

FLATPAGE

Artist's Statement by Katherine Toukhy

I am a story being told. I create figurative cut-outs, installations, and paintings to imaginatively process issues of liberation, repression, and migration.

Since the beginning of my art-making career, the female form has been my starting point. She embodies the history, chaos, and transformative potential that drives me. Using my own movements or poses that resonate with me, I re-work figurative drawings until I find shapes that are dynamic. These figurative shapes are severed, then layered with dense patterns and emotive color. I make patterns out of map lines, writings, camouflage, and plant forms.

A leg might become a mass of collaged-together bits of drawing. A face might become a sharp flower; a torso could be an ocean made of molded canvas. Disparate parts fit, sometimes held together delicately by threads, because all these pieces articulate the cycles of violence and renewal we go through.

In my installations, the figurative cut-outs come alive in space. I paint and write on the walls around them and hang translucent fabric from the ceiling to build sensual-psychological environments. The figures are not connected to a geographical or physical setting, but exist in a liminal emotional space that speaks to loss and regeneration.

I realize that a story is not created alone. I also create social sculptures, where a piece grows out of people's guided participation. The Khayamiyya Monument (2016) was my most in-depth exploration of this process. I designed activities to elicit intimate writings from women of the Afro and Arab diaspora, around the themes of migration, violent upheaval, and resilience. Female US veterans who had fought in Iraq responded to those writings with their own. As I traced the women's writings in both Arabic and English onto canvas, I came closer to embodying these stories that shape our current moment in post-9/11 America. The monument also activated a community open mic, where im/migrant women spoke their own stories and poems in public.

Through developing a personal symbolic language, I discover the multilayered beauty of women who have lived transcontinental migrations and exile. My works become a place for me to challenge the silencing of stories that do not fit today's dominant narrative of national identity.