

In the Gallery with Artist *Fedra Yazdi*



A dialogue with Amena Hajjar

Amena: Fedra Yazdi's paintings poignantly convey her lifelong search for place. Each painting depicts a specific story of wayfinding, carefully mapping animals and figures, illustrating the cycle of wander and wonder. Trails and paths offer a direction, yet in some of her paintings, their access appears to be inaccessible. The tiniest of brushstrokes tie stylized elements to the canvas as if stitched rather than painted. Below, Fedra discusses the profound meaning and personal experiences behind her journey to immigrate to the United States, her life in exile, and her passion for painting.

Tell me about your inspiration.

Fedra: My inspiration comes from Gabbeh rugs. These rugs were made by women for centuries and used as a means to tell their stories. My work utilizes the ancient art of painting to convey my story of seeking asylum. Although my paintings are inspired by Gabbeh rugs, each composition and color palette is unique to me. I design everything myself. One of my early paintings explored the idea of what it truly means to make a complete departure from home and settle somewhere new. That is why there is a floating, falling look to it. I'm playing with the feeling of floating, and the idea of landing.

What is your process?

My process is what I call 'Slow Flow'. I like to sit with my subject and really understand the 'Why'. Why this subject? Why these colors? All of my work is rooted in the core of my search for the universal theme of home and a sense of belonging.

In my studio, I have 5-6 unstretched linens taped to the wall, and I work on them simultaneously. Each painting has many layers. I know it's flat, but it's a multi-layered design that I intentionally created to give it a textile feel. I use extra-fine linen and sand it, applying many layers of gesso. I intentionally do not work on canvas; I love the feeling of painting on linen against the wall. There is a strong connection for me, always.

I have a lot of respect for these paintings. I work to make sure that I create them right. It is very important to me - the materials, the paint, the linen, everything has to be of good quality. I spend months on each painting, which is why I work with multiple paintings at the same time.

I use a very fine linen. I paint on gesso and sand multiple times, making sure it's beautiful and smooth. Then the colors. My pallet tray is very big. It takes me a long time to get the colors right for each piece. I create a lot of hand-drawn designs on the surface, while I design and hand-carve the stamps in a clear material.

I use acrylic paint, and when I say the flow has to be right, the brushes are first. I have a lot of brushes, and I use a blade to trim them down to very thin hairs, sometimes with only a few remaining. It is a slow process, all of it.

You have such a unique style. How did you arrive at this?

Art has always been a part of my life. As a child in Iran, I would draw my friends and their families and cut them out, then I would paint homes for them. Always giving them a home, a place to live.

As an adult, I experimented with abstract painting. I could not really express my story. I knew my story, but I was without a unique style and felt restricted.

My background is in film and theater, and I have written plays dealing with the reality of living in exile and missing home. But for me, being a painter works better for the story, because painting is a universal language. I am an immigrant from Iran.

Four years ago, I was exploring ways to return home to Iran. Due to the situation in Iran, it became clear to me that I would never be able to return home. It was processing these feelings that I found my style. Now, I have an intense connection and also know precisely what I am about to do each time I paint.



What do the stitches represent in your paintings?

I actually am not only inspired by gabe fugs but also by Uzbekistan's Suzani textiles. The stitching I paint aligns with the entire concept of exile. Living in exile is a permanent feeling, and something that will probably not change in my lifetime; the stitches emphasize this. I paint stitches, reaffirming that this is here to stay, stitched together. Roads are stitched and fixed, and I have intentionally shown humans and pets without the stitches, flowing and moving around in the painted story.

Do you find you are alone in your story?

I have had immigrants from other countries purchase my work. I remember one immigrant from Mexico who bought a painting from my Migration series, telling me, "I can't believe a girl from Iran can portray something I feel so well." And that is the best compliment I have ever gotten. I appreciate the paint as a universal language.

How did you come to join the GRO Visiting Artist Program?

I learned about the gallery and felt my work was a good match in terms of topic. When I applied, I lived here in the area. But since then, my husband has been relocated to Atlanta. I remained in the program because my topic fits so well with GRO. I traveled back here to hang the show, and I am so glad that I did. It has been wonderful to work with the artist members and staff here. My sisters came to see the show, and they started to cry. These feelings are universal, and I appreciate that I can capture the sense of being in transition, finding a place, and that others can relate.

GRO's Visiting Artist Program hosts individual and small group exhibitions 5 or 6 times each year for artists unaffiliated with GRO. The Visiting Artist Program is an important way for artists to support artists. Founding GRO artist Zea Morvitz and GRO Artist Jenny-Lynn Hall co-direct this program. For more information, visit <https://galleryrouteone.org/for-artists/call-to-artists/>

