts before our eyes. Lines are made from heavy threads carefully shaped and glued to canvas, or a metal nib in her ink drawings, a scratch of metal, a toss of curled thread, a lightness and a freedom of movement, a transformation and a merging on the page. Look once, look again, and eventually forms swim into your eyes, becoming familiar, provoking laughter, sharing eroticism, joy, animality, a vital force. There is a woman with breasts, with more breasts, and there is a man, more breasts, and fish suckle somewhere. Here is an aubergine, there a strawberry. Fecundity overruns, life is here, sex, nature, possibility.

Layers upon layers of closely woven tulle or net are arranged carefully yet definitely on surfaces, creating precise and delicate counterpoints to line, a sensitive depth of colour to match their strength. Without knowing we know that the layers are many, the depth is clear. Depth again, lightness again.



Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 70x70 cm | 2024

*

Always moving, she passes from one state of being to another.

After all, what is a steady state, for a person, for art. Life is in the experience, the ugly and beautiful making mutations necessary, inevitable for life. Shed the skin, make the new skin fit.

Transformation might have a form, a new body, a new way of being, new ways of moving.

Without transformation we are living half-lives.

*

The significance in this work is depth. From the lightness of air, the butterfly found in her previous work, to a slender fish with a braided tail, a bow swaying in the water. From the air to the deeps, a lightness in each. From the layering of tulle to the dark lines that cross and become many stories, many things at once, it is depth that characterises the work of Azza Abo Rebieh.

And yet, as I write of depth, I want a return to lightness. It is lightness and possibility, the possibility of transformation, a lightness in that, a knowledge of the lightness of things, coming from the experience of the hard, of untold horrors.

Lightness meets depth, dives to the deeps of the sea and finds yet a lightness there, a joy, eroticism, that is exactly as it is, as it feels to be in the lightness and depths of great passion, of sex, of love. The lightness is that of becoming one, the depth of the experience, touch. The simple and joyful confusion of bodies, hearts, minds.

*

A coathanger, such a simple object

*a familiar
darkness, light.*

*shadows
depths*

*reach to light
plow through weight*

water.

*Each shape is precision
but mutable
ready to move, begun.*

*

Exactness to thought must always be in a state of transformation.

This statement of mine is a feeling rather than a philosophical position, words form around thought made in response to the art of the artist.

If one can manage to say such words, to voice this difficult thing, that exactness to thought must always be in a state of transformation (a statement that I cannot rationally support, or not today, or won't) then a shift occurs in that very thought. To give voice to a thought in response to a feeling is as powerful as it should be. There is a shift, or perhaps, a transformation. To transform is a happening to be swept along with, accepted, embraced.

*

Exactness (to thought)

*The work is exact
as word forms around thought.*

*A sweep between feelings
the gap between word and thought.*

The exact space of feeling.

*Amy Todman
Beirut, July 2025*



اللا مُعاش...

ماذا لو كان الظل ملّوناً وليس رمادياً؟

كان هنا بكتلته الكثيفة، رحل !

وإذا بألوانٍ أراها، ليست رمادية، ليست ظله،

بل هي بقايا حديثٍ عابر أو ربما خيالات نشأت من تلك الحالة.

كيف أصنع منها عالماً أعمق، غير محدود؟

تنهيدة ضمن العمل

غياب ذلك الوزن الثقيل، وحضور تلك الألوان الشفيفة

كهذيان أحياناً...

بينما أحلم أراها تارةً وأراه، أرى سمكةً أو شجرة، واللون يصبح شخصاً حاضراً لا يحدّد بشكل.

أنا لا أرسم أحلامي، بل هي تأخذني إلى عالمٍ آخر.

كنت أرسم سمكةً وإذ بخطٍ يخترق جسدها ليصبح مهبطاً ولينقلب ذيّلها ضفيرةً شعر.

لم أقصد ولكنها طلبت، وهنا تبدأ رحلة بحثي.

إنه عالم مشتهى، لا معاش،

عالمٌ رغبنا فيه شغافاً، عالمٌ نعيشه فقط في داخلنا ويستحيل أن نعيشه في الواقع.

سأقدر هذا الخيال وأصنع منه حياة ربما تعاش ضمن هذه الأعمال.

أرى مدى-وخيالات وألوان، أهرب من تحديدها أحياناً

لأحصل على عمقٍ لا نهاية له.

عزه

The Unlived ...

What if the shadow wore colors, not just gray?
Here it stood, dense and heavy, then drifted away.
And suddenly, the hues I see, alive and bright,
Not mere shadows, but echoes of fleeting light—
Fragments of a conversation, whispers from the past,
Or dreams that take form, in a spell so vast.

How do I craft from this a world, boundless, deep?
A sigh in the canvas, where heavy thoughts seep,
Yet those delicate colors, like a fevered dream,
Haunt me as I wander, in a vivid stream.
Sometimes, I see fish or a tree taking flight,
And the colors become figures, dancing in the night.

I don't paint my dreams; they pull me away,
Leading me to realms where the heart longs to stay.
I painted a fish, and with a stroke, it became
a portal of desire, not bound by name.
Its tail turned to tresses, in a twist of fate—
I didn't intend it, yet it called me to create.

A world I crave, without tangible life,
A transparent existence, free from the strife.
We live it within, where reality fades,
In the depths of our souls, where this magic invades.

I'll nurture this vision and breathe it to life,
A realm born anew, beyond worldly strife.
I see horizons, fantasies, colors that roam,
Escaping their limits to find a home.

Azza





Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 189x152 cm | 2025





Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 140x140 cm | 2024



Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 140x140 cm | 2024



Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 140x140 cm | 8/12/2024



Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 140x140 cm | 2025

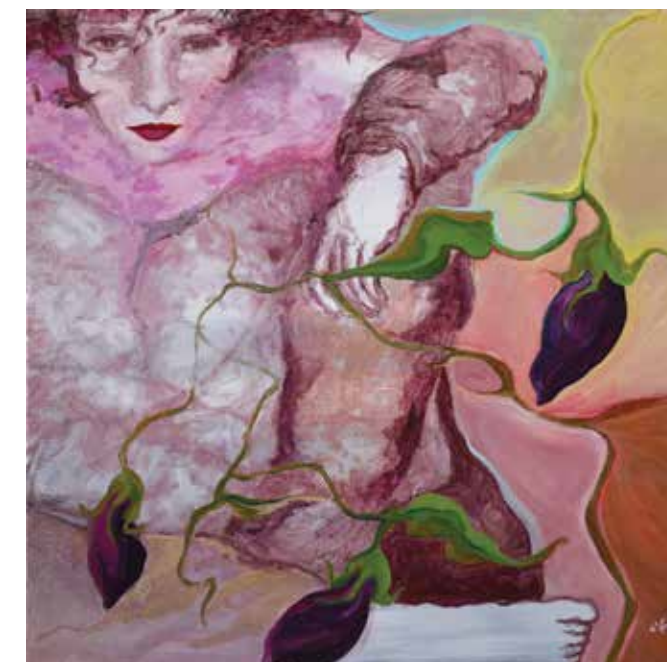


Tulles layering and
threads on canvas
190x82 cm | 2025





Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 140x140 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 85x72 cm (left) - 70x70 cm (right) | 2024



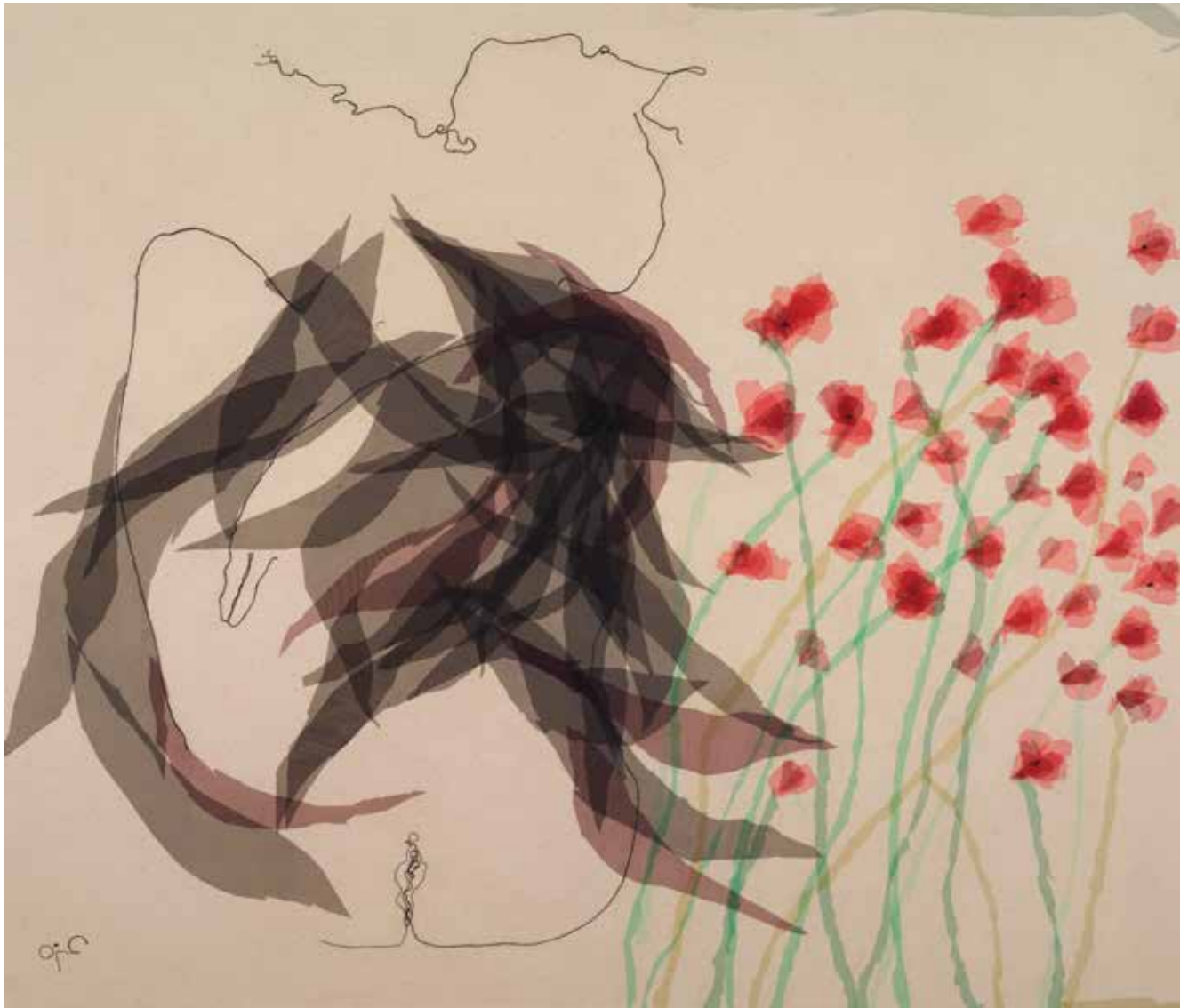
Tulles layering and threads on canvas
200x150 cm | 2025



Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 120x140 cm | 2024



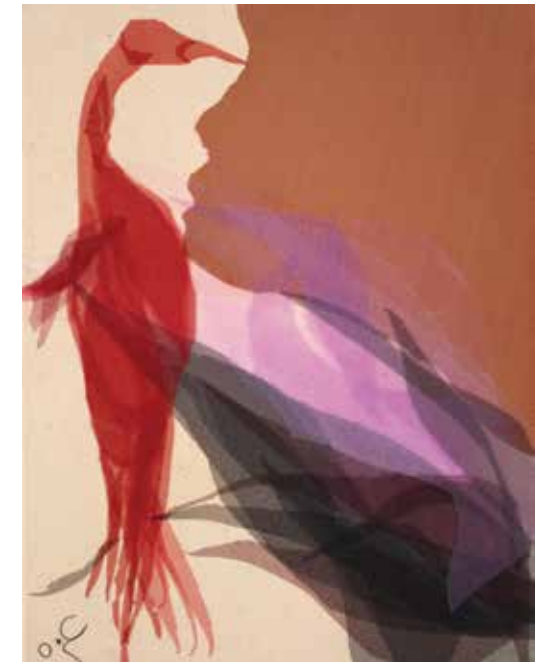
Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 100x100 cm each | 2024



Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 120x140 cm | 2024

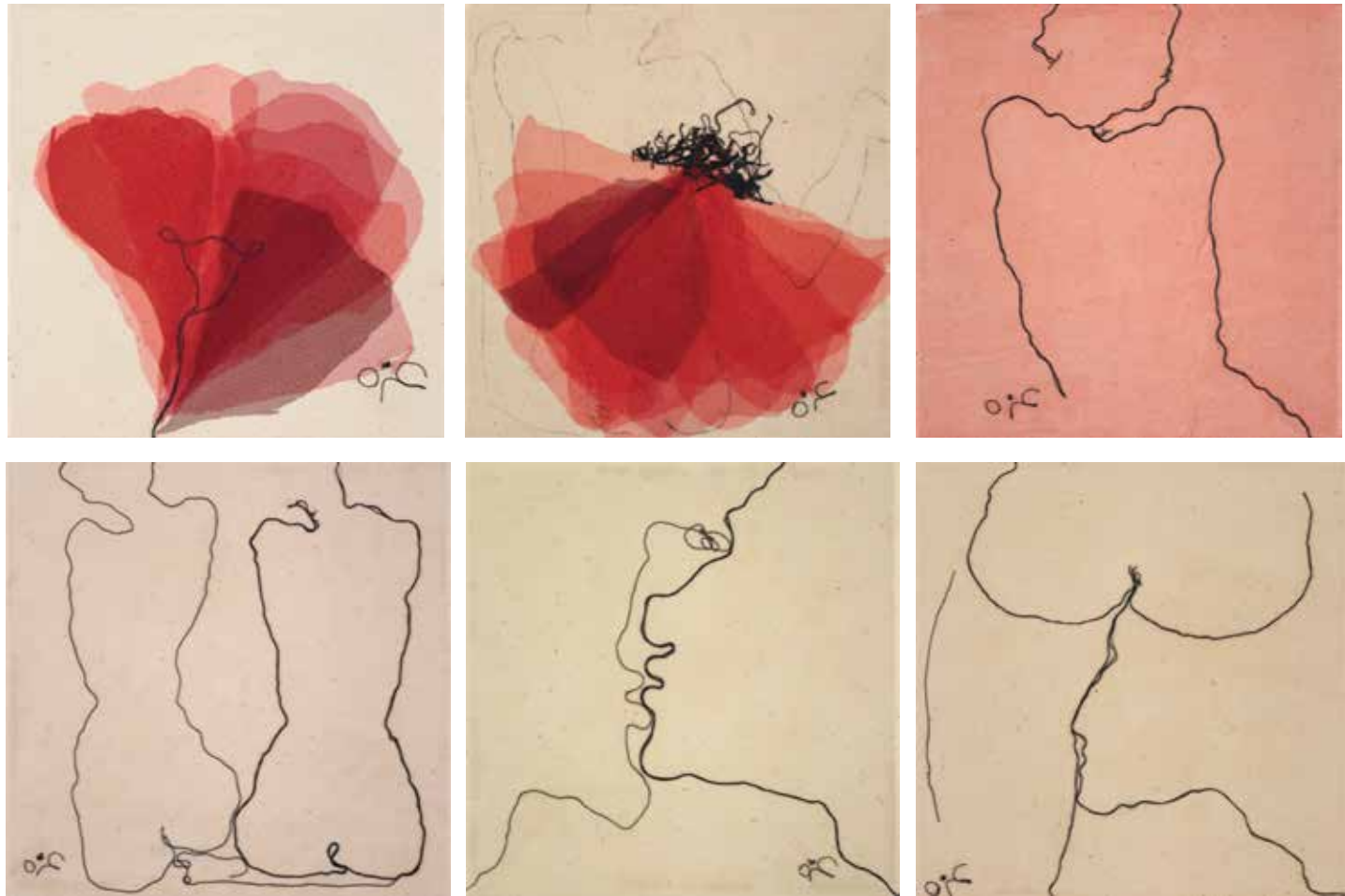


Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 70x70 cm each | 2024-25

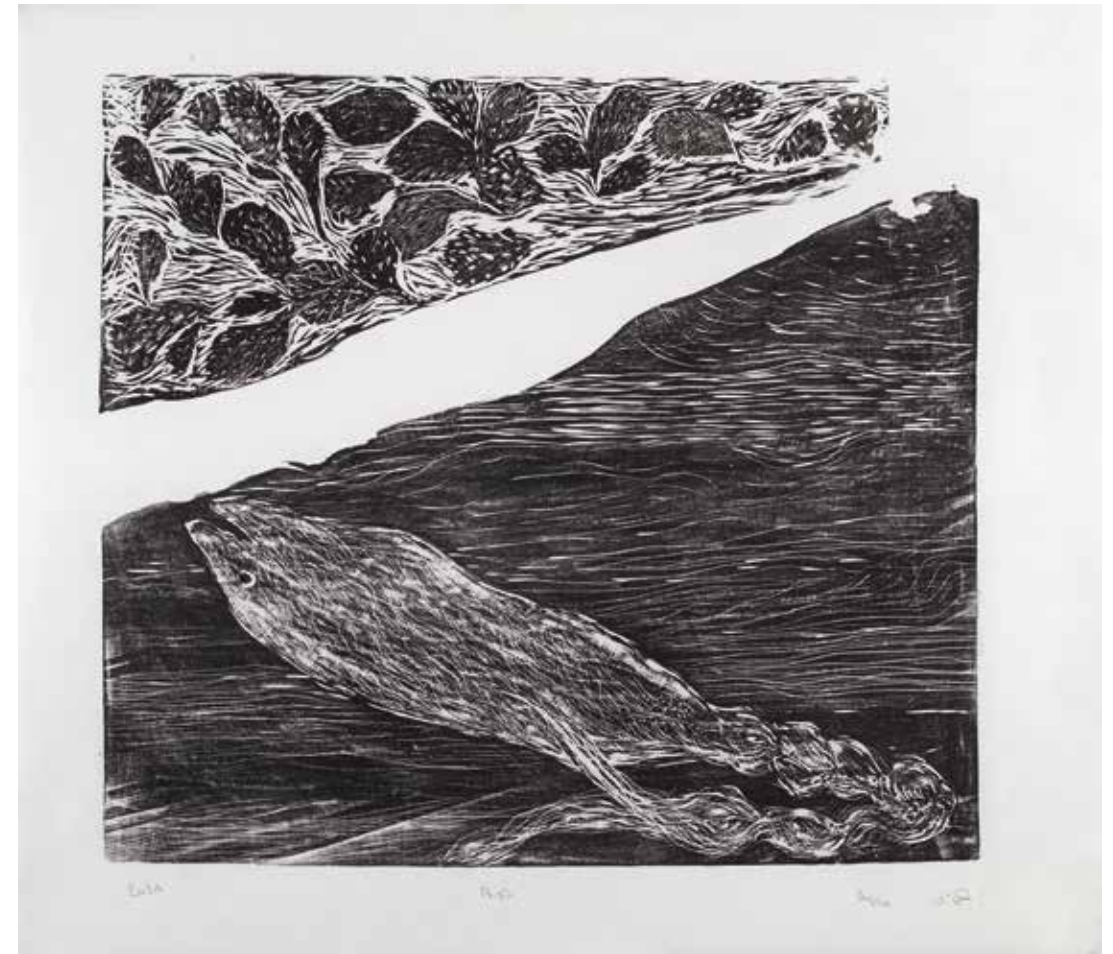


Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 85x72 cm each(lower) - 70x70 cm (upper) | 2025

Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 50x50 cm each - 45x35 cm (upper right) | 2023



Tulles layering and threads on canvas | 20x20 cm each | 2023-24



Woodcut printed on washi paper| 50x42 cm | 2024



Oil on canvas | 45x35 cm each | 180x150 cm (right) | 2023-24



Oil on canvas | 110x148 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 100x100cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 50x50 cm each | 2023-24

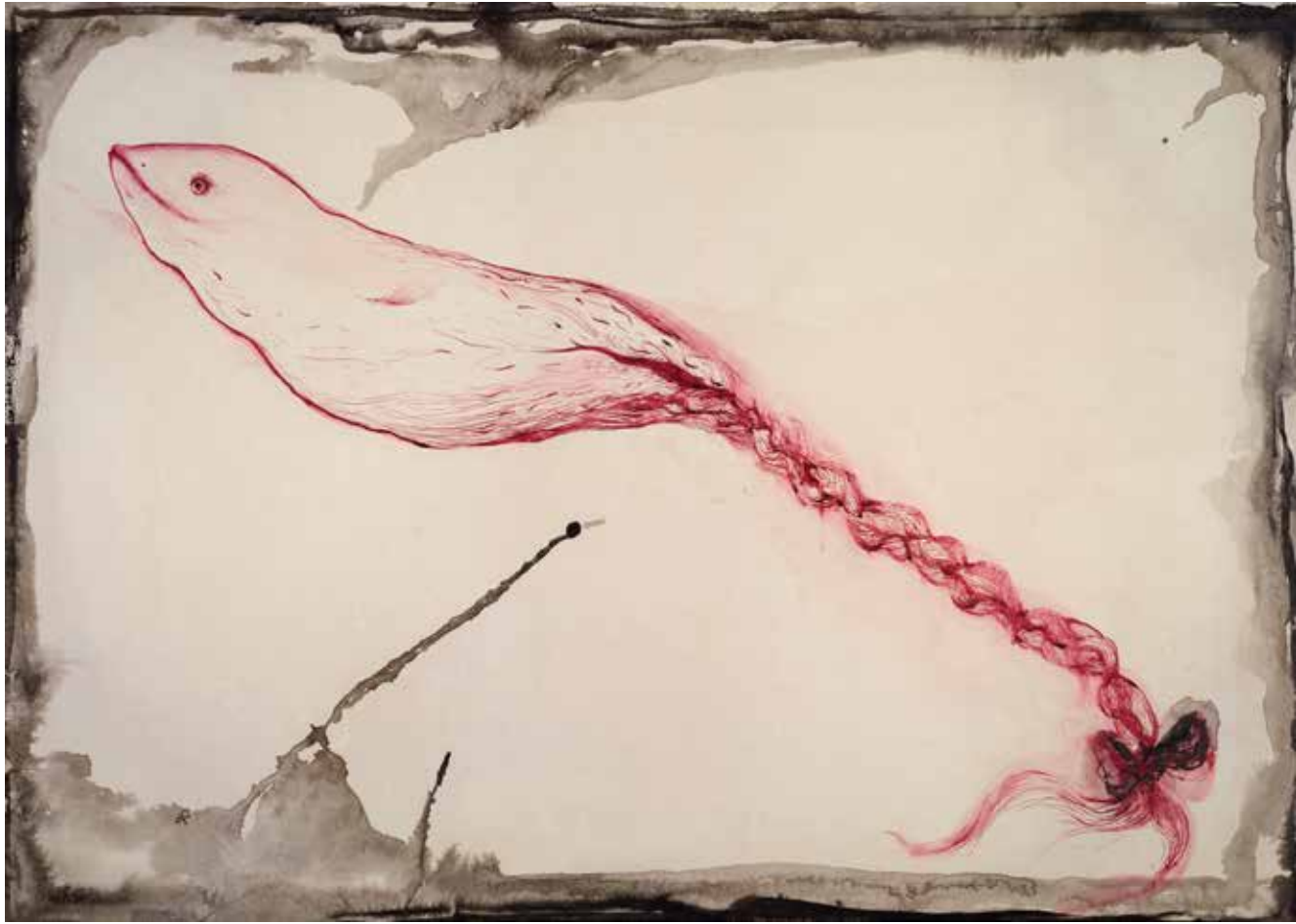
Oil on canvas | 160x160 cm | 2023-24



Oil on canvas | 74x84 cm each (left) - 70x70 cm (right) | 2023-24



Oil on canvas | 50x50 cm (left) - 85x72 cm each (right) | 2023-24



Ink on washi paper laid on canvas | 92x130 cm | 2023



Ink on washi paper laid on canvas | 80x80 cm each (lower) - 50x50 cm (upper) | 2024



Ink and watercolor on cotton paper | 30x40 cm (upper) 57x77 cm (lower) | 2024

Ink and watercolor on cotton paper | 57x77 cm (upper) - 30x42 cm (lower) | 2024



Ink and watercolor on cotton paper | 30x40 cm (upper) 57x77 cm (lower) | 2023-24-25



Ink & watercolor on cotton paper | 25x25 cm each (upper) | Etching, AP | 25x25 cm (lower) | 2023

About Azza Abo Rebieh

Azza Abo Rebieh (Syria, b.1980) obtained her degree in printmaking from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Damascus University in 2002. Initially interested in etching and engraving, she has extended her work to encompass an array of media and materials, including watercolor, thread and tulle on canvas and ink painting.

Abo Rebieh held her first solo exhibitions in 2018 and 2019 at 392 Rmeil (Beirut, Lebanon) managed and curated by Nelsy Massoud, and in 2022 she held her solo exhibition, 'Yearning' at Saleh Barakat Gallery. In 2024 she held a solo exhibition and performance titled '111' at Majaz gallery (Beirut, Lebanon). She has participated in more than fifteen group exhibitions and has been the recipient of three awards for artistic work including first prize in the Damascus Annual Youth Exhibition (2006).

Abo Rebieh's work is held in a number of notable collections including the British Museum (London), Musee de l'institute du Monde Arabe (Paris), Dalloul Foundation (Lebanon), Atassi Foundation (Syria) and the Ostrobothnian Museum Vaasa (Finland).




She has participated in a number of residencies, notably an online art residency organized by Coculture and Ettijahat & Martin Roth Initiative, Germany (2021), an art residency for one month as an Artist Protection Fund fellow at the Bogliasco Foundation, Italy (2020), and a residency of four months as Artist Protection Fund fellow at the American Academy in Rome, Italy (2019-2020).

In 2025 she was the recipient of the prestigious Vaclav Havel Prize for creative dissent and a main stage speaker at the Oslo Freedom Forum.





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Design by Carol Chehab
Photography by Mansour Dib
Printed by Salim Dabbous Printing Co. sarl
July, 2025
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