

The Other Side of the Moon

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Baró Galería, founded by María Baró in 1999 and O-Contemporary, founded by His Excellency Dr. Obaid Al Ketbi in 2024, are proud to announce the launch of their new partnership in Abu Dhabi. This collaboration aims to foster cultural exchange and elevate contemporary art in the region, bringing together a diverse range of works by internationally acclaimed artists and emerging regional talents in 2025.

For the Grand Opening, the galleries invite you to The Other Side of the Moon, a group exhibition curated by Esmeralda Gómez Galera, Elena Belolipetskaia, and Mohammed Al Saqqa

Artists — Rasheed Araeen, Christopher Joshua Benton, Elias Crespin, Néstor García, Jorge Rosano Gamboa, Gary Hill, Tamara Kalo, Eduardo Kac, Mohammed Kazem, Adrian Pepe, Mano Penalva, Abdus Salaam, Latifa Saeed

There is always another side: hidden, distant, imagined. The Other Side of the Moon brings together artists from seven countries and unfolds in three interconnected chapters, moving from the immediate landscapes around us to the distant realms of the cosmos.

The exhibition opens with Insaan, a meditation on humanity featuring works by Abdus Salaam, Latifa Saeed, and Adrian Pepe. Through themes of self-knowledge, memory, and spirituality, these works explore how meaning is constructed in relation to land and myth, positioning the human experience as a point of contact with both material and symbolic realities.

In Matters, attention shifts to materiality: not only what things are made of, but also what they carry. Matter here is never neutral; it holds the weight of affection, memory, and political tension. Artists including Tamara Kalo, Néstor García, Mano Penalva, Christopher Joshua Benton, Jorge Rosano Gamboa, and Mohammed Kazem engage with strategies of reuse, translation, and subtle intervention.

Finally, Cosmos turns its gaze outward. The Moon and the space beyond appear not as destinations, but as mirrors, surfaces upon which we project our questions and longings. With works by Eduardo Kac, Elias Crespin, Gary Hill, and Rasheed Araeen, this chapter explores the celestial as a poetic frontier.

Through this journey, the exhibition invites viewers to reflect on what connects the known and the unknown. In the subtle tension between outer space and inner gravity, it challenges us to reconsider what we choose to illuminate, and what we leave in shadow.

Insaan

The chapter Insaan (a word إنسان — Insaan — translates as ‘human being’) delves into timeless and fundamental questions about who we are as humanity touching upon the aspects of our existence that transcend the ‘self’ but refer to eternal questions of self-knowledge, search and exploration. Knowing oneself stands as the cornerstone of human journey. Over the centuries, a human has built civilizations, languages, arts, laws and theoretical and practical systems, he has accumulated and carried memory in an attempt to explain both the universe and itself. As eternal seekers, we endeavor to understand the relations between the microcosm and the macrocosm turning to religion, science, craftsmanship, mythology, and artistic practices, etc.

Three artists featured in this section approach the subject through diverse lenses: Abdus Salaam, in his installations and paintings, examines it through the poetization of religion and spirituality; Latifa Saeed looks at artistic practice through scientific methods; and finally, Adrian Pepe weaves mythologies and ancient craftsmanship techniques into his tapestries.

The poetic connotation of the word Insaan, previously used in one of the projects by South African artist Abdus Salaam, is often alluded by the mystics and scholars of Islam as it so poignantly delivers us the essence of humanity being that of love, a reality that we often forget within our terrestrial, ethereal and divine planes. Salaam's body of work, created during a six-week residency coinciding with Ramadan, intertwines the land, its hominid remains, and the polluted river with themes of global environmental shortcomings and intimate moments. It poses the question of whether love, as the essence of our being, can alleviate the anxieties and fears we project into the world. His pieces, such as the suspended quartz sculpture “Mother & Child”, symbolize transcendent love, while “The Weight”, made from dolomite and platinum, represents mental and economic burdens. “The Arrowheart” reflects the balance of masculine and feminine energies, and “Rivulets” combines sound and visuals to explore humanity's connection to nature and spiritual renewal. Salaam's work invites viewers to engage in a space of remembrance rather than seeking conventional answers, where stone speaks as loudly as silence, and art becomes an invocation. This multidisciplinary experience, encompassing sculpture, sound, video, and poetry, creates a ritual that evokes both ancient memory and contemporary language, with each element resonating with metaphysical presence.

A view of humanity, revealed through an environmental and location-based discourse, can be seen in the works of Dubai-born conceptual artist Latifa Saeed. In her site-specific projects, she uses sand as both a medium and a focal point for research. Sand serves as a multifaceted metaphor for the site, the desert, and the universe. Saeed's hand-bonded glass panels from the series “Diminishing Landscapes” aim to reveal the spirit of a city born from the desert. The sand, collected from various regions around Dubai and fused into glass, creates expressive abstract patterns that reflect on the fragile bond between humanity and the land, highlighting its diminishing state due to environmental and identity changes. All of Saeed's projects are iterations of one another. The complexity of human knowledge is further explored in her series of paintings “Portals”, which revisits themes from her earlier works. Meanwhile, her video work “Dust Devil” invites viewers into a sensory experience through spectral imagery, emphasizing the fragility and resilience of traditional landscapes.

Adrian Pepe's Awassi wool tapestries complete the narrative of the chapter by addressing the profound relational ties we form with objects throughout time. The artist examines how artifacts are created, replicated, transferred, and adapted, revealing the complex relationship between humanity and materiality. Pepe crafts objects and experiences that invite open discourse on our connection to the physical world. His hand-embroidered wool tapestry “Malus Sieversii” represents the living microcosm carried on the sheep's body, incorporating elements like seeds, small insects, parasites, and debris. This symbolizes the ability of humanity to construct and carry forward myths and narratives. Pepe's work embodies the enduring traces of time-worn physical labor, emphasizing our intertwined relationship with the earth and the stories that shape our collective knowledge.

**Elena Belolípetskaia
Mohammed Al Saqqa**

Matters

How do we shape the world, and how does the world shape us? Matters carries a double meaning: on the one hand, it refers to physical substance, and on the other, to what is relevant, those issues that concern or affect us. The works gathered in this section explore this dualism, this back-and-forth journey. As Donna Haraway has pointed out, "It matters what stories make worlds, and what worlds make our stories"¹. Matter is potential, constantly subject to change. Here, materials are not neutral; they are imbued with memory, affection, and political tensions. They are traces of the everyday and, at the same time, vehicles to think beyond it.

The artists presented in this section, Tamara Kalo, Néstor García, Mano Penalva, Christopher Benton, Jorge Rosano Gamboa, and Mohammed Kazem, work with what is at hand: found objects, traditional knowledge, minimal gestures, inherited languages... Through strategies of reuse, collaboration, and translation, they invite us to rethink how meaning is produced in and through matter.

In Tamara Kalo's series *Current Sea*, Lebanese banknotes, now devalued by the economic crisis, are transformed into embroidered landscapes, digitally distorted, almost liquid. The bills are transfigured into abstract, fluid forms through scanography, a tactile process that metaphorically connects with the value of labor. In a sense, money, even in the title, becomes a flowing current, a map of the uncertainty that sometimes governs economic systems.

In Néstor García's work, the opposite occurs: the seemingly innocent gaze at the landscape reveals its internal tensions tied to colonial economics and the logic of extractivism. What lies hidden behind a landscape? To represent it is also to dominate it, both symbolically and materially. His canned, portable landscapes, with the palm tree as a symbol of exoticism, create a new cartography from a decolonial perspective.

Other artists share a focus on the everyday, the precarious, and the reused as forms of resistance. Mano Penalva rescues domestic or popular objects to propose new systems of visual organization, inspired by street aesthetics and informal economies. For example, the small wooden beads that often appear in his recent sculptures come from the seat covers of taxi and bus drivers in many cities. Interested in anthropology and material culture, his work displaces and redefines the banal, giving value to what often goes unnoticed.

Christopher Joshua Benton, for his part, works within migrant communities to address labor, identity, and cultural resistance. Through the reuse of uniforms, textiles, and collaborative strategies, his work makes visible the stories woven from relational contexts, underscoring how working-class communities transform culture as a means of agency. His piece *Perfect Dry Cleaners* consists of discarded uniform embroidery samples held together with safety pins, reflecting an interest in the lives of a dense expatriate worker population. Both artists explore forms of knowledge that emerge from the margins: survival strategies, care, and collective creativity.

Finally, Jorge Rosano Gamboa and Mohammed Kazem place the body as a means of perception, memory, and cultural translation. In *Nenepilli*, Rosano Gamboa collaborates with an Oaxacan weaving master to create monumental tapestries made of natural wool dyed with cochineal, inspired by pre-Hispanic codices. In them, the tongue, both muscle and symbol, articulates a story of mestizaje and syncretism.

Mohammed Kazem's work responds thoughtfully and playfully to the material conditions of his immediate geographical location. Subjectivity filters through small actions in the midst of an urban landscape rapidly changing due to modernization. In his series *Kisses*, Kazem traces lines with chalk that connect gum residues on sidewalks, an invisible encounter between bodies that occupied the same space at different times. A cartography of the subtle in public space that seems to respond to the question posed by Georges Perec: "But how should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?"²

The works gathered here weave a network of material, symbolic, and affective relationships. They remind us that what we do leaves a mark on objects, on bodies, in the landscape around us, and that those traces, no matter how minimal, shape our ways of being in the world.

Esmeralda Gómez Galera.

¹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016).

² Georges Perec, *Especies de espacios* (*Espèces d'espaces*), p. 209–210.

Cosmos

In its final chapter, the exhibition turns its gaze skyward. From the sand beneath our feet to the lunar horizon and the vast, uncharted territories that lie beyond, Cosmos reflects on that uniquely human impulse: to reach beyond, to imagine, and to seek meaning in what exceeds us.

Here, the exhibition shifts from the material and the constructed to the speculative. The artists in this section, Eduardo Kac, Elias Crespin, Gary Hill, and Rasheed Araeen, engage with the cosmos not only as a realm of scientific inquiry or philosophical abstraction but as a poetic frontier. It is in this space that the works resonate with the symbolic language of the cosmos: geometry, orbit, light, and rhythm.

Eduardo Kac's *Adsum* offers a point of departure. Created specifically for the Moon, the sculpture consists of a one-centimeter glass cube containing a laser-etched spatial poem readable from all directions. Miniaturized at a 10:1 scale to approach the limits of legibility, *Adsum* exists in several iterations. The *Flight-Ready* version orbited Earth aboard the International Space Station for eleven months before returning in 2023. The *Lander* version, completed in 2025, now rests permanently on the lunar surface, protected aboard a lander. Its title, Latin for "I am here," serves not only as a marker of presence but as a poetic gesture toward being seen, a silent message, like those once launched into deep space. Like the plaques and golden records sent on early space missions, Kac's work speaks to a long-standing impulse: the need to leave a trace, to declare our existence across space and time.

Gary Hill's *Big Legs Don't Cry* introduces a more ambiguous gesture. A pair of suited legs stands atop an open book, with its pages continuously turning through the figure. This strange, looping interaction evokes the sense of landing, a body set down in unknown terrain. Here, the act of standing becomes symbolic: as if claiming knowledge, or being claimed by it, the figure becomes part of a looped scene at the threshold of legibility, where objects verge on becoming something else, animated by a logic that transcends them.

Movement becomes a form of meditation in Elias Crespin's kinetic sculptures. His suspended geometric forms perform slow, deliberate choreographies in the air, sequences governed by invisible algorithms and precise structures, yet experienced as soft, weightless rhythms.

These works evoke the experience of orbit and gravitational drift: they float, recalibrate, hesitate. In doing so, they mirror the deep-time cycles of the cosmos itself and its entropy: ever-moving, never fixed.

Rasheed Araeen's geometric structures, rigorous and modular, offer another entry into this celestial logic. Deeply rooted in abstraction, Araeen's practice affirms geometry as a universal language, one capable of articulating order, balance, and the potential for harmony between earthly and cosmic forces. As Araeen has written, "geometry is not just a formal language, but a reflection of an order inherent in the universe — an order that speaks of unity, balance and infinite potential."^[1]

Together, these works return us to one of the exhibition's central ideas: that the Moon and, by extension, the cosmos is not merely a destination but a mirror. A space upon which we project our longing. What compels us to project ourselves into space, to inscribe ourselves in the stars, to imagine ourselves beyond ourselves? And what do we find there, at the edge of distance, if not a reflection of what is most deeply human?

Esmeralda Gómez Galera.

[1] Rasheed Araeen, *Art Beyond Art: Ecoaesthetics, Manifesto, and Other Writings* (London: Third Text Publications, 2010).