

Ayan Farah

23.1.26-7.3.25

Ghost River

“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's oeuvre is at once bold, tender, and vast. Her work exudes the essence of abstraction, re-rendering reality beyond accurate depiction, where shapes, colours, and gestures interact to arrive at something else. This refusal of literal representation is not entirely intentional for the artist but a form of release that occurs as she falls into the process of art-making. Farah believes in endless possibility and boundlessness in her practice. Through stitching, attaching, painting and making anew, her work breaks free from conventional boundaries generating new language forms. Born in Sharjah, in the UAE, to Somali parents, Farah grew up in Stockholm before relocating to the UK to study art. This biographic trajectory, in many ways, encapsulates her attentive relationship to geography, materiality, and fluidity. Movement—across place, time and climate—is integral to her practice. She frequently travels to expand her material repertoire and to experiment with techniques involving pigments, dyes and found matter. From foraging marigold in the nature reserve of Nacka in Stockholm, to searching for the indigo plant in Senegal which is essential to West African dye traditions, to collecting mud samples from the Dead Sea, Farah approaches the world with a spirit of enquiry. Like a scientist, she is interested in mixing elements and observing transformations—moments when the ordinary becomes unexpected and knowledge emerges through reaction. This process of searching and collating both expands and affirms her belief that nothing is static, ephemerality shapes everything, including art. In a contemporary culture that insists on discarding and moving on, Farah insists on resuscitation and close reflection. The textiles she incorporates in her work are often recycled, carrying with them histories and contexts. These materials function simultaneously as surfaces for painting and



Celestine, 2026

Indigo on linen

170 x 130 cm

as subjects in their own right, readjusted into new textures, shapes, and patterns. She reanimates them, making them sites where past and present converge. They offer a ground onto which new marks can be inscribed, allowing memory, labour, and gesture to coexist. Farah demonstrates a rare sensitivity in creating encounters between abstract painting and textile practice, without subordinating one to the other. Her artworks resist fixed readings. Instead, they invite prolonged looking and sensory engagement, unfolding gradually through hue, tactility and scale. When the abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko stated in a 1959 interview with LIFE magazine that ‘painting is not about an experience; it is an experience’, he articulated a belief in art’s capacity to operate beyond narrative or illustration. Farah’s work mirrors this position. Her artworks summon the viewer into an encounter that stirs the senses encouraging an embodied engagement. In doing so, abstraction becomes a site of connection where transformation is not only portrayed but felt.

Written by Tawanda Appiah

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“I am interested in the circulation of fabric, both in a geopolitical sense and in its domestic use, as well as in the history of homes and family life.”

Biographical Note:

Born in 1978 in Sharjah, UAE, to Somali parents, Ayan Farah spent her childhood in Sweden before moving to London, where she earned her MA at the Royal College of Art. She lives and works in Stockholm. Recent grants and residencies include the Roberts Institute of Art Residency, Scotland; Black Rock, Dakar; and Sven-Harrys Konstmuseum, Stockholm. Recent solo and group exhibitions include *We Grown-Ups Can Also Be Afraid: Creativity in Times of Crisis*, Attenborough Arts Centre, Leicester (UK); *Black Rock Sénégal / Dak’art Biennale*, Dakar (SN); *Stockholm Cosmology*, Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm (both 2024); as well as prominent group shows at El Espacio 23, Miami (US); Cromwell Place, London (Roberts Institute of Art, UK); Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich (UK); Fondazione Prada, Venice (IT, all 2023); Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow (UK); Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (DE); The New Art Centre, Salisbury (UK, all 2022); Tarble Arts Centre, Eastern Illinois University, US; Whitechapel Gallery,



Naiad (River), 2026

Seashell pigment, clay and embroidery on canvas

200 x 150 cm

London (both 2018); and Fondation Hippocrène, Paris (FR, 2014). Her works are represented in institutional collections including Moderna Museet, Stockholm (SE); Kadist Foundation, Paris (FR); Stockholm konst (SE); Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf (DE); Sammlung Zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (DE); Public Art Agency Sweden (SE); The Hill Collection, New York (US); El Espacio 23, Miami (US); and the David and Indré Roberts Collection, London (UK).

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