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Everything Folds, Unfolds, Refolds

Sophia Al-Maria, Manal AlDowayan, Aziza Kadyri, Raya Kassisieh, Almagul Menlibayeva, Elnara Nasirli

Curated by Dr. Alfredo Cramerotti and Auronda Scalera

Private View: 8 October, 6–9 PM (AZT)
Exhibition: 9 October – 20 December 2026
Location: Gazelli Art House, Baku

Gazelli Art House is pleased to present E*verything Folds, Unfolds, Refolds*, a group exhibition curated by Dr. Alfredo Cramerotti and Auronda Scalera, bringing together six artists whose practices explore how histories, materials and cultural knowledge survive transformation.

Taking its title from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's writing on the fold, the exhibition considers the past and present not as separate or opposing states, but as continually shaping one another. For Deleuze, the fold describes an ongoing process through which forms persist by changing: folding, unfolding, and refolding as they move between different times, contexts, and conditions. Across the exhibition, this becomes a framework for thinking about inheritance itself. What is carried forward is never simply preserved. It is translated, reworked, and made newly present.

Spanning installation, sculpture, textile, moving image, photography, painting, and ceramics, the exhibition brings this proposition into dialogue with practices rooted across Central Asia, the Gulf and their diasporas. Rather than presenting a single geography or narrative, the works reveal unexpected connections between inherited techniques, ecological histories, technological systems, and the body.

Dr. Alfredo Cramerotti and Auronda Scalera, curators of the exhibition, say:

"The past is not elsewhere, it is here, folded into the present, waiting in a sculpture, a carpet, a name, a city's ruins, to be unfolded again. That is exactly what we found tracing these six practices: artists working from different cities and different materials, arriving independently at the same pressure point. A convergence like that is rarely about the artists alone. It says something about the condition each was responding to, one neither could see from inside their own practice."

Textile and weaving emerge as recurring forms through which knowledge is transmitted and transformed. In *Conversations with AI* (III) (2026), **Aziza Kadyri** takes the Central Asian tradition of suzani embroidery into an ongoing exchange with generative AI. Traditional patterns move repeatedly between the artist's hand and computational models, accumulating mistranslations and new interpretations without relinquishing their origins. The work is presented in relation to handmade suzani embroideries, shifting the question away from which form is more authentic towards what happens to authorship and cultural memory as an inherited visual language moves between human and machine.

Almagul Menlibayeva similarly approaches material as a living archive. In *The Map of Nomadizing Reimaginings: An Evolving Cyber Textile Map, Iteration 04* (2026), recycled textiles, hand sewing and digital print form an evolving map of Central Asian and Eurasian territories, bringing ancestral knowledge into dialogue with digital processes. This relationship between memory and transformation extends into *Mother Water. Gulbibi Balkhash* (2024), where myth, environmental loss and the synthetic visual language of the screen converge around Lake Balkhash, a landscape under ecological pressure from mining and agricultural extraction.

This relationship between inheritance and transformation also underpins **Manal AlDowayan**'s *Watch Before You Fall* (2023), which draws upon Sadu weaving, a practice historically sustained by Bedouin women. Elsewhere in AlDowayan's *The Emerging* series, fragmented female bodies appear caught in the act of crossing a threshold. Limbs emerge from surfaces without resolving into complete figures, holding the body between private and public states, and between what it has been and what it might become.

Elnara Nasirli's *Ghost Bark* (2026) traces another genealogy of transformation, moving from the rubber tree's natural caoutchouc to latex and metallic film. Biological matter and its manufactured descendants are brought together within a single object, destabilising distinctions between organism and technology, origin and imitation.

Sophia Al-Maria tests the exhibition's premise of continuity and transformation through *We Couldn't Give Her What She Needs* and *She Became Aggressive* (2026), two new paintings created for Baku. Animal figures emerge through rough fields of watercolour, acrylic, graphite and ink, while their titles draw from the language used to justify abandonment, revealing how responsibility can be displaced onto those already excluded. In doing so, Al-Maria complicates the idea of histories unfolding seamlessly across time, drawing attention instead to what is omitted, misread or left outside as images and knowledge are carried forward.

The body becomes another site of transformation in the work of **Raya Kassisieh**. *Thorn Throne* (2025) brings goat hair and sheep's wool into a sculptural form that moves between garment, plant, and armour. Softness and defence occupy the same silhouette, while the organic fibres meet the industrial presence of steel. Across Kassisieh's works in the exhibition, growth appears not as a stable state but as an act of breaking through, protection, and vulnerability held together within the same form.

These recurrences were not predetermined. They emerge independently across the six practices: weaving as a carrier of knowledge, water as both landscape and memory, the body at a threshold, and materials that retain traces of what they once were. Together, they suggest that cultural forms endure not by remaining unchanged, but through their capacity to adapt, migrate, and be activated again.

The exhibition also resonates with German art historian Aby Warburg's concept of *Nachleben*, or afterlife, through which images, gestures, and symbolic forms can disappear and resurface across different historical moments, altered by the conditions through which they have travelled. From a suzani motif interpreted by an AI model to a Bedouin weaving technique entering contemporary sculpture, the works in *Everything Folds, Unfolds, Refolds* approach inheritance as an active process rather than an archival one.

The past, in this sense, is not elsewhere. It remains folded into a textile, a material, a landscape, a gesture or an image, capable of being unfolded under new conditions and refolded once more.

Opening on 8 October, *Everything Folds, Unfolds, Refolds* precedes **Baku International Arts Festival** (BIAF) and **Baku Art Weekend (Fly to Baku)** 2026 and will remain on view throughout both programmes as part of Baku's wider autumn cultural season.

About the Artists

Sophia Al-Maria (b. 1983, Tacoma, USA) is a Qatari-American artist, writer and filmmaker whose multidisciplinary practice spans drawing, sculpture, video, performance, and experimental film. Grounded in storytelling, myth, and speculative fiction, her work examines histories of colonialism, technology, ecological change, and the contemporary Gulf.

Al-Maria participated in the 59th Venice Biennale (2022) with *Tiger Strike Red,* a special project presented by La Biennale di Venezia and the Victoria and Albert Museum, and returned for the 61st Venice Biennale (2026) as part of Qatar's participation. Recent solo exhibitions include Spike Island, Bristol (2024); Henry Art Gallery, Seattle (2023); Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha (2022); Tate Britain, London (2019), and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016). She lives and works in London.

Manal AlDowayan (b. 1973, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia) is one of Saudi Arabia's leading contemporary artists, working across photography, sound, sculpture, and participatory practice. Her work explores collective

memory, social histories, and the representation of women, often bringing personal narratives into dialogue with wider cultural transformation.

In 2024, AlDowayan represented Saudi Arabia at the 60th Venice Biennale with *Shifting Sands: A Battle Song*. Her work has been presented at institutions including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Louvre Abu Dhabi; Victoria and Albert Museum and British Museum, London, and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. Her work is held in collections including the British Museum, Centre Pompidou, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Mathaf and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Aziza Kadyri (b. 1994, Tashkent, Uzbekistan) is an Uzbek multidisciplinary artist working across textiles, sculpture, installation, performance, and creative technologies. Her practice examines migration, displacement, decolonisation, and identity, particularly in relation to women in Central Asia and its diaspora, bringing inherited textile traditions into dialogue with AI and other emerging technologies.

Kadyri represented Uzbekistan at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024 with *Don't Miss the Cue*, presented at the Arsenale. Her work has been presented at the Bukhara Biennial; Zhejiang Art Museum, Hangzhou; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Humboldt Forum, Berlin, and Somerset House, London. She was awarded an Art Basel Award Medal in 2026 and was a finalist for the CIRCA Prize in 2025. Kadyri is a graduate of Central Saint Martins, London.

Raya Kassisieh (b. 1991, Amman, Jordan) is a multidisciplinary artist working across painting, sculpture, and installation. Drawing on her Palestinian heritage and background in textiles and pattern-making, her practice explores the politics of the body through fibre, metal and pigment, considering vulnerability, transformation, and the relationship between bodily and material forms.

Kassisieh participated in the Islamic Arts Biennale, Jeddah (2025), and her work has been presented at SAMoCA, Riyadh (2026); Asia Culture Center, Gwangju (2022); Bayt Al Mamzar, Dubai (2022), and exhibitions in London, Kuwait and Amman. She studied at Pratt Institute, New York, and completed an MA in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art, London. She lives and works between Amman and London.

Almagul Menlibayeva (b. 1969, Almaty, Kazakhstan) is a multidisciplinary artist working across video, photography, installation, digital media, and textiles. Her practice examines Central Asian histories and mythologies, post-Soviet transformation, ecology, and gender, increasingly bringing ancestral knowledge into dialogue with contemporary technologies.

Menlibayeva has participated in major international exhibitions including the Venice, Sydney, Sharjah and Moscow Biennales. Her work has been presented at institutions including the Grand Palais, Paris; Ludwig Forum, Aachen; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, and M HKA, Antwerp. In 2026, she participated in *As Above, So Below,* an official Collateral Event of the 61st Venice Biennale and presented *I Understand Everything,* a major retrospective at Almaty Museum of Arts. She is a Chevalier of France's Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

Elnara Nasirli (b. 1987, Baku, Azerbaijan) is an Azerbaijani artist working across painting, sculpture, installation, and mixed media. Informed by environmental technology and biotechnology, her practice explores biomorphic systems, material transformation and the relationship between human and natural environments, creating immersive works that move between organic and synthetic forms.

Nasirli's work has been presented internationally through exhibitions and site-specific projects across Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the United States. In 2026, she participated in *As Above, So Below,* an official Collateral Event of the 61st Venice Biennale, presented by One Ocean Foundation and ZEITGEIST19 at Fabbrica H3 in Venice. Her interdisciplinary practice draws on her background in environmental technology to examine ecology, resilience, and the transformative possibilities of material and form.

About the Curators

Dr. Alfredo Cramerotti is a curator, scholar, and cultural entrepreneur working across contemporary art, media, and digital culture. He is Director of the Media Majlis Museum at Northwestern University in Qatar, where he leads research-driven exhibitions exploring the role of media in shaping contemporary cultural narratives.

Cramerotti has co-curated national and collateral presentations at the Venice Biennale and developed projects for international platforms including Manifesta, Noor Riyadh, Art Dubai Digital, and the Lumen Prize. From 2011 to 2023, he was Director of Mostyn, Wales.

He is President of the International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art (IKT) and Chair of Digital Strategies for the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), and has advised the British Council and UK Government Art Collection. His publications include *Aesthetic Journalism* (2009), *Curating the Image* (2020) and *Hyper-Imaging: New Languages for Art, Media and Communication* (2026).

Auronda Scalera is an artistic director, curator and cultural strategist working across contemporary art, digital culture, and artificial intelligence. Based in the Middle East, her practice spans exhibitions, public programmes and cultural strategy across Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas.

Her curatorial and consultancy work includes projects for the Venice Biennale, Art Dubai Digital, Noor Riyadh, AlUla Design Week, and the Lumen Prize for Sotheby's. Recent projects include *Cosmotechnics: Ding Yi as a Planetary Code for* the Venice Biennale 2026; *Body Machine*, featuring Sougwen Chung at Palazzo Citterio, Milan, and *404_LAND: territory not found,* produced with HEK, Basel and the Tezos Foundation.

Scalera was founding director of IAM, a research museum dedicated to art and new technology, and Visiva, a cultural district in Rome. She also collaborates with research groups at The Alan Turing Institute and the University of Oxford.

About the Gallery

With spaces in London, New York, and Baku, Gazelli Art House presents a cross-generational program spanning Post-War, modern, and contemporary art. Representing an international roster of artists and estates, the gallery brings together historically significant figures alongside contemporary practitioners working across painting, sculpture, photography, installation, performance, moving image, and digital media.

Founded by Mila Askarova in 2010, the gallery champions artists whose practices challenge conventions and expand the possibilities of their chosen mediums. Through exhibitions, commissions, and institutional collaborations, Gazelli Art House fosters dialogues between historical and contemporary perspectives while maintaining a longstanding commitment to artists from Azerbaijan and the wider Caucasus region, supporting greater international visibility for the region's artistic and cultural histories.

In 2015, the gallery launched GAZELL.iO, a platform dedicated to artists working at the intersection of art and technology. Through exhibitions, residencies, commissions, and research-led initiatives, GAZELL.iO supports practices engaging with computational systems, generative processes, artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, and other emerging technologies.

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