

Ayan Farah

The Heliacal Rising

23.3.24–4.5.24

“I think of my work in space. As a  
dialog with my physical body.”

- Ayan Farah

How do we define a place? Ayan Farah's work is marked by her deep interest in the geographical and geopolitical characteristics of the places she spends time in, most recently Sweden, Senegal and England. In these places she collects minerals, soil or plants such as indigo, which she later uses in her studio to produce pigments for dyeing. The “pictorial ground” always consists of historical textiles from the 18th and 19th centuries, which Ayan Farah cuts up into individual fragments for dyeing and later sews together again by hand and machine to form strict compositions. During the dyeing process, the textiles become “vessels” of the geographical characteristics of certain places as well as their socio- and geopolitical characteristics. At the same time, the textiles are “places of memory” of the stories of their former owners, often “marked” by hand-embroidered initials that refer to past times as an “index” and now become part of Ayan Farah's works. This “cyclical” approach to textiles, which is currently finding expression in pop culture in the form of “recycled fashion”, is based on Ayan Farah's biographical roots in Somalia where the collection and processing of textiles with hand embroidery has been practiced by her family. Ayan Farah's keen eye for the availability of natural resources is also based on the fact that her ancestors were nomads who, depending on water and natural resources, moved from place to place and adapted their way of life to their immediate surroundings.



Asia, 2024

indigo, rust, india ink and marigold on hemp and linen

200 × 150 cm

In this respect, Ayan Farah's work process follows the concept of “cyclical developments”. In each new cycle, Ayan Farah uses a new element, but also incorporates materials from previous work cycles. Some textile fragments only find their “place” within a composition after ten years. In this sense, Ayan Farah's works are an allegory of past, present and future. Her recent stay in Senegal as part of the Black Rock Awards has had a significant influence on her current work cycle. In Senegal she collected leaves from indigo plants from which she later extracted pigments for coloring in her Stockholm studio. Other layers of color are based on yellow pigments that she obtained from an earlier harvest of marigolds from an empty plot near her parents' house in the Stockholm Archipelago.

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“I am interested in not just textiles but also like natural resources and minerals and how those things are like traded between countries.”

- Ayan Farah

Another important aspect are metal and rust particles that she collected during the pandemic from “lost” objects around Alfred Nobel’s former factory for dynamite in Vinterviken, Sweden, in the close vicinity of her former studio. Having been a nature reserve in the 1990s, the area had been closed after the discovery of chemical contaminations of the earth and water, and re-opened again after the soil was cleaned.

Ayan Farah sees the process of dyeing as a “performative process”. On the one hand, this refers to the extraction of the dyes, which are elaborately “mixed” in a studio kitchen, and then the folding, application of the dye, layering and drying of the textile fragments. The dyeing takes place in several layers, similar to a “building” that is constructed piece by piece. The layering of earth is an important part of the African architectural tradition, which constructs houses from layers of earth or dried stones, especially in desert regions, in dialog with the immediate surroundings. In this sense, the definition of place in Ayan Farah’s work is both personal and geopolitical. Her artistic approach thus expands far beyond the aspects of land art and abstract painting and is located in our current discussion about climate change, the distribution of natural resources and their influence on the location of our individual living space.



Infinite (Jade), 2024

Marigold and carob on linen

180 × 150 cm

Biographical Note:

Born in 1978 in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, to Somali parents, Ayan Farah grew up in Sweden and lived for a long time in London, where she studied painting at the Royal College of Art. Today she lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden. Ayan Farah’s works are in institutional collections such as Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, the Art Collection of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Klein Collection, the David Roberts Art Foundation, London, Public Art Agency Sweden and the Kadist Foundation, Paris. Recently she has exhibited at Fondazione di Prada, Sainsbury Centre of Visual Arts in Norwich, El Espacio Twenty Three in Miami (all 2023), „In the Eyes of the Beholder“ at the Tarble Arts Centre, Charleston, USA, Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, Hunterian Art Gallery in Glasgow (all 2022) and Alison and Peter Klein Foundation in 2019. In 2021 she was awarded with the Black Rock Senegal artist residency.

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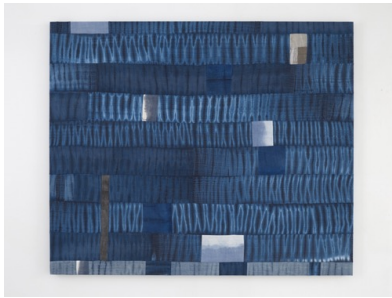
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## Ayan Farah - The Helical Rising

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Amal, 2024  
indigo, India ink  
and madder on linen  
150 × 180 cm

Amal, 2024 is created from a series of dyed strips and patches of French linen. The powerful blue hues are largely from Indigo, which was hand-picked by Ayan Farah in Senegal. The brown and black tones that appear were created by a mixture of India ink which the artist processes herself in the studio and Madder, a type of tree bark also collected in Senegal.



Ore, 2024  
India ink, rust,  
marigold flowers  
and indigo on linen  
170 × 160 cm

Ore, 2024, consists of thin strips of sewn French linens, featuring one strip of linen with open work embroidery which stretches horizontally across the entire surface. The dominant dark dyes are a combination of India ink, rust, marigold flowers and indigo. The rust samples were collected from the Alfred Nobel factory site, an area near her studio in Stockholm called „Vinterviken“, the Indigo was mostly gathered in Senegal and the marigold flowers were grown by the artist in Stockholm. The light, bright background is a clean, untouched linen, which stands apart from the other works as it is the only surface left to show the linen's natural character



Amira, 2024  
indigo, marigold leaves,  
India ink and rust  
on linen and cotton  
170 × 200 cm

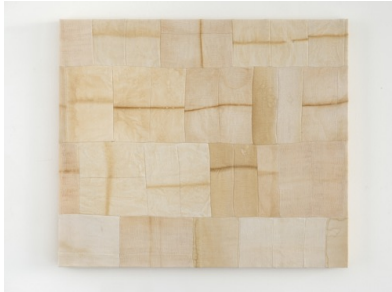
Amira is a predominantly indigo work with several pops of color through Ayans quilted patch work pattern. The work is composed of linens, sewn together in a patchwork pattern. One of the patches features an embroidered circular monogram that belongs to the former owners. The work consists of indigo, marigold, India ink and rust, on linen and cotton. The Indigo was grown in Senegal and hand-picked by the Ayan Farah. The marigold was grown by the artist in Stockholm and the rust was collected from the Alfred Nobel factory site, an area near her studio in Stockholm called „Vinterviken“.



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Dawn (Jade), 2024  
carob and clay on linen  
60 × 70 cm

Dawn (Jade) is composed of vertical and horizontal patches of French linens of the 19th century. The sewn patches are dyed using natural clay and carob that the Ayan Farah gathered in Morocco. The darker lines within the patches are the result of the drying process.



Soil - Asfi, 2024  
carob and clay on linen  
60 × 70 cm

Soil - Asfi, is composed of horizontal strips of linens from the 19th century accumulated in the south of France. The sewn patches are dyed using natural clay and carob that Ayan Farah gathered in Morocco.



Infinite (Jade), 2024  
marigold and carob  
on linen  
180 × 150 cm

Infinite (Jade) features a strict patchwork pattern with a series of horizontal lines. The lines appear in the work during the hanging and drying phase. The dyes are created from Moroccan carob that the artist collected as well as marigold that was grown by the artist in Stockholm. The textiles are linens from the 19th century of the south of France.



Soil - Safi, 2024 rust  
and clay on linen  
160 × 170 cm

Soil - Safi consists of strips and patches of sewn French linens from the 19th century. The varying shades of beige, brown and red are created from rust samples that were collected from the Alfred Nobel factory site, an area near her studio in Stockholm called „Vinterviken“ as well as clay that the artist gathered from Morocco.

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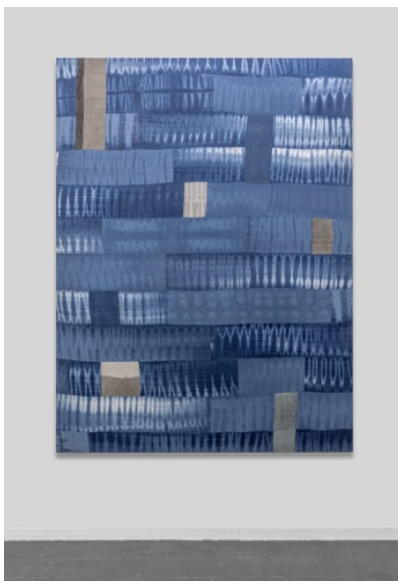
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Magma, 2024  
rust, India ink, indigo,  
marigold leaves, marigold  
petals on cotton and linen  
170 × 200 cm

Magma is composed of patches and strips of cut linen and cotton from the 19th century, sewn together in a patchwork pattern. The work consists of indigo, marigold leaves and petals, India ink and rust. The Indigo was grown in Senegal and hand-picked by the artist. The marigold was grown by the artist in Stockholm and the rust was collected from the Alfred Nobel factory site, an area near her studio in Stockholm called „Vinterviken“.



Asia, 2024  
indigo, rust, india ink and  
marigold on hemp and linen  
200 × 150 cm

Ayan Farah unites here several places and time periods. Composed in a pattern of lines and grids the work combines multiple locations, memories and working processes related to the artist's travels to specific regions around the world. The blue patches are treated with Indigo that she has hand picked in Senegal while she was on the Black Rock Senegal artist residency in Dakar. The grey patches are treated with rust collected near the Alfred Nobel blasting explosive factory in Stockholm, close to Ayan Farah's studio in an area called Vinterviken, and marigold that she has planted at her earlier Studio in England. The repetitive patterns are broken up in each row with pieces dyed in a variety of saturated pigments. This work combines all aspects of Ayan Farah's approach to art making: a conceptual investigation of coexisting times, places, histories and geologies.



Aicha, 2023  
Rust, indigo and  
sea salt on linen  
220 × 170 cm

Aicha unites several places and time periods. Composed in a pattern of lines and grids the work combines multiple locations, memories and working processes related to the artist's travels to specific regions around the world. The grey patches are treated with a mixture of rust that Ayan Farah has collected from an area near her studio called „Vinterviken“ in the Stockholm suburb of Aspudden. Some works are treated with black carob gathered in Morocco and salt from lake Assal in Djibouti. The deep blue patches are made from indigo collected near Saint Louis in Senegal while Ayan Farah was on the Black Rock Senegal artist residency in Dakar. Each material, individually treated, has then been sewn together to create the final „painting“. The textiles are antique french linen from the 19th century woven near Marseille.