

Afra Al Dhaheri
Split Ends

20 January - 4 March 2021

Split Ends showcases a body of conceptual works by Afra Al Dhaheri that frame a liminal state of unlearning and readdressing. The cultural dichotomies of hair are framed throughout the exhibition simultaneously in both the understandings of hair through the domains of the public and private. The figure of the split end—that brittle fraying of a hair when it becomes too dry—encapsulates the time and space between the start and finish of a transformation, or between an ending and its separation into a new beginning.

The juxtaposition of the organic and inorganic, embody both strength and vulnerability. Rope mimics the delicate language of hair but also evokes processes of tying down, taming, and tidying. Concrete summons images of rigid architecture and cityscapes but here develops a softness, as well, adapting to the delicate intricacies of the human body. The Arabic title of the installation *Fil Al Shaar*, a cornerstone work in the exhibition, insinuates a playful liberation of hair. The architectural space delineated by its ropes that hang heavily from the ceiling is meant to be experienced in the body's movement through it, felt in the paradoxically light intimacy of touch. In contrast, *One at a Time* showcases the delicacy, intricacy, and force found in the organic state of human hair. The act of taping down the collected hairs and straightening them insinuates the force of external factors, and the reality of its natural state. The work explores hair's malleability as a cultural, public signifier of what is "presentable" but also its own inherent, material force of rebellion in its persistent return to a private, "natural" state.

Throughout the works presented, Al Dhaheri draws the viewer into the intimacy of binary oppositions to propose a third possibility introduced in her works. She reinterprets hardness as a delicate trait thereby negotiating the rigidity of architecture and the fluidity of its definitions. The artist's manipulation of interior/exterior and public/private in her materials shows how social and cultural obligation can transform into new forms. In the liminal spaces found in the moments of separation that inaugurate metamorphoses, Al Dhaheri proposes new realities that allow time to seem both expansive and limited, making space for destruction and construction to coexist. In the time of these material processes, the arrival at one ending opens onto the chaos of a new beginning. Where there is absence and finality there lies, too, the opportunity for presence and transformation.

- Text by Munira Al Sayegh

Artist Biography

Afra Al Dhaheri (b. 1988 in Abu Dhabi, UAE) obtained her MFA from Rhode Island School of Design, USA in 2017 and had her residencies from The Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artists Fellowship, in partnership with the Rhode Island School of Design (2014) and Porthmeor Studios, St. Ives, Cornwall, UK (2019).

Solo exhibitions include *Split Ends*, Green Art Gallery, Dubai, UAE (2021) and *Inevitable Ephemera*, T + H Gallery, Boston, USA (2016). Selected group exhibitions include *Beyond: Emerging Artist*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2020); *From Within*, Riyadh, KSA (2019); *Avoid Bad Dreams*, Green Art Gallery, Dubai, UAE (2019); *Barcelona to Abu Dhabi*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2018); *Emirati Expressions*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2011 and 2015).