

## HAYV KAHRAMAN DISPLACED CHOREOGRAPHIES

De La Warr Pavilion  
9 February – 2 June

*When I walk into my studio, I realise I am building my own army of women. It is an army.*  
Hayv Kahraman, 2018

Works list, clockwise left to right:

**Clock 2**, 2017

Oil on linen, RSG and pigment on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

**Audio Files**, 2019

Listen to personal responses to the exhibition, recorded by students of colour from the University of Brighton.

**The Kawliya Dance**, 2013

Oil on panel

Private collection

The title of this painting refers to a traditional dance performed by the Kawliya gypsies of Iraq, a minority community of Indian origin. Performed by women, the dance is characterised by the tossing of long hair. Despite being popularly seen as a provocative and 'dirty' dance, Kawliya women are often invited to perform for figures of authority, such as Saddam Hussein, whose men would often assault them after. Kawliya is also the name of an Iraqi town where many gypsies lived: a poor area with red-light districts and a lot of prostitution. In 2004, the town was seized by the Mahdi army, who claimed that the town was unholy and in need of purification. Many Kawliya townspeople died or fled the city as a result.

**T25 and T26**, 2017

Oil on linen

Collection of Brian and Sofia Weinstein

Kahraman's family fled Iraq in 1992, travelling across the Middle East, Africa and Europe, finally ending up in Stockholm, Sweden. They were instructed by the people who smuggled them out of the country to take just one suitcase. It contained falsified passports and other survival necessities, as well as a mahaffa: a handheld fan woven from palm fronds. This kind of fan is referenced in Mesopotamian imagery as far back as the eighth century. The mahaffa was placed in their new home in a corner described by Kahraman as 'a memorial and a shrine that carries imaginations of a lost past'. The mahaffa's woven motif appears throughout her series *Mnemonic Object*, often referenced in woven segments of the canvas surface that have been carefully split and re-sutured. Through this technique, painted bodies become dismembered and then mended: a symbolic healing of past trauma.

**Hussein Pasha**, 2013

Oil on wood

Courtesy of Defares Collection

The shape of this work is lifted from the floor plan of a house in Baghdad. *Hussein Pasha* is part of a series of works titled *Let the Guest be the Master*, made after the sale of the artist's childhood home in Iraq. Kahraman describes this event as 'a massive loss of tactile memory', and it triggered a wider period of research into domestic courtyard homes in the region. These courtyards are semi-public spaces where male family members receive their guests, and the women of the house watch from the shanasheel (ornate screens) on the second floor. From the viewpoint of these women, Kahraman writes:

*The house is my domain. When you enter you will resign and obey. At least that's what I have to believe if I were to survive. [...] Through the screens I can see everything you do and you won't even know that I'm watching. I will laugh when you stumble and I will hear your conversations with others. [...] I am behind these walls. Tamed and constrained. Yet this is my domain.*

**Location of Attacker, 2017**

Oil on linen

Courtesy of Wessart Collection, Switzerland

Like *T25* and *T26*, this work is part of the *Mnemonic Object* series.

**Swedish Class, 2014**

Oil on linen

Courtesy of Defares Collection

This work is part of a series titled *How Iraqi Are You?*, in which jokes about language, assimilation, war and displacement are integrated with references to *Al-Hariri Maqamat*, a canonical 12th-century Baghdad manuscript that portrays the daily lives of Iraqis. The manuscript is an example of the Baghdad school of miniature painting that was cut short by the Mongol invasion: reflective of the same cultural loss that haunts Kahraman's works. Kahraman uses the style of these manuscripts to recreate a forgotten history from the perspective of an immigrant, recalling personal memories of her upbringing in Iraq, her assimilation into Swedish life, and her experience of learning to write Arabic again.

**LRAD.1, 2016**

Oil on linen and acoustic foam

Collection of Adam and Mariana Clayton

LRAD stands for 'Long-Range Acoustic Device', a weaponised speaker system that delivers a loud beam of sound to belligerent crowds, causing nausea, disorientation and pain. In Kahraman's *LRAD* series, cuts in the surface of paintings are inset with acoustic foam, making visible the sounds that assault the wartime body whilst simultaneously constructing a kind of armour for Kahraman's figures.

**Clock, 2017**

Oil, linen, RSG and pigment on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

**Star, 2017**

Oil, linen, RSG and pigment on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

**Body Carpets, 2018**

Carpet

Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

Each *Body Carpet* is cut to the shape of the artist's own body. They are created from handmade carpets woven by women in Afghanistan, Iran and Kurdistan. Kahraman relates the West's fetishisation of the brown woman's body (including her own, and those of the carpet makers) to the concept of the 'superfluous' body, developed by German philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt. Arendt proposes that when a person, or group, is reduced to an image alone, they are perceived as superfluous and can be killed without the killer feeling any guilt.

On the screen outside:

**Gendering Memories of Iraq**

Performance documentation, 9 February 2019

Courtesy of the artist

On the occasion of the exhibition's opening, five performers read texts written by Hayv Kahraman that draw upon her childhood memories. Through this work, Kahraman considers how neo-colonial wartime violence remains a visceral presence in her life today. As her unnamed protagonists float through the exhibition, the investigation of Kahraman's trauma merges with collective memory and experience.