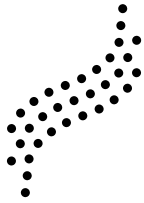


July 22 – September 16, 2023



diinsi abuur

The Bows
2001B 10th Ave SW,
Mohkinstsis/Calgary, AB

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Gallery Hours
Thursday – Saturday
12 – 6 pm

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*Related works by all three
artists are also on longterm
view at the Somali Canadian
Society of Calgary, 3940 29th
St. NE*

Kaamil A. Haider
Khadijah Muse
Mohamud Mumin

Curated by Godfre Leung

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Canada Council
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Conseil des arts
du Canada

The Bows
Mohkinstsis (Calgary, AB)

Diinsi Abuur

Kaamil A. Haider, Khadijah Muse, Mohamud Mumin

Diinsi Abuur is an exhibition of new, abstract works by Minneapolis-based Somali diaspora artists Kaamil A. Haider, Khadijah Muse, and Mohamud Mumin. Their artistic practices are driven by a common urge to comprehend their histories, embracing Somali art history among other sources of cultural knowledge. As Somali art history (as a coherent narrative) has become fragmented due to the large waves of migration and diaspora since the 1990s, each artist presents a distinct perspective on this history through the lens of their hybrid identities.

In *Diinsi Abuur*, Haider, Muse, and Mumin look to the fluidity of abstraction, with its myriad entry points, to transcend literal representation and conventional narrative, in pursuit of an engagement with history guided by complex ideas and emotions.

Drawing inspiration from the Somali term *Abuur*, meaning to plant, the artists intimate the act of planting a seed after meticulous preparation in their artworks, which emerge through different stages of ideation, research, production, and ultimately the act of sharing with a community, now or in the future. Philosophically, these works will coalesce in their interaction with an audience, in parallel to the activation of *Abuur* by the forces of nature. *Abuur* symbolizes the boundless possibilities of this exhibition and the connections that have already taken root, across Canada and the United States.

Diinsi (Balanophoraceae) is a resilient plant revered for its healing properties in many cultures. Ground finely, *Diinsi* is often transformed into a gastronomic elixir. For Haider, Muse, and Mumin, *Diinsi* was often used in their homes as a substitute for conventional Western medicine by their mothers. Its invocation in this exhibition honours their concept of home and the cherished memories it resides in.

Diinsi Abuur waa bandhig cusub oo ay sameynayaan farshaxamiistayaal ka mid ah qurbajoogta Soomaaliyeed oo kala ah Kaamil A. Haider, Khadiija Muse, iyo Mohamud Mumin kuwaasoo fadhigoodu yahay Minneapolis. Qaabka farshaxankooda waxaa dhaqaajiyo rabitaan guud oo ah inay fahmaan taariikhahooda, iyagoo isla markaana aqbalayo taariikhda farshaxanka Soomaalida iyo ilaha kale ee ku aaddan aqoonta dhaqanka. Maadaama taariikhda farshaxanka Soomaaliyeed (oo aheyd sheeko u socotay hal jiho oo isku xiran) ay haatan noqotay mid kala firidhay sababo la xiriira mowjadaha waaweyn ee soo-galootinnimada iyo qurbo-joogidda billaabatay tan iyo 1990-meeyadii, farshaxamiiste walba wuxuu soo bandhigayaa aragti gaar ah oo ku saabsan taariikhdan iyadoo lagu eegayo ilo isku dhafan oo ka kala yimaaday aqoonsiga gaarka u ah farshaxamiistayaasha.

Bandhigga ah *Diinsi Abuur*, waxay Haider, Muse, iyo Mumin diiradda saarayaan habsamida farshaxanka dahsoon kaasoo leh xagallo kala duwan oo wax laga eegi karo si looga gudbo sheeko ku jaango'an uun macno ahaan daahirka waxa muuqda ku eg oo caadina ka dhex ah bulshada. Waxay hal-abuuradu taa beddelkeeda raadinayaan farshaxan la fal-galo taariikhda kaasoo ay hagayaan fikrado iyo shucuur lakabyo badan leh.

Iyagoo ka shidaal-qaadanayo ereyga af-Soomaaliga ahee *Abuur*, kaasoo asalkiisu yahay wax abuurid, farshaxamiistayaashu waxay farshaxankoodu ku xirayaan ficilka abuurka iniinta ka dib markii ay iyaguna sidoo kale si taxaddar ku dheehan u diyaariyeen abuurka farshaxankooda, kaasoo soo maray marxalado kala duwan oo kala ah xag fikrad keenid, xag cilmi-baaris, xag soosaarid, iyo ugu dambeyntiina xag ficilka ah la wadaagidda bulshada, kuwooda joogo maanta iyo mustaqbalkaba. Falsafad ahaan, farshannadaan way isbiirsan doonaan ka dib markii ay la fal-galaan bulshada daawaneysa si la mid ah sida uu noqdo abuurka yar markuu la fal-galo xoogagga dabiiciga ah sida qorraxda, biyaha, dabeysha, iyo ciidda. Farshaxanka *Abuur* wuxuu metelaad u yahay fursadaha aan xaddidnayn ee bandhigga iyo sidoo kale xiriirka xididdeystay ee ka dhexeeyo Kanada iyo Mareykanka.

Geedka la dhaho *Diinsi* (Balanophoraceae) waa geed adkaysi leh oo sifooyinkiisa caafimaad awgood aad looga dhex qaddariyo dhaqamo badan. Markii si fiican loo riiqo, *Diinsigu* wuxuu isu beddelaa qoosh daawo leh afka laga qaato. Dhammaan guryaha Haider, Muse, iyo Mumin waxa ay hooyooyinkoodu badanaaba *Diinsiga* u isticmaali jireen inuu galo kaalinta daawada casriga ah ee caadiga dunida ka ah maanta. In *Diinsiga* lagu xuso bandhigan waxa ay maamuus u tahay fekerkooda ku aaddan waxa uu guri yahay iyo weliba xusuusaha qiimaha badan ee uu *Diinsigu* ku leeyahay dhexdeenna.

Orality, Abstraction, Hand Habits

Godfre Leung

—

I'd like to begin with a work that is not in this exhibition: Kaamil A. Haider's *Totem: Sands of Memories*, a small sandbox whose bottom is lined with an abstract geometric composition, made from different colours of duct tape. The audience interacts with *Totem* by drawing in the sand with a stick, revealing passages of the composition underneath. The action that activates and sustains *Totem* is based on the meeting of Somali people in East Africa. As relayed by the Somali artist Mahamood Issa, "When two nomads cross paths, they routinely converse about the state of grazing and availability of water. While one talks, the other will take his walking stick and draw beautiful design in the sands. Then an hour later, they would be gone on their separate paths and the design would be gone too; and the art would be gone as well." *Totem* imagines the form and maybe also "content" of these drawings that accompany how Somali people identify to one another who they are and where they come from; how they share news, exchange greetings, and come into relation. Some of these drawings might depict places of origin or paths of travel, while others might be aimless doodles—ephemeral discharge of hand habits that are in a sense indexical to speech, like hand gesticulations rendered temporarily pictorial.

Somali culture is oral. As such, the transmission of Somali cultural knowledge is simultaneously precarious and ingenious. This ingenuity in the face of precarity is at the heart of Haider's, Khadijah Muse's, and Mohamud Mumin's respective artistic practices, as well

as of their collective endeavour as the co-founders and stewards of Soomaal House of Art. Presented in January 2018 as part of the second season of Soomaal House of Art's *Spearwave* exhibitions, the *Totem* sandbox was also moved outdoors during an event and restaged with snow in the place of sand, dramatizing the persistence of Somali relations in the diaspora. During their site visit to Mohkínstsis (Calgary) in 2022, Haider, Muse, and Mumin gifted a version of *Totem* to the Somali Canadian Society of Calgary, which had hosted an event so that they could introduce themselves to the local Somali community.

The current exhibition, *Diinsi Abuur*, revolves around abstraction. Each artist's work also engages handiwork. In *Totem*, we encountered a productive inversibility of figure and ground. On the one hand, the free play of negative space in the sand drawings revealed the geometric grid beneath them. Conversely, it also left open the possibility that the doodley strokes of the stick are motivated by the underlying abstract composition that it is working to uncover. In the latter case, can the manual intuition initiated by *Totem* be led by geometric abstraction? And, if so, what relation might there be between Somali ingenuity and the revolutionary materialism of the early twentieth-century avant-garde? Between the nomadic and the neoplastic? Between orality and *faktura*?

Khadijah Muse's *Interwoven Paths* are easel paintings based on the designs of traditional Somali weavings. These weavings are commonly used as both mats—including prayer mats, but also domestic mats for sitting—and as portable coverings for Somali *aqallo*-huts. Usually made from dyed wild grass and composed intuitively in unplanned geometric patterns, the handiwork of weaving was a communal activity among Somali women, during the course of which wisdom was shared between generations through

chatter, storytelling, and singing. In this hand-mouth coordination, consonant to that of *Totem*, one is tempted to treat the paintings as a visual byproduct of the more important work of Somali oral relations, a kind of “thick” orality that traditionally bore the weight of carrying culture across time in the absence of written records. But to take the paintings—and weavings—seriously as themselves technical objects, they also are a testament to women’s place in Somali culture as builders of literal, physical homes—in addition to building figurative homes in their role as, in Muse’s words, “bearers of wisdom, carriers of history, creators of safe communities, and healers.”

In the context of Somali diaspora and the *longue durée* of its instigation, *Interwoven Paths* raises a question that calls to account the afterlife of modernism and its universalizing ambitions (both actual and imagined): what is an easel painting to a nomad? And how might the portability of the easel painting as a medium articulate modalities of shelter and diaspora, in the manner of one Canadian peer, Jinny Yu? Or conversely their opposite—colonial discipline and blight—as in the work of another peer, Kapwani Kiwanga?

Kaamil A. Haider’s *Maangaro* also engages the manual, in this case via the medium of writing. Working from Somali proverbs handed down from his mother—Somali proverbs are alliterative—Haider composes graphic panels from the letter in the Somali script Kaddare that notates each proverb’s central repeated consonant. Centralized Somali writing is a relatively recent phenomenon: the rhythm of the mouth is transcribed through a writing system invented belatedly to phonetically notate it. In *Maangaro*, Haider reinvests the scriptic form—and, by proxy, the hand that writes it—with the sensuousness of the rhythm that it records (or, to invoke media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s diagnosis that writing systems “store time,” *Maangaro* inverts

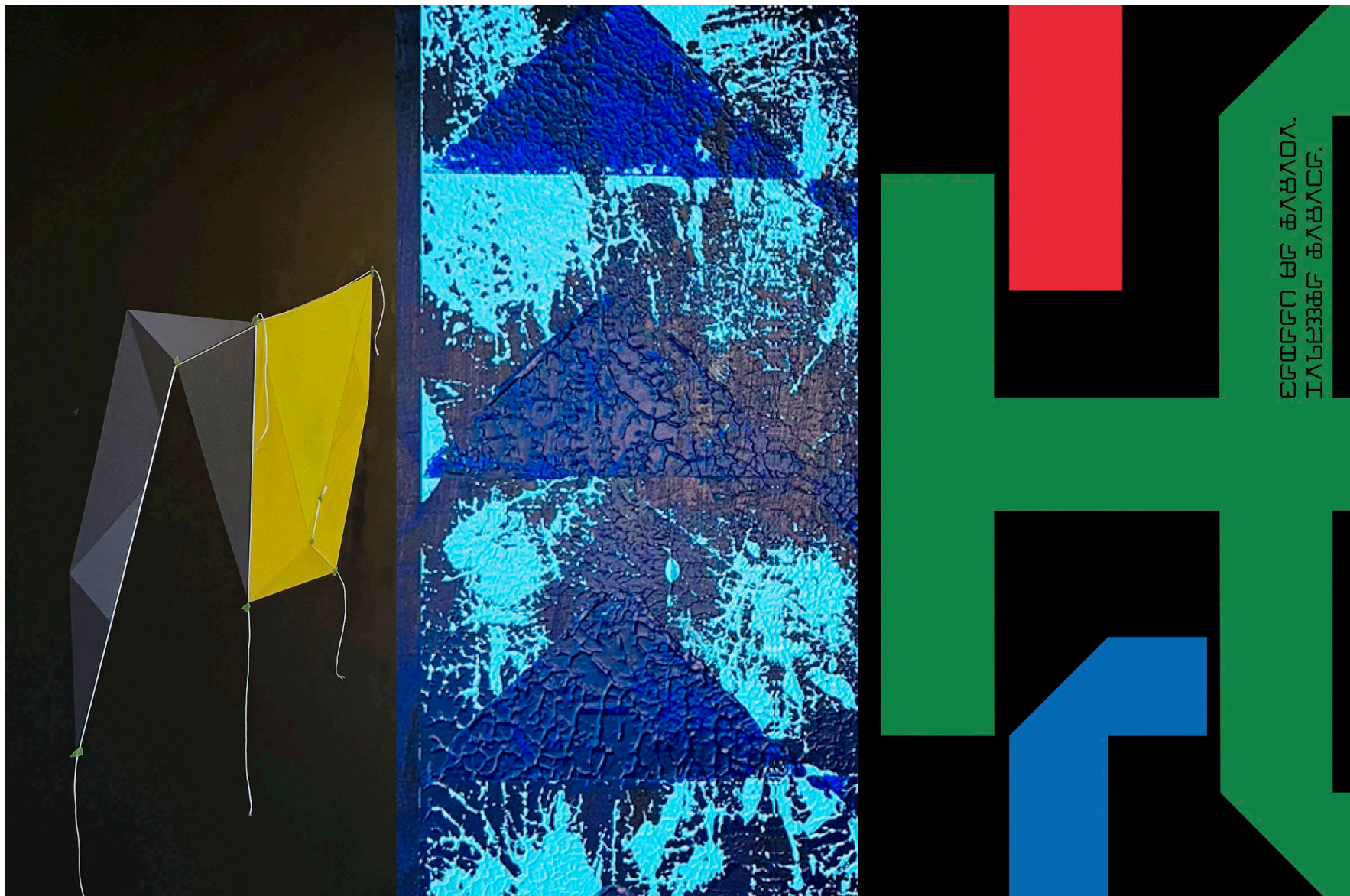
writing: *re-storing* rhythm by unfolding it through the materiality of the letter).

Mohamud Mumin’s works in the exhibition are based on a kind of talisman/amulet common to multiple Islamic traditions in Africa. At critical moments, one visits an Imam, who writes a prayer or verse from the Quran addressing the visitor’s need and subsequently folds it diagonally many times until it is a small square. The folded prayer is then encased in a leather pouch that is threaded with a rope or string and worn on various parts of the body as an amulet. In Mumin’s ongoing body of work with the talisman/amulet, he explores unfolded configurations of the parchment, resulting in elaborate, almost moebius-like constructions. These have taken the forms of two-dimensional paintings, three-dimensional sculptures (some of which can be worn as headpieces), and video. In the video triptych *Muraaya*, Mumin presents footage taken during his research visits to Mogadishu and Nairobi on two channels, which flank a video shot through a camera encased in a box outfitted with tilted mirrors constructed like the folded amulet. This central, kaleidoscopic channel places the viewer in talismanic space, and Mumin’s visits back to East Africa are thus guided by numinous prayer and presented as heterotopic. In the talisman/amulet works, the fold is a figure of inversion: the liminal passage between what is revealed and what is hidden, between the mundane and the sacred. Recalling works by postwar artists Lygia Clark, François Morellet, and Franz Erhard Walther, they also figure the manual activity of hands to be the effectors of this passage.

The social, participatory ambitions of Clark and Walther, as they index the legacy of the geometric abstraction of the historical avant-garde, offer a prism through which to view Haider, Muse, and Mumin’s enterprise. As collectively Soomaal House of Art, they

have been at the heart of a Somali art renaissance in Minneapolis, home to the world's largest Somali community outside of East Africa and colloquially said to be a site of passage for more than half of the Somali diaspora to the United States at some point in their resettlement journey. This endeavour has been continuous with Soomaal's larger project to build an international network of Somali diaspora artists—which has included artistic exchange with

communities and organizations in Africa, Scandinavia, Western Europe, around the US, and now Alberta. This project will ultimately come to a close with an upcoming exhibition at Soomaal House Gallery in Minneapolis of Alberta-based Somali artists, an inversion of Haider, Muse, and Mumin's visit to Mohkínstsis to present *Diinsi Abuur*. The handiwork of the weave and the fold, like the nomadic sand doodle, are reciprocal acts.



Artworks by the artists.

From left to right;
Mohamud Mumin,
Khadijah Muse,
and Kaamil A. Haider.

Kaamil A. Haider is a visual artist, graphic designer, and archivist. Through his practices, he researches the nuanced relationships between objects, shared meanings, and the heritage of contemporary Somali art, with a particular focus on language and memory. Kaamil incorporates diverse cultural, archival, and oral references in his work.

Kaamil holds a Master's degree in Heritage Studies & Public History and BFA in graphic design from College of Design, University of Minnesota. He is the recipient of many prestigious awards, fellowships, and grants, and currently teaches at Augsburg University.

Khadijah Muse is a visual artist and arts organizer based in Minneapolis. Her practice is greatly influenced by her commitment to community building. Khadijah uses art as a tool to explore interpersonal and environmental relationships using various mediums, including photography, woodworking, sculpture, and installation.

Understanding the power of art, Khadijah facilitates opportunities for other Somali artists to optimize their artistic potential. She is the director of Soomaal House of Art.

Khadijah holds a BS in Sociology from the University of Minnesota. She was a 2019 Soomaal Fellow, an initiative by Soomaal House of Art in partnership with Augsburg University Art Gallery, and an Art(ists) On the Verge Fellow with Northern Lights.mn in 2020.

Mohamud Mumin is an artist and curator at Soomaal House of Art. His artistic pursuits cover a diverse range of mediums, including but not limited to photography, experimental film, installation, painting, and sculpture. A recipient of many awards, Mumin's work has been exhibited in community spaces, galleries, and museums in the United States and abroad.

Collectively Kaamil A. Haider, Khadijah Muse, and Mohamud Mumin are co-founders of **Soomaal House of Art**. Soomaal House of Art is a Minnesota-based Somali artist collective that works with students and emerging and established artists to find artistic community, mentorships, and opportunities. It provides a platform for Somali visual artists around the world who want to create and use art to shape and frame critical discourse around vexing local and global issues of our time. Presently, the facilitators of Soomaal House of Art's diverse programs also include Khadija Charif, Wasima Farah, and Muna Scekomar.

Abdi Roble is the founder and executive director of the Somali Documentary Project and a multi-award-winning documentary photographer and community archivist who has exhibited internationally. Abdi has worked for over a decade to document Somali migration globally. He is currently working on an archive based on his documentary photography work and collection of historical manuscripts, postcards, and photographs of Somalis around the globe in the past century.

Along with writer Doug Rutledge, his book *The Somali Diaspora: A Journey Away* was published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2008.

Godfre Leung is an art critic and the curator at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. He has most recently organized exhibitions by Dionne Lee and Sesemiya at CAG, as well as *TJ Shin: The Vegetarian* (The Bows, 2022), *Offsite: Christopher K. Ho* (Vancouver Art Gallery, 2022), *Guesthood and Alienhood: Sun Yung Shin, Jinny Yu, Republic of the Other* (Hotam Press Gallery, 2021), and *Pao Houa Her: Emplotment* (Or Gallery, 2020). His writing has recently appeared in *ArtAsiaPacific*, *ASAP/Journal*, *C Magazine*, and *ReIssue*. He was the artistic director at The Bows, 2021–2022.