

Rand Abdul Jabbar. Installation view of *Molding Anew* at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, 2024.
Photography by Ismail Noor / Seeing Things. Image courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabibi



THROUGH THE HANDS OF TIME

Rand Abdul Jabbar breathes new life into ancient crafts and narratives in her solo exhibition at **Lawrie Shabibi** in Dubai, as her work dances between the past and the present.

Words by Yalda Bidshahri

Rand Abdul Jabbar's practice explores myth-making as cultural preservation and transformation. In *Molding Anew* (ended 6 December), curated by Meitha Almazrooei at Lawrie Shabibi, Her works blur the passage of time, weaving together the ancient and the contemporary. Across multiple media, the works draw directly from the traditions of the artist's ancient

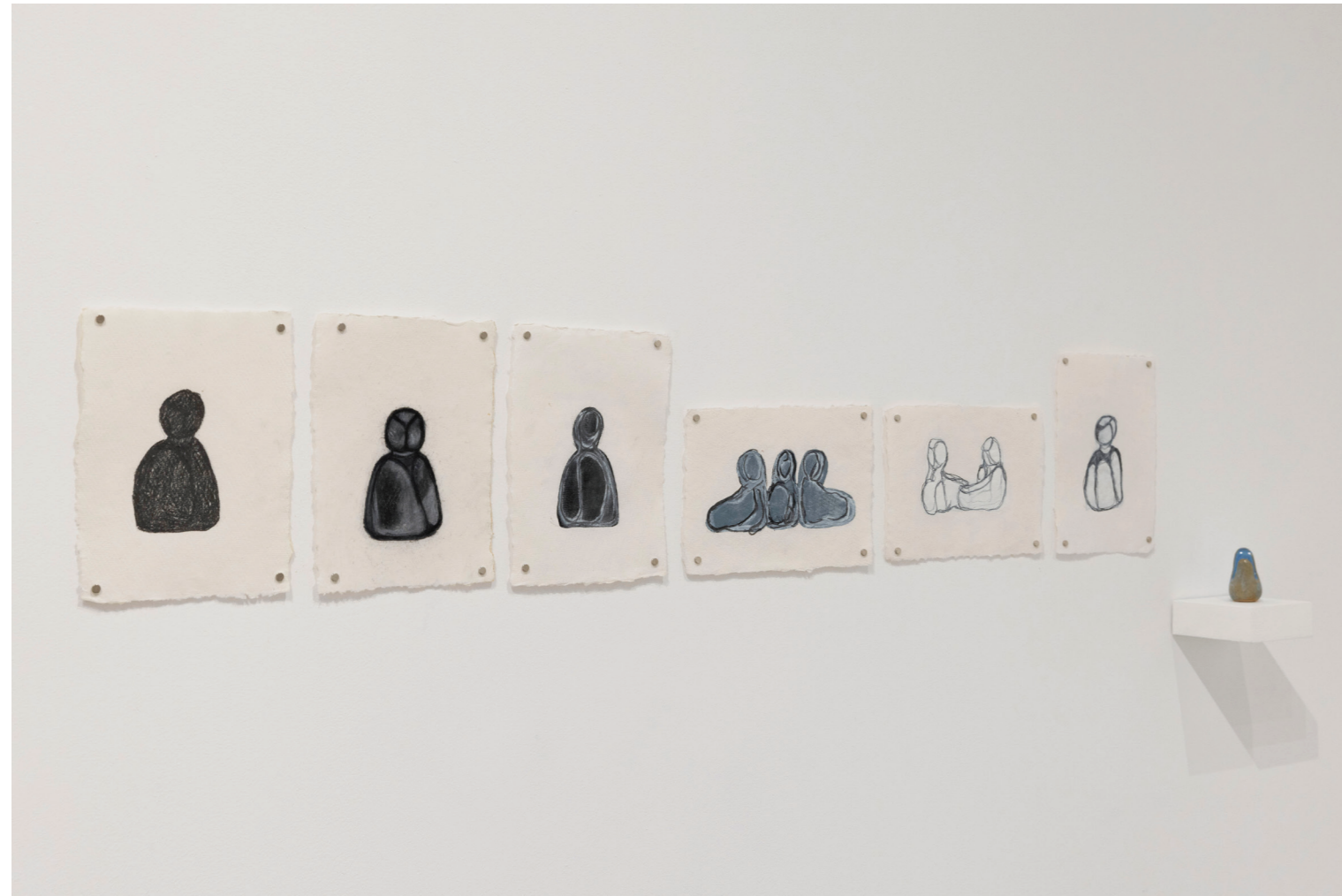
Mesopotamian forebears, reverberating their legacy in forms that reclaim, preserve and transform, giving new life.

The main gallery was transformed into a sculptural landscape, where plinths resembled clay vases that mimicked the rise and fall of sandy dunes. Atop each of these bases were countless small ceramic sculptures from the series *Earthly Wonders*,



Rand Abdul Jabbar. *Tracing Origins - Untitled (Tapestry)*. 2022. Variation 1. Tracings of ceramic objects on embossing foil. 42 x 29 x 1 cm. Photography by Ismail Noor / Seeing Things. Image courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabibi

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Celestial Beings (2019–ongoing). The glazed stoneware pieces evoke ancient Mesopotamian symbolism of fertility figures, eye idols and crowns. A blue sculpture suggests a seated human form, while an orange piece has two rounded elements atop its structure. Each piece carries an abstract yet familiar resonance. Clay’s malleability, memory and connection to culture and history make it a fitting material for the practice of an artist whose work collapses time. The act of moulding clay – rolling, shaping and pressing – echoes the gestures of countless hands, embodying an enduring knowledge passed down through generations. Yet the transformation through firing turns this once-ephemeral material into something permanent, capable of withstanding time. Through this alchemy, Abdul Jabbar captures the dualities central to her work: the ephemeral and the eternal, the ancient and the contemporary, the crafted and the conceptual.

Alphabet (2024) presents the iconography of Abdul Jabbar’s forms as an evolving language of signs and symbols. This

series features five distinct compositions printed on linen, created using individual blocks, each derived from one of her sculptural works. On the wall, the linen panels were aligned with five chapters of the narrative text that the artist authored and which served as the central narrative for the exhibition. The relationship between the panels and the text offered viewers a layered experience of Abdul Jabbar’s practice. Each panel unfolded as a visual representation of a chapter, yet the forms allowed new interpretations to emerge. The work encouraged personal readings, creating a dialogue between the artist’s myth-making and the viewer’s engagement.

Nearby, five framed foil tracings hung in a row, continuing the exploration of material culture that connects the past to the present. The soft impressions, created by embossing ceramic heirlooms onto golden foil, recall decorative antiques once treasured in Abdul Jabbar’s family home. Despite her diasporic experience – she was born in Baghdad and spent much of her

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life in Abu Dhabi – the artist maintains a strong connection to her Iraqi heritage through the embedded narratives of these objects. Their embossed forms, with shimmering surfaces and subtle details, invite close examination: is that a palm tree? Do those shapes make out words? The process of embossing transforms these objects into fragile yet enduring imprints, preserving their cultural weight while leaving space for interpretation.

In a smaller room, black-and-white drawings on white paper enveloped the intimate space. *مذكورا ليكن (may it be remembered)* (2023) is a series of finely detailed drawings inspired by archival family footage of Abdul Jabbar’s late uncle Maan visiting the ancient city of Hatra in the 1990s. One drawing recreates a still from the footage as the camera zooms in on the statues and bas-reliefs that adorn the walls of Hatra’s monumental structures, capturing their weathered beauty and resilience in the face of time and upheaval. Abdul Jabbar’s

drawings recreate these sculptural forms with precision. A face is depicted with a wide-eyed frozen expression, embodying vulnerability and strength. The ancient sculptures, eroded by history, bear silent witness to cycles of loss and perseverance. Abdul Jabbar’s meticulous hand breathes new life into them, transforming the act of drawing into one of revival. By reanimating these figures, her work does not simply replicate the past but also gives breath to what might otherwise be lost. It’s a refusal to forget.

Whether it is in the family archives that the artist manipulates, the imprints she makes of heirlooms or the clay she transforms into glazed stoneware, the works in the exhibition were a kind of resurrection. What emerged from *Molding Anew* was a new voice to ancient narratives. Bridging the ephemeral and the permanent, connecting age-old crafts to contemporary artistic expression, Abdul Jabbar’s work collapses divisions as she moves seamlessly between different media and chronologies. ■