LISSON

DANA AWARTANI
Give and be generous with all your hand possesses

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION DATES:
20 NOVEMBER 2026 – 6 FEBRUARY 2027
67 LISSON STREET, LONDON

OPENING: 19 NOVEMBER, 6 – 8PM



For her first exhibition with Lisson, Dana Awartani builds on significant recent presentations at Arnolfini, Towner Eastbourne and the Venice Biennale, with a new body of floor-based sculptures and paintings on paper. Four installations continue the series of mosaics made for the National Pavilion of Saudi Arabia at the 61st Venice Biennale (ends 22 November), entitled *May your tears never dry, you who weep over stones*. These iterations of her handmade, brick tile floors restore now lost decorative mosaics from former sites of worship or architectural importance that were destroyed over the past three or four years, continuing her exploration and preservation of destroyed sites of cultural heritage in the wider Arab world.

Working in collaboration with stonemasons and artisans of Afghan, Pakistani and Syrian descent from a mountainside studio near Riyadh, Awartani redrew and recast the geometric floor patterns in three colours of clay, which were harvested from three different locations in the region, before being dried and baked by the sun. The knowledge and traditions encapsulated in her laboriously handmade recreations constitute a bridge to the past and an act of protection and perpetuation of a dying art form. By researching multiple sites harking all the way back to the origins of mosaic in ancient Mesapotamia (largely corresponding to present-day Iraq), the fragmentary nature of this medium reflects not only those previous and complex colonial entanglements, but also the present day shattering of shared cultures and histories. Despite all of this, Awartani posits that these shards can still be remade and recombined into a unified, aesthetic composition.

From a dozen ink and gouache reconstructions of the designs that were displayed as one combined installation in Venice, Awartani has selected four floor pieces for this show: namely the Byzantine Church in Khirbet Midras (latter-day Israel), Hisham's Palace in Jericho (Palestine), the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (Palestine) and the Kursi Monastery in Golan Heights (Syria), all demolished through bombardments by the Israel military. The reclamation of these significant sites of cultural heritage also amounts to a plea for the preservation of memory, craftsmanship and the people who helped construct these temples, basilicas and holy spaces – amounting to a kind of "quiet resistance," to use Awartani's words. Her original title for the series *May your tears never dry, you who weep over stones* is now joined by a subtitle for this show from the same Arabic poem by Abu Nuwas (762–813CE), *Give and be generous with all your hand possesses*, referring to the sharing of knowledge that went into this body of work, constructed as it was by the labour and skill of 'many hands'. Indeed, by spanning the fifth to the 21st centuries, the original, mostly Christian, Byzantine-era mosaics would have been seen and used by worshippers from Islamic, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths and been witness to the rise and fall of Ottoman and Roman emperors alike.

The paradox of the man-made and the man-destroyed is also evident upstairs in *Let me mend your broken bones* (2024) composed of naturally dyed silk fabrics, handmade in Kerala in south India. The abstract panels are infused and coloured with ayurvedic herbs and medicinal spices, but are then slashed and disrupted by holes and tears that correspond to mapped locations in the Middle East that were subjected to sustained violence or destruction. The artist then mends these punctures through a healing process of darning, just as she has re-carved a Palmyran pillar, which also recalls the silenced traditions and epochs of beauty that are unthinkingly erased by moments of violence.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Dana Awartani engages in critical and contemporary reinterpretations of the forms, techniques, concepts and spatial constructs that shape Middle Eastern culture. Steeped in a multitude of historical references, especially Islamic and Arab art-making traditions, Awartani's practice straddles continuity and innovation, aesthetic experimentation and social relevance. Spanning painting, sculpture, performance and installation, Awartani's commitment to historically situated and locally sourced materials lends a rare sensitivity to urgent political concerns of gender, healing, cultural destruction and sustainability. Consistent throughout the artist's work has been her philosophical elaboration of geometric patterns as an alternative genealogy of abstraction.

Awartani's work metaphorises possibilities of collective healing while recalling a venerable tradition of repairing and revering objects. Her material choices speak to the ethical and ecological terms of production and embody acts of resistance through the dual emphasis on artisanal production and indigenous knowledges. This approach can be seen in an earlier performative work, *I went away and forgot you. A while ago I remembered. I remembered I'd forgotten you. I was dreaming* (2017), in which she sweeps away a pattern painstakingly created from hand-dyed sand to resemble a traditional tiled floor, seemingly in the name of progress.

Dana Awartani is a Palestinian-Saudi artist born in Jeddah in 1987. She lives and works between New York and Jeddah. She has a BA in Fine Art from Central St Martin's College of Art and Design, London and a Master's degree in Traditional Arts from The Prince's School of Traditional Arts, London. Dana Awartani has held solo exhibitions at Towner Eastbourne, UK (2025); Arnolfini, UK (2025); Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide, Australia (2024); Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, UAE (2018); Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit, USA (2017) and Athr Gallery, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2015). Her works have also been featured in numerous group exhibitions, including Venice Biennale, Italy (2024); Sharjah Biennale 15, Sharjah, UAE (2023); Louvre Abu Dhabi, UAE (2022); Lyon Biennale, Lyon, France (2022); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC, USA (2022); Desert X Al-Ula, Al-Ula, Saudi Arabia (2022); Diriyah Biennale, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2021); BNKR, Munich, Germany (2021); British Museum, London, UK (2021); Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain (2020); Contemporary Art Biennial Sesc_Videobrasil, Sao Paulo, Brazil (2019); Cambridge Arts Gallery, Cambridge, USA (2018); Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia (2018); United Nations, New York, USA (2017); The Mosaic Rooms, London, UK (2017); Institute of Arab and Islamic Art, New York, United States (2017); Minnesota Street Project, San Francisco, USA (2016); Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India (2016); Jewish Museum, New York, USA (2016); US Embassy, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2015); Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2013); Institute of Arab and Islamic Art, New York, United States (2017); Yinchuan Biennale, Museum of Contemporary Art, Yinchuan, China (2016); Jewish Museum, New York, USA (2016); US Embassy, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2015); Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2013).

ABOUT LISSON

Lisson is a global gallery dedicated to shaping the art of today. Creating meaningful dialogues and robust markets between artists and audiences across six venues in the UK, US and China, Lisson exhibits the most engaging and challenging work, adding value and narrative through decades of experience and innovation.

Building significance and reputation with our artists, Lisson nurtures and amplifies their vision at every turn, supporting opportunities to show beyond the gallery's walls in museums, the public realm and through international partnerships. The gallery's heritage and its foundational role in contemporary art since 1967, allows for a deeper perspective and more thoughtful relationships when furthering the career and voice of an artist.

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