

# Zayn Qahtani. Angels in purgatory

20 Jan — 8 Apr 2023 at Vitrine Fitzrovia in London, United Kingdom

21 JANUARY 2023



Zayn Qahtani, Demon Dance, photo by Jonathan Bassett. Courtesy of Vitrine Fitzrovia Gallery

‘Angels in purgatory’ is the first solo show of Bahraini artist Zayn Qahtani, presenting a new body of work exploring themes of destruction, resurrection and rebirth through a personal retelling of stories of the Nephilim.

The Nephilim were a race of angels that were cast out of paradise for disobedient and immoral behaviour. They were doomed to spend the rest of eternity, not in hell, but on earth. Some believe these fallen angels are still among us, traveling the Earth, mating with humans and creating a secret population of Nephilim beings who are half human, half angel – their joint ancestral grief being the knot binding their sullen fates. ‘Angels in purgatory’ follows the episodic, autobiography of a fictitious character ‘the self’ based on the Nephilim, making a pilgrimage through the purgatory of the mind.

Qahtani works across painting, drawing and sculpture to produce work that draws on her own heritage, ancient cultures and nature’s diverse ecosystems as a means to create visual stories which seem to exist in the twilight zone - too distorted to be real, too familiar to be a dream. Through the retelling of the story of Nephilim, the exhibition becomes an exploration into the ironic dichotomy of humankind - life and death, light and dark and pain and pleasure - challenging the binary nature of these extremes.

The artist investigates the ways in which these so-called opposites may co-exist in time and space. During the odyssey within the story and Qahtani’s paintings, the character is split into many versions of the self, with the most notable being the anti-self, or the poltergeist. This is depicted in the work using genuine amethyst – a stone used for witches to scry and use their psychic powers. Qahtani paints the self in genuine lapis lazuli - or ‘blue stone’ - reminiscent of the untainted purity at the beginning of life. Historically, lapis lazuli was a colour exclusively reserved to paint the robes of the virgin Mary as the pigment was rare and its cost high. The use of crystal pigments for these characters allows them to exist on a liminal plane, bestowing upon them energies that may not be coherent in the tangible, earthly realm.

Adding a further materiality and three-dimensional aspect to the work, the artist uses abalone shell as a backing in certain works, such as ‘Demon dance’, to create borders for the worlds being depicted. The artist reveals within the work a shifting iridescence that uncovers the initial sparks of knowing, as the self begins to enter the subconscious mind. Using themes of hedonism, grief, hurt and ecstasy, the artist depicts the subconscious mind using memories from her own life. In ‘Damned to the ephemeral’, we see the self and anti-self locked in an almost suffocating embrace, whilst in ‘I am the you in me (I beg you to set me free)’ there is a chilling moment of recognition – that the illusion of separateness is one of the ego – and pleasure and pain are one.

The work in ‘Angels in purgatory’ has been created throughout late 2022 and includes some of the most intricate sculptural pieces Qahtani has created to date, each one hand-sculpted over 40 hours. The exhibition also presents the most extensive and large-scale works on panel by the artist. Zayn Qahtani is exhibited in Vitrine Fitzrovia’s basement gallery, which is the first time this space has been used for an individual solo show by a young emerging artist, which is a format that the gallery will continue within its commitment to presenting emerging artists at the very start of their careers.

**Zayn Qahtani** (b. 1997, Bahrain) is based between Manama, BH and London, UK. She is currently on The Drawing Intensive at The Royal Drawing School, London, UK, and holds a BA in Fashion Design from The Royal University for Women, BH (2019). Awards include the YSA ‘21 Selected Artist + Honorary Grant from ATHR Gallery, SA (2021).

She has exhibited internationally with galleries and institutions including Arusha Gallery, Edinburgh, UK; Fortnight Institute, New York City, USA; MIA Art Collection, Dubai, UAE; Wilder Gallery, London, UK; The Tub, London, UK; Purslane Art, London, UK; ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, SA; Jewellery Arabia 2021, BH; Gallery BAWA, Kuwait.

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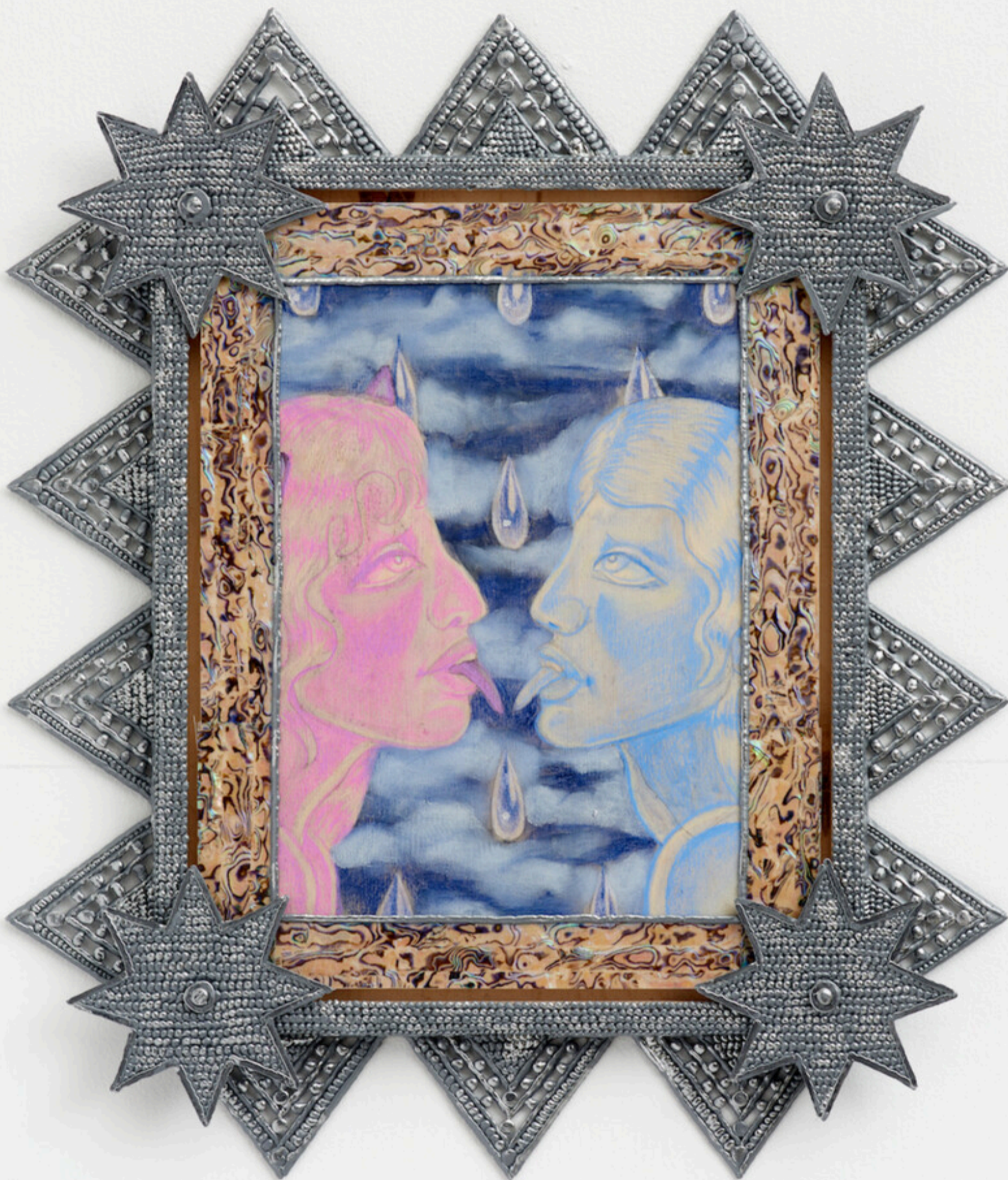


## Vitrine Fitzrovia

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Gallery profile

Location	Founded in
London, United Kingdom	2012



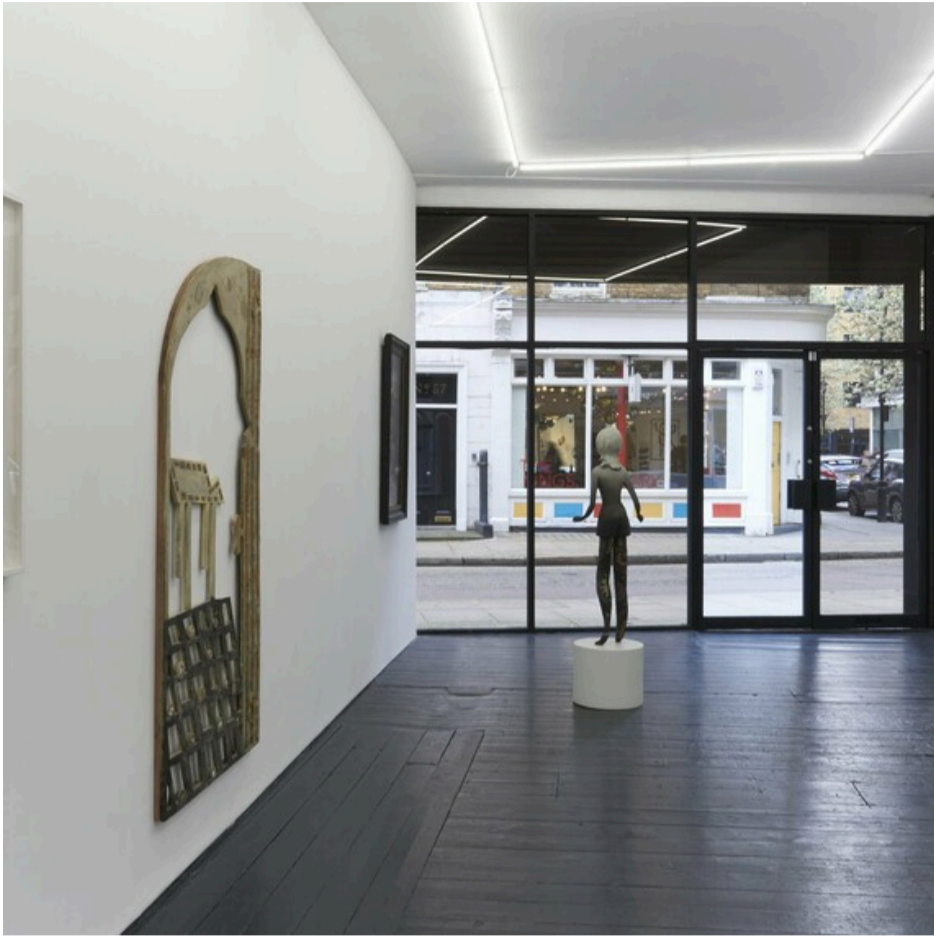




1. Zayn Qahtani, Addicted to the Feeling, photo by Jonathan Bassett. Courtesy of Vitrine Fitzrovia Gallery

2. Zayn Qahtani, You Begin Here, photo by Jonathan Bassett. Courtesy of Vitrine Fitzrovia Gallery

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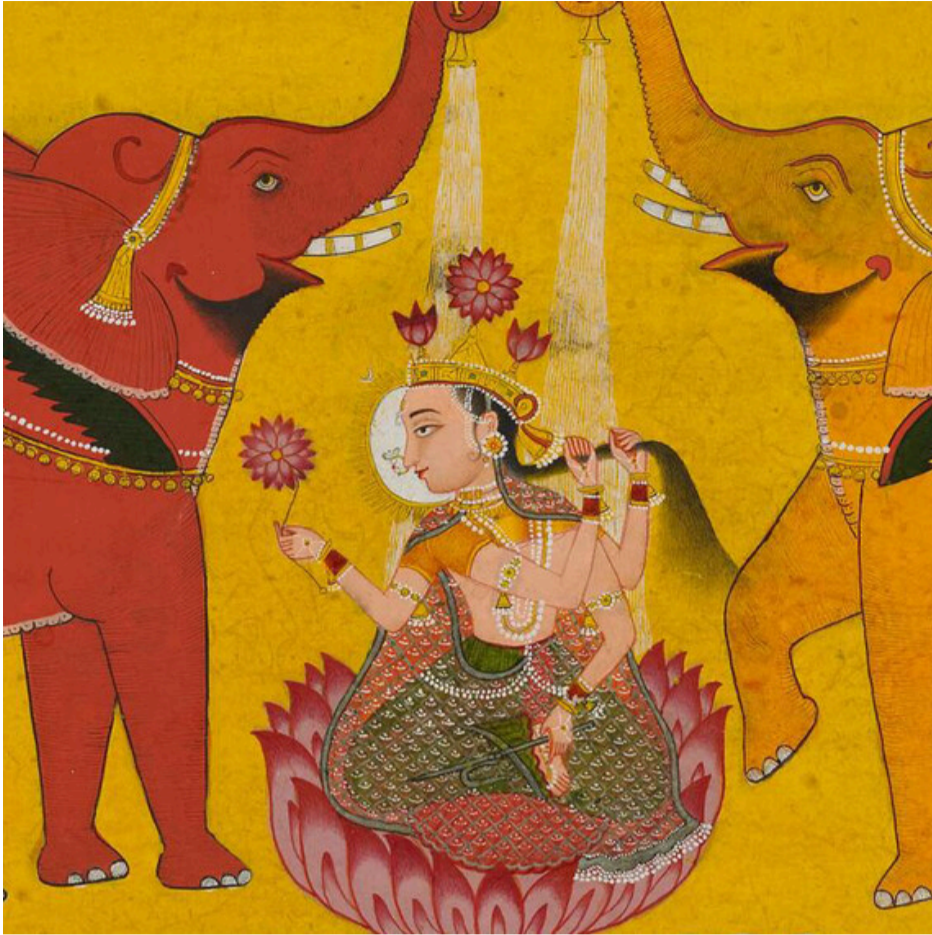


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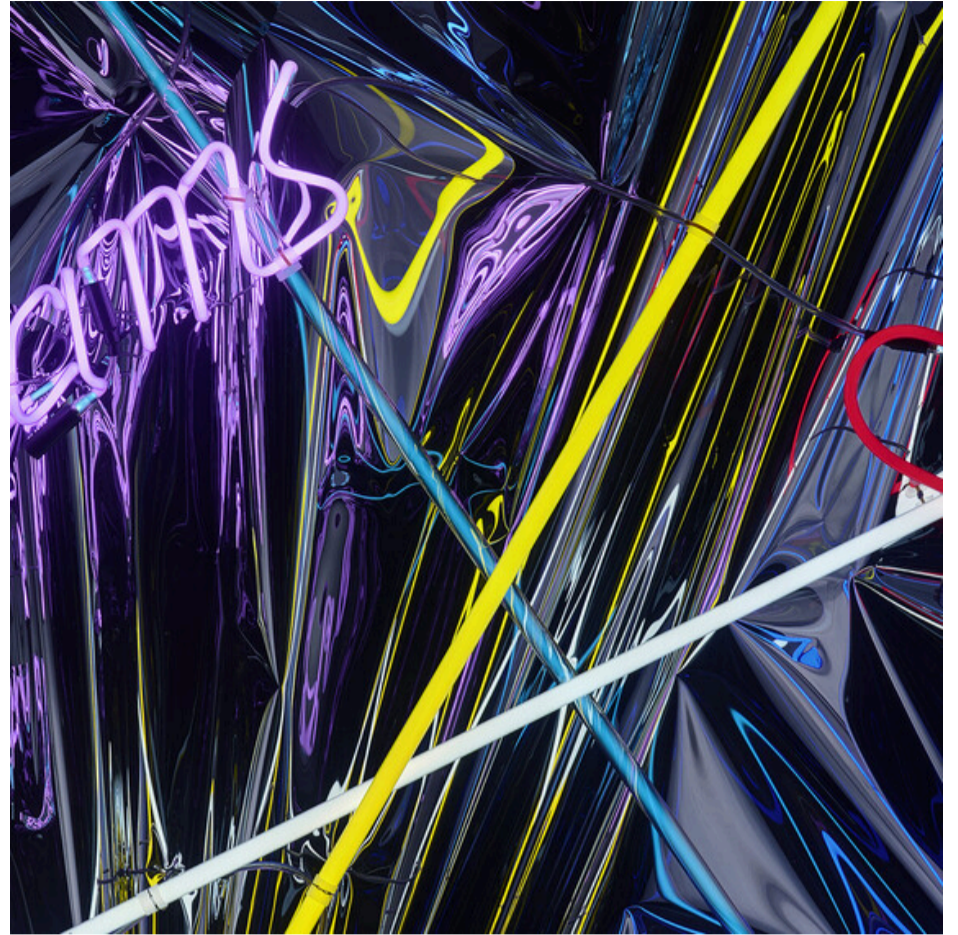
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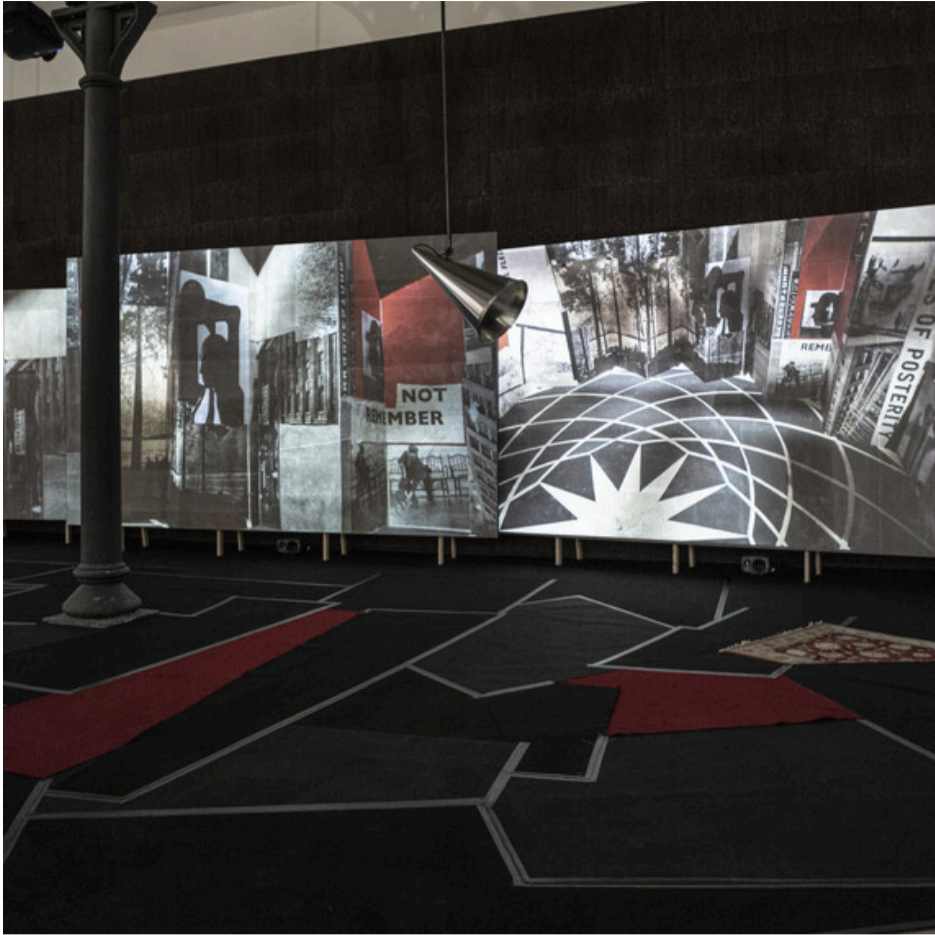
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