

ASMA BELHAMAR

When the Window Refused to Fly, and the Arch Decided to Hold the Sky

Curated by Duygu Demir

17 January – 18 March 2026

Green Art Gallery is pleased to present Emirati artist Asma Belhamar's first solo exhibition, *When the Window Refused to Fly, and the Arch Decided to Hold the Sky*, curated by Duygu Demir, opening on 17 January 2026.

For her solo exhibition at Green Art Gallery, Asma Belhamar presents drawings and assemblies of 3D-printed stoneware clay, wood, and ceramic tiles. Further expanding her visual and material vocabulary, Belhamar continues her exploration of architectural elements as bearers of the past and projections into the future, carrying both aspirations and contradictions tied to futurity and nostalgia, inspiration and preservation, acceleration and repose.

Titled *When the Window Refused to Fly, and the Arch Decided to Hold the Sky*, the exhibition presents a whimsical spatial proposal, inviting the viewer to regard the courtyard of the Emirati house as a type of playground—a place of belonging and memory, as well as a space for imagination and play. It is based around the memory of a second, unfinished courtyard in Belhamar's family home, where, while the adults remained undecided on how to use the plot or simply waited for the family to expand, the children played with discarded building materials and turned the empty space into a stage. The artist invites the viewer to join her in this childhood game: walk around, sit, stand, sneak, slide, or simply imagine. Take a peek at the elements at hand before closing your eyes and allowing your ideas to take flight.

Belhamar fuses fragments of local examples of ornamentation, which she documents on her evening walks, with existing generic forms extracted from both the urban environment (such as walls, curbs, and playground slides) and the domestic environment (for example, stairwells and seating). Her focus remains fixed firmly on architecture in its physical and psychological forms. The drawings presented are extensions of Belhamar's ongoing exploration into how architecture in the United Arab Emirates is experienced, as though viewed from a moving vehicle. Like the balustrades that she has come to be known for, which appear to stretch or melt, her drawings play with the idea of double-takes, whether due to the optical effect of speed or the distorted residue of a memory. Reminiscent of glitching cameras, dreamy flashbacks, or the drive-by glimpse of a scene, the drawings hone in on corners, freezing the movement of shadows or capturing the layered grid structures of the city. Created on primed canvas using acrylic, the drawings feature a color palette that echoes the sun-soaked walls of government-granted plots demarcated by UAE citizens under land grant schemes, as well as the sepia tones of old family albums. The drawings also replicate the physical delineations they capture, forming walls within walls, which serve to enclose the gallery space, effectively turning it into a courtyard.

For this exhibition, Belhamar used a technique that merges the affordances of technological advancement with the handmade. The ceramic elements within her spatial assemblies are 3D printed. Far from the smooth, hassle-free process one may imagine, this is an intensive approach to making. The artist must first create an inner architecture for structural integrity, for which she appropriates ornamental forms, before processes of wedging, printing, attaching, drying, firing, glazing, and re-firing can take place. These pieces are then married with other forms in wood, the result of which represents neither architecture nor furniture. While the pieces take inspiration from existing elements, they are skewed in scale. Some pieces are placed on unused tiles from the artist's home, while others are carefully nestled within supportive frames, encouraging the viewer to contort to their own logic.

In *The Poetics of Space* (1957), Gaston Bachelard sets out to prove that "imagination augments the values of reality," suggesting that it is the memories of all the houses we have lived in, or dreamed that we have lived in, that culminate in our concept of what we call a home. This is how a space becomes a place: the psycho-social, the analytical, and the phenomenological operate simultaneously. Simply put, it is something beyond the physical edifice that makes a house a place of dwelling. It is the result not of the form, material, nor size of a dwelling, nor its location, smell, or the memories contained within it, but rather an accumulation of the physical and the psychological. In his 1971 text "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger states, "We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell." Belhamar's artistic proposal is infused throughout the entire exhibition space and can be taken to function as a wider metaphor for the building practices of the UAE at large, as far as they can be interpreted on a domestic scale. It offers an invitation to ruminate on the nostalgia of the modern, the efficiency of the technological, as well as the creative challenge of the empty lot. If dwelling is a question of how to live, then it is indelibly tied to the question of how and what we build in order to live. Belhamar's work proposes that dreams are constructed from both the future and the past.

About the Artist

Born in 1988 in Dubai, UAE, **Asma Belhamar** graduated with a BA in Visual Arts from Zayed University, Dubai, UAE (2012) and MFA in Textile Design at Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI (2017). She completed the Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artists Fellowship in partnership with the Rhode Island School of Design, Abu Dhabi in 2014, and was an Artist-in-Residence at March Project, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE and Porthmeor Studio, St Ives, UK both in 2019.

Public commissioned works include: *Thresholds of Perception: Redefining Balcony Spaces*, Public Art Commission for Alserkal Arts Foundation, Dubai, UAE (2024); *Union of Artists*, together with four other artists commissioned by Dubai Culture in collaboration with Art Dubai (2024); *Chasing the Dance of Alfay*, Public Art Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2023); *Distorted Familiarities* for Expo 2020, Dubai (2021) and *The Edifice of Sba* at March Project, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE in 2019.

Solo exhibitions include: *When the Window Refused to Fly, and the Arch Decided to Hold the Sky*, Green Art Gallery, Dubai, UAE (2026); and *Solid Void*, at 421, Abu Dhabi (2023).

Selected group exhibitions include: *Siraj*, Islamic Arts Festival, Sharjah, UAE (2025); *Maknana: An Archaeology of New Media Art in the Arab World*, Diriyah Art Futures, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2025); *Guest Relations*, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, UAE (2023); *Time & Identity*, Al Safa Art and Design Library, Dubai, UAE (2023); *Evaporating Suns: Contemporary Myths of the Arabian Gulf*, Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger, Basel, Switzerland (2023); Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present* (SB15), Sharjah, UAE (2023); *Tales of Nostalgia*, Misk Art Institute, Riyadh, KSA (2022); *Disconnect & Reconnect*, Part Two, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2022); *Disconnect & Reconnect*, Part One, Etihad Modern Art Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2022); *Between The Sky and The Earth: Contemporary Art from the UAE*, Middle Eastern Institute, Washington, DC (2021); *Playing Spaces*, Engage 101, Dubai, UAE (2020); *Emerge III: Converging Lines*, Sestiere Dorsoduro 47, Venice, Italy (2019); UAE & Greece Cultural Week, Zappeion Exhibition Hall, Athens, Greece (2018); *Place Memory Time*, 1stDIBS Gallery, New York, NY (2017); *Art: Process & Practice*, Salama Bint Hamdan Emerging Artist Fellowship Program, Warehouse421 Abu Dhabi, UAE (2016); and *Markers & Makers*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2016) amongst others.

Based in Dubai, Belhamar also works as an Assistant Professor at Zayed University – Dubai.

About the Curator

Duygu Demir (b. 1985) is an art historian and curator with a PhD from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research topics include exhibition histories, transnational encounters, and moments of confluence between art and architecture, in addition to contemporary artistic practice, especially of the non-Western kind.

Currently, she is teaching in the Department of Culture and Tourism's Teaching Artist Fellowship program in Abu Dhabi, and working on her book manuscript on articulations of modern painting from the late Ottoman Empire and early Republican Turkey. Between 2023–2025, Demir was the curator of the Art Gallery and Research Assistant Professor in the Humanities Division at NYU Abu Dhabi. There, she co-curated *Between the Tides: A Gulf Quinquennial* (2024–2025) and presented *Entrusted Ground* (2022), a performance and installation developed around artworks by Gözde İlkin, together with choreographer Aslı Öztürk and musician Berke Can Özcan in Istanbul.

In 2022–2023, she was Assistant Professor of Art History at Sabancı University in Istanbul, Turkey. Before her graduate studies, she worked as a programmer at SALT in Istanbul. In addition to SALT (Ankara and Istanbul), she curated exhibitions at İmalat-hane (2023, Bursa), artSümer (2021–22, İstanbul), MIT’s Keller Gallery (Cambridge, MA, 2017), Arter (2016, İstanbul) and Tate Modern (2011, London). While at SALT, she co-curated the archival exhibition *From England with love, İsmail Saray* (2014), the retrospective *A Promised Exhibition – Gülsün Karamustafa* (2013), and the inaugural exhibition *I am not a studio artist* (2011), a retrospective of the late Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin. She also worked on numerous solo and group exhibitions and accompanying public programs including *Rabih Mroué* (2014), *subREAL* (2013), *Hassan Khan* (2012), *İstanbul Eindhoven SALTVanAbbe: Post '89* (2012), and *Modern Essays: Across the Slope – Ahmet Öğüt* (2011).

Her academic writing has appeared in *Art Margins* (2014), *Thresholds* (2018), both from MIT Press, as well as *Art Journal* (2019). Her upcoming essays will be published in anthologies by Yale University Press, American University of Beirut, and Cambridge University Press. She has edited and co-edited artist monographs, including *Ismail Saray* (2018, SALT), *Room of Rhythms-Cevdet Erek* (2012, Walther König), and *I am not a Studio Artist* (SALT, 2011). She also writes essays, articles and reviews on contemporary art for catalogues, magazines, and online platforms, both in Turkey and abroad.

She has a combined BA in Visual Arts and Art History from Columbia University in New York.

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