

twofold
CARLA SALEM

*“Silence may be difficult to recognize on a simple sheet of paper.
It might be better understood when associated with words on the page.”*

Carla Salem
Tokyo
August, 2011

The Enchanting Hub

This enchanting hub, tucked away in the turbulent east Mediterranean, never ceases to surprise its devout lovers with astonishing and refreshing connections...

In 2015, at the inauguration of Hala Choucair's memorable exhibition, I was handed the catalogue of the show. An elegant slim publication that had handled the graphic designer's nightmare of bi-lingual publications in Arabic and European typography, designed with ingenuity, intelligence and elegance that made me enquire who the designer was...

That was the first time I heard of Carla Salem...

At a later gallery event, I met Carla Salem, and in lieu of the usual vernisage chitchat, an in depth extended conversation was taking place on the pavement outside the gallery, covering issues of creativity, communication, art education disciplines and other current debates...

This, for me, was possibly another example of this new crop of young emerging talent that people this city, in spite of its apparent deteriorating intellectual environment... and I had to further investigate my intuitive hunch...

A visit to her studio - Carla calls it her office - to preview her current exhibition, was an ideal backdrop to rediscover an organized mind that is meticulously reflected in her luminous workspace...

Our conversation that morning, while covering the further unraveling of her improbable career and life decisions was concentrated on these works and on her current existence between two cultural and linguistic poles, Japanese that she learnt and continues to do, and Arabic that she admits with endearing candor that she is still learning...

After her graduating in graphic from AUB in 2000, she was at loss in grappling with the limitations of work prospects in her profession, at the time... She taught for spell... Designed books... The Art of Rawas was an early major graphic accomplishment, commissioned by her AUB teacher and mentor the Lebanese artist Mohammad al Rawas. It was an early example of her applied talent...

The anxiety and confusion about her future professional life persisted into 2004... When one day, going through these anxious future discussions with her calligraphy teacher and mentor Samir Sayegh, he flew a "Why don't you go to Japan to study typography?"... The concept caught her imagination. She gave that suggestion serious consideration. She did not want to study typography, she decided on Japan and started the process, to find herself introduced to her original passion, the millennial art of paper making in the far away village of Nagaoka, for a long apprenticeship in the arduous and long seasonal process of Japanese paper making, and that of impregnating it with personal meaningful silence...

Last week, in her studio in Beirut, we went over much of what is on display here, all delicately handled and passionately explained...



"... I wanted to develop a dialogue between Japanese and Arabic calligraphy..."

" ... These large ones were the subject of my doctoral theses, Aposiopsis: A graphical interpretation of silence on Paper..."

" ...and these... these were my Master degree thesis project..." Four large vertical scrolls of snow-white vibrating sheets with what looked like a large teardrop shape illuminated watermark, and a very precise graphic screen application on each that intrigued my insatiable curiosity, that I had to touch physically to understand... She explained that the watermark effect was a manufacturing error that is usually discarded in Japan, but she liked it, and integrated the error into her composition. The graphic applications what intrigued me most ... " It is silkscreened in white on the inverse side of the paper..."

Mystery cleared, and we continued inspecting her Dialogue series...

While these had the clear imprimatur of hard, honest and concentrated creative work... Something irked me about the validity of their title.

A dialogue is between two reasoning entities with a desire to reach a common understanding. These bi-lingual calligraphic ink on paper works could not have had that human will. Yet they exuded valid attempts at aesthetic harmony... superposed...or entwined...

Here we have a reconciliation process between two writing disciplines: One based on the fude (pronounced fudé), the other on the Qasabah reed; one on Sumi inks, the other on mixed artisanal liquid ingredients that are being quickly replaced by industry; and between one that still thrives on millennial Washi paper tradition, while the other survives on available industrial paper, due to the total disappearance of Middle Eastern paper traditions... A daunting challenge indeed...

Now on reflection, it dawns on me that an inter disciplinary fugue is a more appropriate christening for this innovative and brave attempt that surely promises a distinguished career to follow up... I trust that Carla's talent will find its way to evolve her original attempt at inter cultural dialogue into the enchanting genesis of a cohesive and original visual fugue that may enrich our contribution to art.

Waddah Faris
Beirut, March 2016

Golden Sunbeams

Golden sunbeams make their way through the wind-shaken trees.

Calligraphed shapes slowly appear and disappear across the shaded silhouettes of leaves and branches on the watermarked surface of a fluttering paper, hanging on a thread.

There are no sounds, only the tranquil hum of the breeze, the slight cringing of the paper, and the rustle of the trees.

In this scene, captured during Carla Salem's time in Japan, the elements come together in hypnotizing harmony, bringing out the subtleties at play in her *Kami to no mojigatari* series, a collection of works consisting of watermarked, self-made washi paper, adorned with Salem's unique interpretations of both Arabic and Japanese calligraphies.

These works are ones of the many products of the artist's long stay in Japan, after her graduation from the American University of Beirut's department of graphic design, where she had developed an interest in and knowledge of Arabic calligraphy and writing systems, under the trainings of professor Samir El Sayegh. There, in the small town of Oguni, she discovered traditional Japanese techniques of papermaking and calligraphy, and a new language.

Komorebi, for example, is a Japanese concept that describes light, and the idea that every ray from the sun will come to meet the earth in a unique and different manner. "It expresses in a visual way that every moment is precious on its own", Salem explains, an idea she tries to include in her artwork.

As it changes with the changing light, as it varies with its every variation, her work thus gains a contingency, a fleeting property that comes to mark the fleeting moment the artist attempts to capture. Light in these works becomes a key element, without which they could not be understood; light molds, it changes them, giving them an almost ethereal quality.

Salem's works are ones of duality; her watermarks play on visibility and invisibility, on the hidden that only reveals itself in light, a changing light that never hits the earth the same way.

Twofold then becomes an expression of this duality, present throughout the entirety of her body of work, and also found in the marriage of languages and calligraphies, but it is, additionally, a great homage, a love declaration *to paper and papermaking themselves*. "Paper is not just a background, it's alive, it's a living entity of its own", she explains.

Indeed with Salem, paper, a material that is seldom given much thought or attention, and is often perceived as merely the support of the "actual" work of art, comes to occupy the *forefront*, along with the very writing it harbors. The artist thus describes the papermaking process with great passion, and an emphasis on the physical but also rhythmic nature of the

labor, one that engages the maker's body in its totality in a practice that becomes almost meditative.

As she demonstrates this in her many films and images taken in Japan, a somewhat performative aspect in the act of paper-making becomes obvious, one that is also translated in her work, in her calligraphy that unfolds in time, holding within its brushwork the movement of its own creation, as the eye follows and recreates the traces of the hand and its journey across the paper.

Brussels, a series created during the artist's summer residency in Belgium, demonstrates this characteristic. The works engage the viewers' gaze in a sort of puzzle, as they explore the familiar yet undecipherable shapes of calligraphy in Arabic and Japanese, those are freed from *literality*, and their traditional relationship to meaning, they become *silent* words that engage in a purely visual interaction, a mute dialogue. Merged, and often completing each other, they take on a movement of their own, combining the gestuality of both traditions, in this rhythmical encounter.

This interaction between calligraphies is further explored in relation to its intersection with paper, in a series of silkscreens, featuring a variety of words and characters in both languages, brought together in juxtaposition as they engage in what can only be described as a *dance*, a *waltz* where each word or character advances or reclines, appears or disappears, in function of the paper and its finely varying color.

The subtle change in gradation and appearance throughout the series becomes the manifestation of the subtlety that moves the works in *Twofold*, a quality that requires, and almost demands a certain mindset, a form of presence, to engage with it, understand it, and feel its various layers *unfold*.

Aya Alameddine
Beirut, March 2016

Carla Salem
b.1978



Carla R. Salem (Lebanese, 1978) is a papermaker and printmaker whose work explores words and language. Having lived in Japan for seven years, Salem merges Japanese language and culture with her native Arabic through an exploration of the surface and texture of self made mulberry paper (washi) and its relationship and interaction with light. Her Masters (MFA) was triggered by a research on papermaking and developed with an emphasis on papermaking and its relationship with screenprinting. The work eventually unfolded into a PhD from Tokyo University of Arts, School of Fine Arts, with a self-driven research focused on lacquered printmaking using handmade paper. Her personal printmaking methods were inspired from a foundation class on the uses of urushi to create Maki-e. Salem is continuously developing her own printmaking techniques while teaching screenprinting as well as papermaking, at the American University of Beirut and at the Lebanese University of Fine Arts.



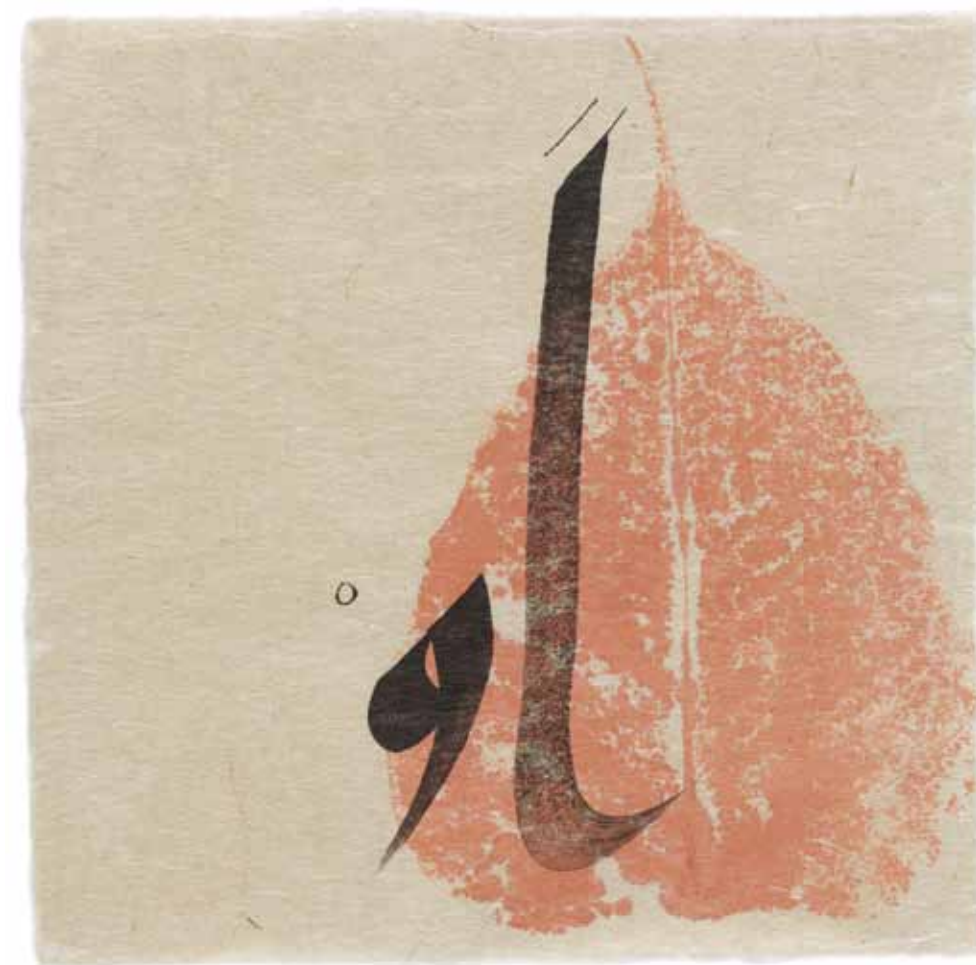
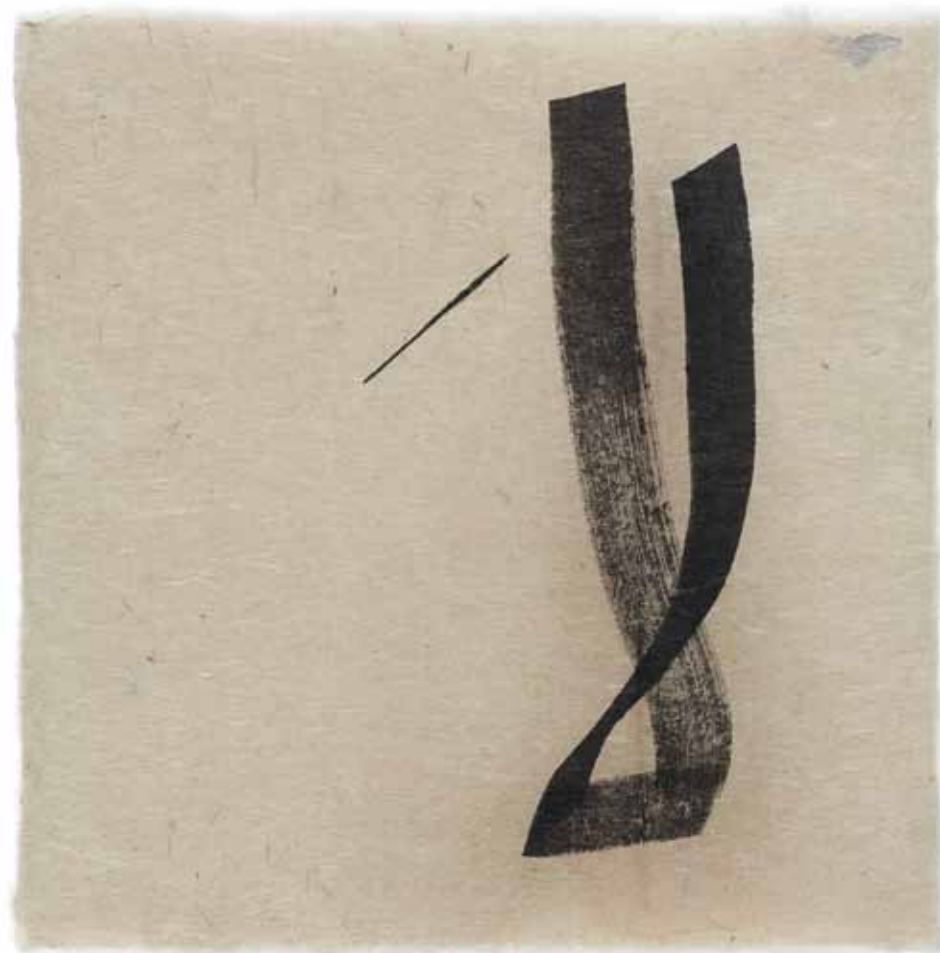
Calligraphy ink on 90g Japanese paper
14.8x10 cm-each
2015



Calligraphy ink on 90g Japanese paper
14.8x10 cm
2015

(Following pages: 14 and 15)
Calligraphy ink on 90g Japanese paper
64 x 21 cm each
2014





Pigment ink on self made washi
19 x 19 cm-each
2014



China ink&pigment on Japanese calligraphy paper
33 x 24.5 cm-each
2014



Pigment and water based ink on Indian paper
33 x 24.5 cm-each
2015

D.R. SALEM JULY 2015



Pigment and water based ink on Indian paper
33 x 20 cm-each
2015

Pigment and water based ink on Indian paper
40 x 30 cm each
2015



Pigment and water based ink on Egyptian paper
36.5 x 26 cm each
2015

SCREENPRINT series

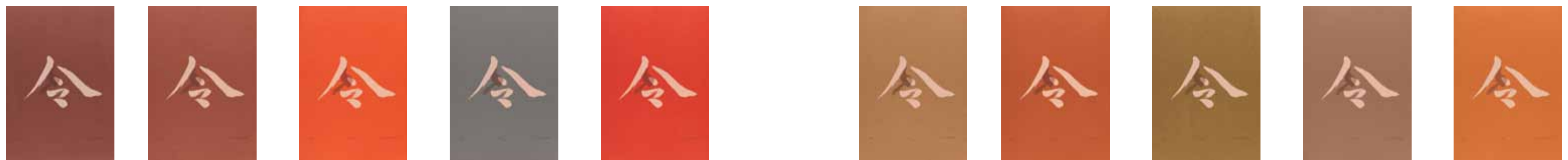
Water based ink on Japanese paper
39 x 27 cm-each, edition 10/10
2015



KAZE



A.K.A.



TORI



Water based screenprint on self made washi
Diptych, 70 x 48 cm each
2008



Water based screenprint on self made washi
Diptych, 70 x 48 cm-each, edition AP
2008



Water based screenprint on self made washi
Diptych, 70 x 48 cm-each, edition AP
2008

كُلُّ ورقةٍ صنعُها كانت تقولُ لي،
كانت تهمس.

فكلُّما صنعْتُ ورقةً كانت
هي
تصنُعني
وتزيدي خيالاً وثقةً،

نوراً ومعرفةً

آذار ٢٠١٤
بيروت



Snow
Urushi lacquer on self made washi
145 x 70 cm, edition 1/1
2010

لم أدر حينها ما كنتُ أشعُرُ:
هل كان قلب (أو كوكورو)؟ هل كانت نار
تتحرق الورقة عندما أكتبُ عليها.

لا أعرف.

ولكن



Mind
Urushi lacquer on self made washi persimmon dyed washi
145 x 70 cm, edition 1/1
2010

فإذا تكلمتُ بلغة الشَّعر أردتُ أن تكون
مثل الهايكو.
أو أنني نسيتُ أنني كنتُ أكتبُ بلغتي الأم
وكنتُ أتكلَّم باليابانيَّة
لأعبِّرَ عمَّا أراه
لأكتشف



أنني أصبحتُ أترجمُ لجليسي بالعربيَّة
وكانَ لغتي كادت تصبُحُ غريبةً عنِّي.

سنة ٢٠٠٥ بدأت أتعرّف على الورق الحقيقي

وصناعة السّاقفة

والتي تستدعي الفصول الأربعة لنتاج سنوي:

مضني ولكنّ راقبي وحيّ،

نتيجته تستوحي وتوحي

في الوقت عينه.

يُصنّع الورق من شجرة التوت التي تُدعى

بالكوزو في اليابانيّة.

ويحوي هذا الورق عروق طويلة تجعله

متماسكاً وصلباً

ذو إستعمالاتٍ عديدة داخل البيوت

من أبواب إلى أدوات إنارة

ونوافذ ...

كنتُ أنظرُ

إلى هذه الأوراق من خلال النور

لأرى وأكتشف أساطير وحكايات وكتبها،

أو أكملتها.

أكملتها كي يراها القارئ إلى جانبي

- وكان أجنبياً -

فكلمته بلغته، اليابانيّة.

الأوراق الحيّة التي تدعى بالواشي

أو الكيفامي كانت لغة مشتركة بيني

وبين القارئ.



Dawn
Urushi lacquer on self made persimmon dyed washi
145 x 70 cm, edition 1/1
2010

... لهذا النص باللغة الإنكليزية.

- بما أنني أمضيتُ سنوات عديدة من حياتي
وأنا أقرأ، أكتب وأحلل بلغاتٍ أجنبية -

ولكن الآن، ولأول مرة أريد أن أتكلّم بلغتي الأمّ
وذلك نتيجةً لخبرتي بالتواصل حين تواجدني
في اليابان ...

وتقديري لعدم إستطاعتي ترجمة
الأحاسيس
والمشاعر
من لغةٍ إلى أخرى.

وهنا

بدأ الحوار بين لغتيني رئيسيّتين في فكري.
لِيترجم، وعلى أوراقٍ ضُيعت بين يدي
وباللغة التي كنتُ
ولا زلتُ
أتعلمها، ولغتي الأمّ

والتي لا أزال أتعلمها أيضاً.



Water
Urushi lacquer on self made washi
145 x 70 cm, edition 1/1
2010

بدأتُ كتابة أفكارِي ...

بحثت ولم اجد امتداداً سوى الألف والنون. ال أن.

كارلا سالم
بين اليابان ولبنان
٢٠١٦

حوار بصوت واحد
كارلا سالم