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Alia Ahmad: an artist in bloom

📅 May 8, 2025

By Gabrielle Stein

Saudi-Arabian artist Alia Ahmad is blossoming in the contemporary art world. Her large-scale, expressionistic oil paintings have captured the eyes of collectors, auction houses and galleries worldwide. At just 29 years of age, this level of market popularity is remarkable.

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Ahmad works predominantly with oil paint, and the canvases on which the artist paints are of such specific strength, size and calibre that she often has them shipped to her Riyadh studio from the UK, and then shipped back for exhibitions. This extreme commitment to her practice reflects a greater underlying problem: the historical lack of arts funding and education in Saudi Arabia. The arts scene was primarily underground until the 1960s after the introduction of art education in schools. This eventually resulted in the emergence of galleries, exhibitions and private art institutions. However, many Saudi Arabian artists are still choosing to practice elsewhere. Ahmad herself studied in London, completing a Masters of Research at the Royal College of Art after finishing a degree in Digital Culture at King's College London. Ahmad's paintings respond to these shifting surroundings through entangled florals that reflect the entangled landscapes of her past and present.

“

Calligraphy forms an integral part of Ahmad's practice, with fluid strokes of Arabic script reflected in the artist's brushstrokes

On the subject of entanglement, it is important to consider the history and impact of calligraphy in the Middle East, and its relationship with Ahmad's work. Arabic calligraphy, dating back

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Ahmad's commercial success has culminated this year with a solo exhibition at the White Cube gallery in Mason's Yard. The globally renowned gallery holds enormous prestige in the contemporary art world, with a star-studded list of past artist representation: Tracey Emin, Lucian Freud, Ellsworth Kelly, Louise Bourgeois and many more. The addition of Ahmad's name to this list can be described as nothing less than a miracle. At only 29 years old, gallery representation from the most prolific and prestigious gallery in the contemporary market is set to propel her career to new heights.

The exhibition at the White Cube sprawls across two floors, with charcoal works on paper upstairs and oil paintings hung downstairs. An 8-part series of charcoal drawings, *From the fields*, is the viewer's first sight on entering the gallery, and serves as an introduction to Ahmad's fluid, calligraphic drawing style. Although black and white, these works are so intricate and detailed that the viewer begins almost to imagine the radiant colours of the landscape between the charcoal lines. It is in these pieces that the Arabic calligraphy style is most evident, but the sweeping, swirling, spiralling style is carried through into the paintings downstairs.

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Her large-scale, expressionistic oil paintings have captured the eyes of collectors, auction houses and galleries world-wide.

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wide, two metres high and bursting with shape and colour – an undeniable highlight of the exhibition. Yellows, oranges, greens and slight dashes of red harmonise on the canvas. Ahmad creates mesmerising curving patterns that reflect the warm, dusty desert of Riyadh, and the Arabic calligraphy style swirls across the centre of the canvas in her brushstrokes. This painting was said, by Ahmad, to visualise what we see when we close our eyes.

Another key painting is *Date Picking*. This piece is smaller, but charged with colour and energy. It is as though one of the larger paintings has been squashed and pressed into a more compact space. The result: a canvas almost bursting with colour. Dominant in this work is red; the top half of the canvas is engulfed in a deep blanket of it, contrasting with the lighter bottom section. Black and brown lines tangle together to represent branches, with pinks and dashes of cyan darting around the tree. This piece demonstrates the breadth of Ahmad's skill as a painter, from immense sprawling canvases to more compact and detailed works.

The White Cube exhibition is a triumph, with Ahmad's distinct visual language now gaining popularity in the global market. The young artist is moving from strength to strength, and is set to become a key player in the contemporary art world. Just like the mesmerising florals in her paintings, Alia Ahmad is in bloom.

Image: © Alia Ahmad. Photo © White Cube (Eva Herzog)



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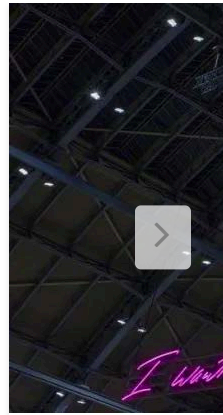
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