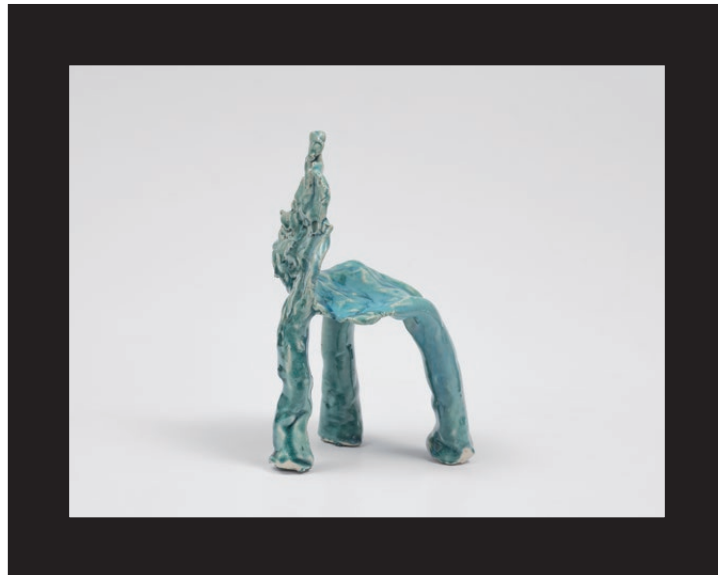


Exhibition

Simone Fattal. Suspension of Disbelief

12 Dec. 2024 — 01 Jun. 2025



Simone Fattal, *Three-legged Centaur*, 2004.
Courtesy of the artist. Photo: François Fernandez

Press Dossier
Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

IVAM35

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12 Dec. 2024 — 01 Jun. 2025

Curators:
Nuria Enguita and Rafael Barber

Exhibition design:
Sina Sohrab



IVAM

Sponsor



Simone Fattal. Suspension of Disbelief

Simone Fattal is an artist born in Syria in 1942 and raised in Lebanon. Fattal studied philosophy in Paris and established herself as an artist in the late 1970s in Beirut, where she exhibited her paintings until the start of the Lebanese civil war. She left Lebanon in 1980 and settled in California, where she founded The Post-Apollo Press, a publishing house dedicated to innovative and experimental literary works. In 1988, she enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute to go back to making art and activate a new dedication to sculpture and ceramics.

The exhibition *Suspension of Disbelief* is the artist's first exhibition in Spain and brings together 85 works spanning a timeframe from 1999 to 2023. Simone Fattal's multidisciplinary



Simone Fattal, *Mermaids*, 2004.
Courtesy of the artist



Simone Fattal, *Man on the Moon*, 2003.
Courtesy of the artist

practice conceives time as an elastic entity that transcends distinctions between past, present and future. Her work draws on mythology, spanning from ancient Egypt to Sunni mysticism and Greco-Roman tradition, creating archetypal figures that integrate historical narratives into the present.

Predominantly sculptural, her work is undertaken in a multicultural and nomadic space, different from that of official history. This space transports the viewer to a “historical place” of an almost archaeological, multilingual and polytheistic nature that, even so, exists and manifests itself in the present.



Simone Fattal, *Youth*, 2005.
Courtesy of the artist



Simone Fattal, *Zbat El Himma*, 2006.
Courtesy Sharjah Art Foundation Collection

Through media such as sculpture, painting and photography, Fattal explores the limits of figuration, drawing inspiration from historical figures of the Mediterranean, creating a cosmogony of resistant bodies and architectures. Her sculptures in bronze, clay and stone-ware evoke literature, Sumerian tales, Arabic epics and Sufi poetry. Angels, centaurs, heroes and gods join architectural ruins and figures of fruits and animals, alluding to the loss of

historical places such as Palmyra or Aleppo. These works, timeless and simultaneously archaic and modern, reflect on humanity and its place in the world and history.

Fattal has been awarded the 2024 Julio González International Prize for her contribution to contemporary art. To commemorate the award, the IVAM is organising this exhibition which reviews the main lines of work of this Franco-Lebanese artist.



Simone Fattal, *Stele*, 2008.
Courtesy of the artist



Simone Fattal, *Woman on a rock*, 2009.
Courtesy of the artist

BIOGRAPHY

Simone Fattal, born in Damascus, Syria, in 1942, is primarily a sculptor, although her work also expands into areas such as painting, sculpture and collage. Her work is deeply influenced by her experiences in many cultures and locations, especially in the Middle East, Europe and the United States. Fattal's artistic production is distinguished by its commitment to history, mythology and her personal memory.

Fattal spent her childhood in Damascus until her family moved to Beirut, Lebanon, where she attended a boarding school. The cultural milieu of Beirut in the 1950s and 1960s had a considerable influence on her intellectual and artistic development. She studied philosophy at the *École des Lettres* in Beirut and later at the Sorbonne in Paris, where she also attended classes at the *École du Louvre*.

After completing her studies in Paris in 1969, Fattal returned to Beirut and began her artistic career as a self-taught artist, devoting herself to painting. Her early works are characterised by abstract and colourful landscapes, evoking iconic Lebanese landmarks such as Mount Sannine and the Beirut waterfront. During this period, in 1971, she began



Simone Fattal, *Visitation I*, 2008.
Courtesy of the artist



Simone Fattal, *Visitation II*, 2008.
Courtesy of the artist

production of her film *Autoportrait*, completed in 2013. In 1973 she held her first solo exhibition at Gallery One in Beirut.

Following the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, her artistic career was put on hold. In 1980, as the conflict escalated, Fattal and her partner, the poet and artist Etel Adnan, decided to leave Beirut and settle in Sausalito, in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. In 1982 she founded the publishing house The Post-Apollo Press, dedicated to the publication of innovative and experimental literature. One of the first published works was the English translation of Etel Adnan's novel *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978).

The establishment of The Post-Apollo Press represented a significant shift in Fattal's career as she immersed herself in the publishing field. It was not until 1988 that she resumed her artistic work, dedicating herself to sculpture. She attended courses at the College of Marin and the San Francisco Art Institute. Her first sculpture, *Torso Found in Today's Downtown Beirut* (1988), made of alabaster, marked the beginning of her exploration of the human figure through abstract and minimalist designs. This

piece, along with her later sculptures in bronze, ceramic and stoneware, reflects her connection to her Middle Eastern cultural heritage and her ongoing exploration of themes of displacement, memory and history.

Fattal's sculptures are often figurative, presenting human and animal forms reduced to their essential elements. Her work evokes the aesthetics of ancient artifacts, as if they were archaeological relics. This reference to antiquity is a central aspect of her work, as Fattal conceives her sculptures as a way of documenting and preserving the collective memory of human civilization, especially that of the Middle East. Her work not only reflects on the past, but also offers commentary on contemporary issues such as war, migration and cultural identity.

Fattal's deep knowledge of history, mythology and literature is evident in her work. She often draws inspiration from ancient texts such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* or *The Odyssey*, as well as religious narratives, mixing these references with contemporary themes in her sculptures and collages, creating a dialogue between past and present.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Fattal and Adnan moved to France, where Fattal worked for several years with the ceramist Hans Spinner in Grasse. It wasn't until 2019 that she had her first major retrospective in a museum, specifically at MoMA PS1 in New York. The exhibition, entitled *Works and Days*, included nearly 200 works spanning more than five decades, highlighting the diversity and depth of her artistic production.

Simone Fattal's artistic journey is a testament to her ability to connect different cultures, histories and artistic practices. Although it is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical contexts of the Middle East. Through her sculptures, paintings and editorial work, Fattal has built a body of work that is both timeless and contemporary, offering a unique perspective on the intersections between art, history and memory.

In recent years, Fattal has exhibited her work in various solo and group exhibitions in renowned galleries and museums worldwide. Among the most recent are the exhibitions at Secession in Vienna and Karma International in Zurich, both scheduled for 2024. In 2023, she exhibited at Ashkal Alwan in Beirut, Portikus in Frankfurt and at the TBA21-Academy in Venice.

Furthermore, she has been awarded prestigious prizes, such as the Grand Berlin Art Prize and the Julio González International Prize in 2024, reflecting the high recognition she has achieved in the international artistic community. Her works are part of important public and private collections, including the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the National Museum of Qatar in Doha, among others.



Simone Fattal.
Photo: Christophe Beauregard

ACTIVITIES

Presentation of the exhibition

Simone Fattal. Suspension of Disbelief

Date: 12 December 2024

Schedule: 19 h. Presentation of the exhibition
20 h. Opening of the exhibition

CATALOGUE

As part of the exhibition, a catalogue will be published that will include texts by the curators as well as contributions from professionals such as Jacqueline Burckhardt and Omar Kholeif.

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