

ZHANA ASSAAD

Communicality through faith, hope, ethics and criticality.

I'm a research artist and designer. Faith is my main area of research in relation to our current ways of dealing with experiences of crisis and trauma. As a muslim woman with a Lebanese father and Ukrainian mother, I grew up in a household where faith is a core value that has and does help me overcome fears and uncertainties during times when all else seems to be falling apart. I've worked with sound design, video, performance and textiles installations. Thrown from a communistic society to an individualistic one, my focus veered towards leading tarot reading workshops titled "Critical Care Reading" utilising a methodology rooted in critical hope; which is the ability to assess one's environment from a perspective of justice and equity while envisioning a hopeful outlook towards the future. The workshops have become a way to bring individuals together and open up discussions around difficult topics, each time focusing on a specified topic or theme. I aim and make sure to create a space where those participating feel safe and welcome to voice their fears, vulnerabilities and even their sensitive opinions in a constructive and dedicated way.

WEBSITES

www.zhana-assaad.com

SOCIAL MEDIA

[instagram.com/turboghadab](https://www.instagram.com/turboghadab)

soundcloud.com/turboghadab

www.linkedin.com/in/zhana-assaad-b38723141/

EDUCATION

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 2021 -
2023 | Visual Arts and Post-Contemporary Practices Den Bosch, Academie van Kunst en Vormgeving diploma |
| 2014 -
2017 | Graphic Design - Print Emphasis
Lebanese American University diploma |

EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2024 | Critical care reading: Tarot reading workshop Exhale Delft, Netherlands
The workshop took place at Exhale and was booked over capacity. It was a chance for students to gather together and read the tarot beyond fortune telling and the binaries presented by the visuals. Their enthusiasm allowed the atmosphere to be welcoming and productive. Exhale is a space that is part of X TU Delft and is dedicated to art and creative practices and workshops. The space was created to invite students of TU Delft to explore artistic practices as a form of mental health care. All workshops and activities are free of charge and open to all students. www.ready-to-exhale.com/events/critical-care-tarot-card-reading-for-beginners
Solo |
| 2023 | Balkan Y2K The Wrong Biennale Online Part of the Balkan Y2K pavilion, the visual and sound-work titled "Whose Y2K? My Y2K :(" describes my childhood summers in Ukraine. While not Balkan, the music selected was both Ukrainian as well as Balkan, as the cultures inspire each other. thewrong.org/BalkanY2K
Group |
| 2023 | Radio ALHARA: Online radio The work titled "Shivers" was part of the Sonic Protest online radio show. The work is an ambient sound piece that simply describes the shivers of terror. soundcloud.com/tnsxords/sonic-protest-puglia
Group |
| 2023 | Adrift, a shift Willem twee 's-Hertogenbosch The graduation show of the Master Institute of Visual Cultures. I presented a textile and sound installation with titles; "أَسْعَى دَائِمًا"; "70,000 - اشتغال - seeking/striving"; and "قَاءٌ - die" 2023.thecurrent.is/project/faith-in-the-darkness-of-being-046382
Group |
| 2023 | The Void x SALWA's Internet Café W139 x Institute of Network Cultures (INC) Amsterdam, Netherlands The final event started with a conversation between Riad Salameh and artists Inkeri Virtanen, Senakirfa, Zhana Assaad and Radu-Mihai Tănasă. We discussed the anxiety that comes from living in a digital age. The artists explore the transformative nature of an internet that was exhilarating into an internet that raises concern. We look back into natural and healing practices that help us to deal with the current infrastructure of the web. networkcultures.org/void/2023/12/05/the-void-popup-studio-x-salwa-internet-cafe/
Group |
| 2023 | The Void x SALWA's Internet Café W139, Institute of Network Cultures (INC) Amsterdam, Netherlands The final event started with a conversation between Riad Salameh and artists Inkeri Virtanen, Senakirfa, Zhana Assaad and Radu-Mihai Tănasă. We discussed the anxiety that comes from living in a digital age. The artists explore the transformative nature of an internet that was exhilarating into an internet that raises concern. We look back into natural and healing practices that help us to deal with the current infrastructure of the web. networkcultures.org/void/2023/12/05/the-void-popup-studio-x-salwa-internet-cafe/
Group |
| 2023 | Adrift, a shift Willem Twee 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands Graduation Show for the Master Institute of Visual Cultures in Den Bosch. I presented my thesis project with the following titles; "70,000 - اشتغال"; "أَسْعَى دَائِمًا"; "die, .", "قَاءٌ" 2023.thecurrent.is/project/faith-in-the-darkness-of-being-046382
Group |
| 2023 | Balkan Y2K Pavillion The Wrong Biennale Online Showcased as part |

visual, part sound work titled "Whose Y2K? My Y2K :("). The work describes my childhood summers in Ukraine. While not Balkan, the sound mix features Ukrainian as well as Balkan music as both cultures inspire each other. thewrong.org/BalkanY2K
Group

- 2023 Sonic Protest Radio ALHARA Online radio The work featured titled "Shivers" is an ambient piece describing the shivers of terror. soundcloud.com/tnsxords/sonic-protest-puglia?si=4aa1c410676446848ab5ce6917b5c833&utm_source=clipboard&utm_n
Group
- 2023 Arty Party Melkweg Expo Amsterdam, Netherlands During this multidisciplinary festival, the entire Melkweg was dedicated to art in all its forms. All rooms, corridors, and corners of the building were utilized to feature the future of the Dutch art scene. I presented my textile and sonic installation titled "faith in the darkness of being", a reformed way to present my graduation project. www.melkweg.nl/en/agenda/arty-party-07-09-2023/
Group
- 2023 W139 hosts... W139 Amsterdam, Netherlands During the 6th week of W139 hosts... I hosted my workshop titled "Critical Care reading: a tarot reading workshop." The workshop was fully booked with passing visitors joining in. Alongside the workshop hosted at W139, I installed "100 Verses", an interactive installation where 100 cut pieces of naturally hand-dyed fabrics were presented to write offerings to the lives lost during the October 7 happenings. w139.nl/en/event/w139-hosts-week-6/
Group
- 2022 Child's Play: The Last Supper Felix Meritis Hotel Amsterdam, Netherlands Commissioned by Yara Said to contribute to the second iteration of Child's Play, The Last Supper, as part of the AFK package deal. A vinyl banner was made with art inspired by Yara Said's poem. yara-said.com/Child-s-Play-1
Duo

PROJECTS

- 2024 Critical care reading Amsterdam, Netherlands This work was presented at W139 in Amsterdam and at Exhale at TU Delft. Oberman argues, in "A Postmodern Perspective on Mental Health, Spirituality, and Religion (2014)" that adding meaning and purpose to life is not only a rational pursuit but an art form in of itself. It allows for the synthesis of experiences that in turn form a complex understanding of ones reality. Thrown from a communistic society to an individualistic one, my focus veered towards leading tarot reading workshops titled "Critical Care Reading" utilising a methodology rooted in critical hope; which is the ability to assess one's environment from a perspective of justice and equity while envisioning a hopeful outlook towards the future. The workshops have become a way to bring individuals together and open up discussions around difficult topics, each time focusing on a specified topic or theme. I aim and make sure to create a space where those participating feel safe and welcome to voice their fears, vulnerabilities and even their sensitive opinions in a constructive and dedicated way. In the workshops, we explore the subconscious's ability to speak to us through the images that come up, and to create critical outlooks disregarding an end result, focusing only on the process.
- 2023 Whose Y2K? My Y2K :(The Wrong Biennale: Online thewrong.org/BalkanY2K Part of the Balkan Y2K pavilion, the visual and sound-work describe my childhood summers in Ukraine. While not Balkan, the music selected was both Ukrainian as well as Balkan, as the cultures inspire each other.

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES/RESIDENCIES

- 2023 Boxtel, Netherlands As part of the master's program at the Master Institute of Visual Culture in Den Bosch, the residency, Rethinking the Artist Economy, held at De Kleine Aarde in Boxtel over the course of 3 weeks (Oct 2022, Feb 2023, April 2023) included lectures, workshops, and activities questioning the role of the artist in the current economy, and alternative approaches to working in the cultural field. rethinkingtheartisteconomy.hotglue.me/?Zine%202

- 2023 100 verses Amsterdam, Netherlands
This work was presented at W139 in Amsterdam and at Mouhit in Tunis, Tunisia. In Islam, a shroud is used to wrap the corpses of the lives lost with a 100 verse prayer written on. The aim is to join together as a community and create a shroud from people all over the world. Each dedicating a verse, a prayer, an offering that will make up the 100 verses of our communal shroud. These fabrics were naturally hand-dyed and shifted using home-made iron water emphasizing change and ephemerality.
- 2023 70,000 - اشتراح -Hertogenbosch, Netherlands
2023.thecurrent.is/project/faith-in-the-darkness-of-being-046382 This work was presented at Willem Twee in Den Bosch and at Melkweg in Amsterdam. It is said in an Islamic Hadith, 70 000 veils separate us from God, 70 000 veils separate us from true reality. In the tarot imagery, a veil covers the waters of the unconscious. Merging these notions together, as I merge practices of faith and the occult, the work explores my journey of growth and change through the act of meaning-making. In a world where faithlessness is a luxury, the installation invites us to use past knowledge to help cope with experiences of crisis, doom and feelings of trauma while giving credit to the eastern and Islamic cultures that brought it about.
- 2023 أَسْعَى دَائِمًا - seeking/striving 's'- Hertogenbosch, Netherlands
soundcloud.com/turboghadab/seekingstriviing?si=cbf3a3893c4d48fd83562bca268373ab&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing
This work was presented at Willem Twee in Den Bosch and at Melkweg in Amsterdam. Piecing moments together through this sound collage, it traces the origins of an assembled belief-system. The work combines Islamic religious texts and notions, sounds of my hometown of Beirut and a conversation with my father with an amalgamation of popular anime theme songs from my childhood. Translated to Arabic by Spacetoon, an Islamic pan-Arab TV channel, their words of hope become anthems that guide the Youth of the Future — as the channel's slogan goes — towards a brighter, more hopeful outlook. By omitting the anime titles, the words become directed as if towards a higher being.
- 2023 whose y2k? my y2k :(<3 Utrecht, Netherlands
sites.google.com/view/balkany2k/home
This work was presented at the Balkan Y2K pavilion in The Wrong Biennale. Click the link and listen to the music begin playing as you enter the online exhibition. - raw, intense, shit quality, dirty, high energy and inconsistent with sean paul and mr saxobeat drifting in and out of consciousness. my Y2K summers were spent in Ukraine watching scandalous music videos of half naked sweaty girls luring men into submission. i loved it. i built a fantasy world in our small village. with barely any internet, my sister, my cousin and i were either playing outside or on the computer playing games. if the usb internet worked, we'd just use it to connect to msn. this mix switches moods, languages and BPMs like it's nobody's business. zero focus, only the joy of discovering every single drop of what we were offered. having lived my life in Lebanon, going to Ukraine every summer filled a void i now yearn to fill again as i feel it growing bigger and

deeper. my mind was expanding, and now i look back and still feel the stretch and compression in my brain as i listen. the sound of an era forever engraved in my heart.

- 2022 Child's Play: The Last Supper
Amsterdam, Netherlands yara-said.com/Child-s-Play-1 Commissioned by Yara Said to contribute to the second iteration of Child's Play, The Last Supper, as part of the AFK package deal. A vinyl banner was made with art inspired by Yara Said's poem. The large banner features a striking design that captures the artist's fear of jet fighters. The Arabic poem at the edges sets the tone, while the designer has incorporated collected image materials to create a visually stunning composition. Bold colors, textures, and overlapping shapes are used to convey a sense of urgency and disorientation. The result is a commanding presence that demands attention and reflection, showcasing the power of expressing complex emotions through multiple mediums. Overall, the work is a powerful representation of the artist's vision and conveys a deep emotional impact.
- 2022 morph into meta centipede 's-
Hertogenbosch, Netherlands www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSRH5ew1QbA In this video I perform metamorphosis as I act like a molting centipede. I build my own cocoon using gelatin and an assembled bag, I crawl inside. The centipede's process is tedious, but by the end, it emerges with new limbs. I explore the way difficult experiences lead to growth.
- 2022 metamorphosis; ceramic sculptures 's-
Hertogenbosch, Netherlands These sculptures are an exploration of storytelling through the creation of objects that carry an experience within them. The story is inspired by a very personal subject, it suggests a time of hardship, of resilience and the ability to be molded as we go through the difficult happenings of life. There is an interplay between the sturdiness and sharpness of these sculptures as well as their fragility and malleability. These ceramic works were presented alongside the video-performance work titled morph into meta-centipede.
- 2022 3i - ğ 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands soundcloud.com/turboghadab/3i-1?si=bf3eea27dc54621823b3c3bcb9bb2e7&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing
In the dead of night, every sound terrifies and threatens. Silence creeps and darkness veils. Shapeless thoughts of danger and discomfort. Holding onto plushies shaped like safety and comfort. Prayers transferred onto delicate fabrics create talismans for children of fear and anxiety. ğ. Be aware. The word transcends itself and transfers its power.

COMMISSIONS

- 2024 Povești Balcanico-Fantastice
Apartament Șase Iași, Romania Poster designs for the Solo Exhibition and Screening of Romanian, Netherlands based artist Radu-Mihai Tănasă. finished
- 2023 Salwa's Internet Cafe – Identity Design
Salwa Foundation Amsterdam, Netherlands I designed the visual

SECONDARY ART-RELATED ACTIVITIES

- 2017 - -- Graphic Designer On-going

identity of his year-long project, from the residency open call until the exhibition opening. The identity is based off the aesthetics of the late 90s and early 2000s.

salwa.nl/agenda/internet-cafe-exhibition-at-w139 finished

2022

Child's Play: The Last Supper
 Amsterdam Commissioned by Yara Said to contribute to the second iteration of Child's Play, The Last Supper, as part of the Felix Merits hotel, AFK 3package deal presentation exhibition. A vinyl banner was made with art inspired by Yara Said's poem. yara-said.com/Child-s-Play-1 finished



Critical care reading: Experimental tarot reading workshop, 2024
 Workshop Installation



Critical care reading, 2024
 Experimental tarot reading workshop



اشتلاخ - 2023, 70.000
 Naturally hand-dyed textile, machine-sewn stuffed textile shapes, 200 x 200 cm

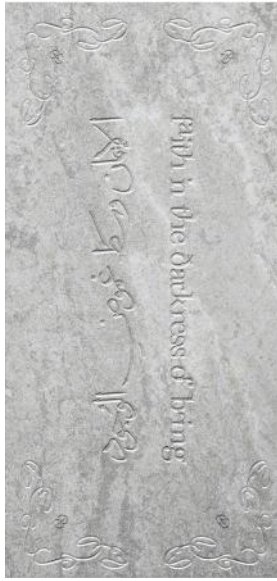


اشتلاخ - 2023, 70,000
 Folded cotton textile, metal wire, 40 x 20 x 20 cm





, 2023
Cyanotype print on textile, 40 x 105 cm



faith in the darkness of being, 2023

The fear of the "magicians" within the Islamic community that I grew up with was quite apparent as magic and other such things were seen as haram (not to be done). It is said that "magic is one of the seven major sins" (S. Bari, 2004, p. 27), however, it can be proven that it is in a case of *Magia per naturalia*¹⁶ where there is no separate form of magic of herbs, stones and things.

What is then magic (Sih) in Islamic terms? The boundaries of what is considered magic and what is seen as divination is not fully clear.

According to Savage-Smith, *sihr* could apply to wonders such as elegant poetry, tricks, the healing properties of plants and incantations to lead for assistance or to bring, diminish, the spirits of planets, and on occasion, the divinatory art of astrology (2004, p. 22). In the early Islamic world, magic was protective in nature, asking for God's beneficence. (2004, p. 27)

I recall occasions in which I prayed onto my plush toy as a child to protect me through the night as I transferred God's healing power by reciting verses from the Quran. Faith helped me cope with the darkness of the world¹⁷ and while religion was accessible to me, I was veering towards various practices that helped guide my faith.

Initially, I got intrigued by astrology which I later learned was prevalent in Islamic culture¹⁸. But it wasn't until years later, when established systems fell apart – social as well as personal – that I began experimenting with the tarot and it put life in a more divine perspective. There was more happening in those crevices than I was aware. I was in the dark, everything buried in an unconscious itching to crawl out.

¹⁶ Savage-Smith (2004) p. 27

¹⁷ The Magicians

¹⁸ There are many forms of Islamic culture and practices but this is not the focus of this paper. For a more detailed look at Islamic culture, see (Savage-Smith, 2004) p. 27



faith in the darkness of being, 2023

The unconscious lives in one's own darkness. One can be in unaware of its happening as it is important to the psyche. It is no easy feat to try to comprehend it, for this reason we have symbols, myths and religion, according to Carl Jung, in Man's soul the symbols, human consciousness has been developed by man over a long and tedious process which took ages to reach its current state. Still, this evolution has yet to be completed and "large areas of the human mind are still shrouded in darkness" (2004, p. 23)

Occult practices, however, like the tarot and astrology alongside religious practices can aid such unveiling.

Clemons argues that adding meaning and purpose to life is not only a rational pursuit but an art form in itself. Meaning-making allows for the synthesis of experiences and impressions that in turn form a complex understanding of one's reality. He uses the term "revelation" to address this framework of meaning-making which one projects onto reality (2004, p. 20). The tarot, after all, is but a series of images, symbols and archetypes that have their meaning assigned in a way to encompass the entirety of human experience. Interpretation is key and in this way the tarot sets itself up as an art form.

For this reason, it is natural for my work to merge the practice of tarot reading or numerology for example alongside religious belief with an artistic practice utilizing a framework based largely on meaning-making and overheard. This method that I have established solidified itself in a country such as the Netherlands where I found an overheard grounded in systems of law, of order and not far beyond the already established structures of the country.

¹⁹ The Magicians

²⁰ There are many forms of Islamic culture and practices but this is not the focus of this paper. For a more detailed look at Islamic culture, see (Savage-Smith, 2004) p. 27



faith in the darkness of being, 2023