

Simone Fattal: Finding a Way

21 September 2021– 15 May 2022

Gallery 2, Free Entry

#FindingaWay

Simone Fattal presents a sculptural environment for a major new commission

18 August 2021 – For her first solo presentation in the UK, internationally acclaimed artist **Simone Fattal** (b. 1942, Syria) leads visitors on a journey of transformation in a major new sculptural commission. Imagining the large, brick-lined Gallery 2 space to be a giant kiln, Fattal fills the room with five ceramic figures who embark on a spiritual and physical metamorphosis.

Elements of an ancient landscape appear throughout the exhibition; a delicate ceramic ladder, a series of carved architectural stele and a Mesopotamian ziggurat temple – connecting earth to heaven – inspire ideas around ascension and emancipation. A series of six black and white etchings, drawn from Fattal's childhood memories of Damascus, appear as abstracted maps or oases of rich vegetation.

Much of Fattal's work exists between figuration and abstraction; modest clay figures are rendered with just enough detail to be discernible as individuals, revealing her preoccupation with the fragility of the human form. In *Finding a Way* the artist draws on sources ranging from war and conflict, to landscape painting, ancient religions and mythologies, Sufi poetry and migration, whilst exploring the politics of archaeology and excavation. Using frequently recurring motifs and forms, her works construct worlds that feel as though they have emerged – temporarily – from history and memory.

The works included in *Finding a Way* visibly exhibit the traces of their own making, spontaneously shaped between two hands on a working table. At first glance the objects are reminiscent of ancient artefacts, souvenirs or idiosyncratic collectibles often found in domestic environments, in which very different objects come together to form a personal story. While often modest in size, other works shift the potential of ceramics into large objects on a bodily scale.

Finding a Way coincides with Whitechapel Gallery's wider exhibitions programme dedicated to clay. In the neighbouring gallery space, artist **Theaster Gates** (b. 1973, USA) presents a 20-year survey of his clay-based works in *Theaster Gates: A Clay Sermon*. Upstairs **Yoko Ono** (b. 1933, Japan) prompts visitors to 'mend the world' by reconstructing fragmented pieces of ceramic in her participatory installation, *MEND PIECE for London*. The exhibitions are thematically linked to Season Two of the Gallery's Ways of Knowing events programme, this autumn inviting artists, filmmakers and academics to reflect upon earth and matter as subjects.

Notes to Editors

- *Simone Fattal: Finding a Way* is curated by Laura Smith, Curator, and Grace Storey, Assistant Curator, Whitechapel Gallery.

Press Release

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- The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated publication designed by renowned Iranian-British designer, Ghazaal Vojdani, including an introduction by Iwona Blazwick, Director, Whitechapel Gallery, an essay by Canadian poet and essayist Lisa Robertson and a newly-commissioned interview with Simone Fattal.
- The exhibition is generously supported by The Whitechapel Gallery Commissioning Council: Dorota Audemars, Erin Bell, Heloisa Genish, Leili Huth, Irene Panagopoulos, Mariela Pissioti, Alex Sainsbury; alongside The Simone Fattal Exhibition Circle: Balice Hertling, Paris; Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna; Sarah and Gerard Griffin; Karma International, Zürich; kaufmann repetto, Milan, New York; and Galerie Tanit Munich-Beirut.

About Simone Fattal

Simone Fattal was born in Damascus, Syria in 1942 and grew up in Beirut, Lebanon. She studied philosophy in Lebanon and then at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1969 she returned to Beirut where she began painting. In 1980, fleeing the Civil War, she settled in California and founded the Post-Apollo Press, a publishing house dedicated to experimental literary work. In 1988, she enrolled at the Art Institute of San Francisco and began making her now renowned ceramic sculptures. Since 2006, she has produced many of her ceramic works in Hans Spinner's prestigious workshop in Grasse, France. Fattal now lives and works in Paris, with her partner the poet, writer and painter Etel Adnan.

About Whitechapel Gallery

For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world-class artists from modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Frida Kahlo and Hannah Höch to contemporaries such as Zarina Bhimji, Sophie Calle, William Kentridge, Eduardo Paolozzi and Michael Rakowitz. Its historic campus houses exhibitions, artist commissions, collection displays, historic archives, education resources, inspiring art courses, talks and film screenings, the Townsend dining room and the Koenig Bookshop. It is a touchstone for contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter.

Visitor Information

Admission: Free

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; First Thursdays, 11am – 9pm

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