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Exhibition 04

BETWEEN HANDS AND METAL

23.08.24 - 21.09.24

**Private View:
Thursday 22nd August, 6-9pm**

**Alia Hamaoui
Amba Sayal Bennett
Raheel Khan**

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Palmer Gallery is delighted to present *Between Hands and Metal*, the gallery's fourth exhibition. Bringing together the work of Alia Hamaoui, Amba Sayal Bennett, and Raheel Khan, and taking a line from Walter Benjamin—"when reaching for the spoon, we hardly know what goes on between hands and metal"—as its starting point, *Between Hands and Metal* explores the theoretical notion of "contact" as a push and pull between estrangement and connection. This exhibition offers a reflective inquiry into the multifaceted nature of contact, recognizing both its destructive legacies as a form of violence and its potential for embodied resistance. By engaging with specific layered spatial contexts, the exhibition invites viewers to contemplate the enduring impact of pivotal moments of encounter, considering how they continue to shape historical narratives.

The notion of contact can be explored through Merleau-Ponty's theory of embodied presence. Within his phenomenological study of perception and essences, Merleau-Ponty asserts the necessity of connecting the body to space and how movement is crucial to our understanding of the world. The works in *Between Hands and Metal* therefore push and pull the viewers from objective space (a map) to oriented space (first person). In doing so, it entangles the viewer's body between such spaces, critiquing dichotomies and suggesting a deeply intertwined relationship. Each artist in *Between Hands and Metal* examines this duality by pondering its interplay with various imperial histories and its impact across different eras—past, present, and future.

Alia Hamaoui's work, for example, folds body, architecture, and artifact into an inseparable entanglement. Her sculptures are informed by the use of archaeology within nationalist ideologies and their permeability into mass media rituals of today, an example of which is Phoenicianism, a colonial legacy of the French mandate in which the archaeology of the ancient Phoenician civilization was used to inform post-1930s Lebanese identity. Hamaoui's sculptures confront the historical dimensions of contact by juxtaposing symbols of the ancient with contemporary attire. Upholstered padded sporting forms crafted from terracotta-toned fabrics hang alongside pewter and ceramic renditions of ancient Phoenician weapons. These textures and materials evoke a tactile intimacy, sitting between tool and adornment to reflect the physical and symbolic dimensions of the circularity of the returning past and consider the effects of such legacies today. By staging these unwearable sculptures in what she terms a "contemporary ruin" — a "gothicised" recreation of the changing rooms at the now semi-derelict Chamoun Sports Stadium in South Beirut—Hamaoui uses the gothic trope of the "ruin" as a suggestion to overturn established hierarchies and provoke a redistribution of value within space. Through its progressive destruction, a ruin creates room for new spatial configurations in the future.

Amba Sayal Bennett's work delves into colonial botany and imperial gardens, examining how colonization and cultivation are entangled through the imposition of certain crops and plants. For *Between Hands and Metal*, her focus turns to rubber, a commodity that, by 1873, had surpassed the value of silver due to its high demand. The usefulness of rubber led to its extensive transfer and proliferation across the globe.



Tripartite (crescentic axe), Alia Hamaoui, 2024, denim, shoulder pad, stoneware ceramic, 40 x 30 x 8 cm

Facilitated by the British government, Henry Wickham illicitly obtained 70,000 rubber seeds from Brazil in 1876. These seeds were transported to Kew Gardens before being distributed to the colonies for cultivation. However, contrary to their success in Southeast Asia, the seeds failed to thrive in India. Sayal Bennett's work reflects on how these attempts at contact through the transfer of resources reveal deeper dynamics of exploitation and resistance.

For *Between Hands and Metal*, Raheel Khan continues his exploration of low-frequency signals that act as materials of devotion and resistance. The subwoofers sit as sculptural gestures, stacked and fragmented away from the rest of a sound system. The design is based on a generic template chosen by Khan due to its brutalist aesthetic and functionality; this version, however, he has rendered in a soft blue hue. For the audio composition, Khan hints towards the experience of traversing a contemporary cityscape, questioning the politics of reducing complex machines and infrastructures to various patterns of vibrating hums, thumps, and rumbles. It also leans towards the soundtrack of his childhood, which, as he states, was filled with both Pakistani folk and devotional music, as well as the hybrid space where garage and grime were both moving towards dubstep—all of the above pummeling through the bass bin in his older brother's car.

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Khan was experiencing, as Dhanveer Singh Brar writes, an aesthetic project of the diaspora, which, due to music's class character, created the possibility to reorganize life within a contemporary city, generating genuine alternatives to the functioning of a city under hyper-financialization. Khan also furthers his interest in various motifs of geometry that collide mysticism with contemporary belief systems. Focusing on a process of sourcing prayer mats from various charity shops across East London, he folds and individually hangs them, resulting in devotional geometry that becomes stuck, mounted yet directionless, ghostly, and inoperative for its intended purpose. He removes these religious and cultural artifacts from their expected environments, questioning the identity of the spiritual and the grounded against the backdrop of choice, commodification, and hyper-logistics in the UK.

Through their diverse artistic practices, the artists in *Between Hands and Metal* highlight how contact – both historical and contemporary – shapes our understanding of cultural ownership, exchange, and progress. By reflecting on these varied dimensions, the artists pose important questions about the enduring impact of contact on our shared histories and the ongoing dialogues around colonialism and identity, urging us to confront the legacies of our interconnected past.



Low Toms, Raheel Khan, 2024, MDF valchromat, sub driver, amplifier, cables, 126 x 63 x 65cm

About the Artists

Alia Hamaoui (b.1996) is a British-Lebanese artist living and working in London. Her multidisciplinary practice explores the proximate relationship of humanity and heritage and aims to advance our understanding of the interrelationship between cultural identity, the object and place, as viewed from within our increasingly tech-infused existence. She is particularly interested in specific cultural artefacts that have been utilised by the cultural industry in shaping broader narratives of regional or national identity. She completed her undergraduate studies at Camberwell College of Arts, and is currently studying for an MFA at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is a founding member of Collective Ending and a member of gobyfish collective, a cooking art collective. Recent solo exhibitions include 'HINO 500' at San Mei Gallery (London, 2023) and 'Passing Pari-daiza' at Soup Gallery (London, 2023). Recent group projects include 'Rumbles in the Gut', Forma HQ (London 2024), 'Backbone', Carbon 12 (Dubai 2024).

Amba Sayal Bennett (b.1991) is a British-Indian artist living in London working across drawing, projection, and sculptural installation. Her practice explores how methods of abstraction are exclusionary and performative, crafting boundaries between what is present, manifestly absent, and othered. Her recent work focuses on the migration of modernist forms and their role within fascist and brutalist architecture. Using translation as method, she explores the movement of bodies, knowledge and form across different sites, processes inherent to the diasporic experience. She received her BFA from Oxford University and her MA in Sculpture from the Royal College of Art. She was awarded her PhD in Art Practice and Learning from Goldsmiths and has published her practice-based research with Tate Papers. She is currently an Associate Lecturer at Camberwell College of Arts. Recent exhibitions include Artist's Rooms, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai (2024); Geometries of Difference, Somerset House, London (2022); Horror in the Modernist Block, IKON, Birmingham (2022); My Mother Was a Computer, indigo+madder, London (2022); and Tomorrow, White Cube, London (2021).

Raheel Khan (b.1992) is an artist and musician exploring the interstices of sound, text, installation and performance. Originally an economist, Khan has moved towards an artistic practice that observes the effects of transnationalism, cultural infrastructures & vacant policy, often finding language through subject and material. His current research explores the cyclical nature of time and promise through a compositional framework he describes as machine, devotion and the acoustic. Khan was recently awarded the Almacantar studio residency & bursary for his MFA degree show at Goldsmiths in 2024, as well as the Lisson Gallery and Aziz Foundation scholarships for his MFA in 2022. Selected exhibitions include Longsight Community Art Space, Manchester (2024), Deptford X, London (2023) Ovada Gallery, Oxford (2023), Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester (2022). Selected performances and talks include Cromwell Place, London (2024), Ormside Projects, London (2024), University of Bergen, Norway (2024) Audiograft Festival, Oxford (2023), Attenborough Centre for Contemporary Art, Brighton (2023), Whitechapel Gallery, London (2022).