

Kunsthalle Wien
Karlsplatz

EN

Kunsthalle Wien Preis 2024
Rawan Almukhtar & Ida Kammerloch
23.1.–20.4.2025

The *Kunsthalle Wien Preis* seeks to support emerging artists living and working in Vienna via an annual collaboration with the city's two renowned universities for art. Organised by Kunsthalle Wien, the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the University of Applied Arts Vienna, the prize is awarded annually by a jury of experts to a graduate of each of the universities. This year's edition was selected from more than 100 diploma and masters entries, awarding Rawan Almukhtar and Ida Kammerloch a joint exhibition.

Rawan Almukhtar

Rawan Almukhtar studied Fine Arts (Art and Intervention | Concept) at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. His paintings and drawings take inspiration from his experiences of forced migration and as an activist.

Born in Baghdad, Almukhtar's early works reflect his need to document the volatile political situation in his home country. Since invading Iraq in 2003, U.S. troops would line the streets – whether overtly or covertly – with the justification of supposedly gaining intelligence on Jihadi terrorist organisations. Almukhtar saw this military presence as an excuse to exhaustively police ordinary Iraqi citizens. His camera was confiscated while attempting to document this once on his way home from art school. He subsequently turned to recording his observations on tracing paper. *THE WITNESSING ARCHIVE* (2010) comprises drawings of overlapping observations. Some were transcribed directly onto the page if he was able to hide out in a parked car. Others were started on the streets but only completed later in the safety of his home. The works are some of the few in the exhibition to be made by the artist while still living in Iraq.

EYEWITNESS (2016) is part of a series of paintings titled *Nothing But Blue* begun in Baghdad, in the year leading up to Almukhtar's departure from Iraq, and finished while he sought asylum in Vienna. The subject of the painting is the artist's brother, Mohammad Almukhtar ('Mukhtar'), who was fourteen years old at the time. Raised during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, subsequent civil war (2006–2008) and the war against ISIS (2013–2017), Mukhtar had never known a stable homeland. Almukhtar wanted to capture this moment of transition in time, the changing adolescent body facing the uncertain future of a failed state, while remaining unsure of his own future in Austria.

In 2015, Almukhtar fled Iraq via 'The Balkan Route' travelling through Turkey, Greece and Croatia, before reaching Austria. His experiences of migration inspired his largest series of paintings and drawings to date: *HIJRA – Deframing Postmigration* (2018–2025). Consisting of five parts, *HIJRA* (meaning 'migration' in Arabic) seeks to challenge entrenched perceptions of forced migration. Almukhtar disputes the idea of a post-migrant utopia where refugees can only find acceptance and safety within Western borders, maintaining that his own exhausting and dangerous journey was also punctured by moments of humour and beauty. Furthermore, arriving at a place of safety did not ensure that he could leave this difficult experience behind him. To paint the moments and individuals he encountered from memory was

to process the aftermath of their shared journey through the act of painting. Moving away from his earlier photorealist style, Almukhtar uses abstraction to blur the bodies in *TRANSCENDING GAZE* (2025), *LEAVING* (2024), *WITNESS* (2024), *Untitled* (2024) and *PASSING* (2023). Acknowledging his inability to pin down any one moment or person that could speak to what he witnessed, Almukhtar seeks to capture a shared emotion through his work instead.

DUKHANIA (2020) and *The Chosen Arm* (2021) reflect upon state-sanctioned violence. The October Protest Movement (2019–2020),¹ known as the Tishreen Movement in Iraq, is the point of departure for the former work. The title – which employs the Arabic for 'tear gas can' – alludes to a specific group of young activists who would protect other protestors from tear gas shots during demonstrations. Almukhtar began the drawing as a figurative documentation of these protests. Their fight against corruption and for transformative change remained largely unreported by Western media. Iraqi activists living abroad therefore became important allies in spreading the protestors' demands. Footage from the demonstrations was often shared over the internet and then disseminated by accounts outside of the country, circumnavigating the Iraqi government's strict censorship policy. *DUKHANIA* was created in stages as Almukhtar received footage from his brother, a participating activist. The drawing acts as a calendar of the protests, and ends with the murder of the artist's brother, Mohammad Almukhtar, in February 2020.

In *The Chosen Arm*, Almukhtar visualises Austria's involvement in political instability in Iraq and beyond. The work consists of 800 photogravures of the Austrian-made HS.50 sniper rifle, which is currently circulating in the ranks of various militias and terrorist organisations across Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon. In making the number of units sold by an Austrian manufacturer visible, Almukhtar seeks to address a discernible lack of political responsibility.

1 'Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box,' International Crisis Group, Report no. 223, 26 July 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/223-iraqs-tishreen-uprising-barricades-ballot-box>

Ida Kammerloch

Ida Kammerloch studied TransArts at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Her immersive video essays draw upon her grandfather's archive of homemade videos. Recorded in post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s, they document a time of significant political and social change. Kammerloch uses her own family history to explore the complex interrelationships between global capitalism and Russian national identity, against the backdrop of architecture and trade.

Kammerloch's grandfather, Vladimir Alin, frequently travelled across the Chinese-Russian border to financially provide for his family. He made extensive recordings of his daily life as a worker in the so-called shuttle trade; a growing movement whereby individual entrepreneurs would buy goods abroad to resell in their home country. Born in Izhevsk (Russia), Kammerloch draws from this original footage in her own artistic practice to explore ideas around identity (including her own) in times of social, political and economic upheaval.

Aren't You Afraid to Swing on Russian Swings? (2021–ongoing) is the first film Kammerloch began as a new cycle of work. The ongoing project examines the unlearning of a socialist way of living to meet new capitalist constraints. Rooted in Mikhail Gorbachev's process of Perestroika – an attempt to restructure and modernise the social and economic system of the Soviet Union – many Russians and people from other post-Soviet territories were forced to find new ways of earning an income. The video footage recorded by Kammerloch's grandfather comprises over 400 hours of material, often punctuated by his own satirical remarks. The title of the film is taken from the moment he pushes a young Ida Kammerloch on a swing in the local playground, while playfully asking, 'Aren't you afraid to swing on Russian swings? Swing a little, feel the joy of life!' Working with the material almost three decades later, Kammerloch's 60-minute film extends beyond an examination of her family's memory of that time. The interviews with her grandparents were recorded shortly before Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. In the face of renewed social and political uncertainty, Kammerloch – like her grandparents – is forced to navigate her own Russian identity. The final version of the documentary is still to be completed.

Layered cultural and historical tensions also lie at the centre of the video installation *ULTRA ALL INCLUSIVE* (2024). The film explores the interior and exterior spaces of a hotel in Antalya (Turkey) that was built as a replica of the Kremlin in Moscow. Itself a conglomerate of contradictory forms of power, the Kremlin's architecture amalgamates elements from the Tsarist era, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the current Russian Federation to form a grand narrative of supposed continuity. Navigating the luxurious complex under the guise of a vacationer, Kammerloch considers the uncanny nature of the distinctive architecture of a political superpower appropriated for holidaymaking. The video is mounted on an Alu-Dibond print of a scaled-up souvenir that Kammerloch bought at the hotel in the 'Vladimir' events room. The toy draws an interesting parallel between contemporary Russia and the time in which her grandfather sold such items.

Many of the cheap objects that flooded the Russian market throughout the 1990s were made in China. They carried a symbolic weight of social and political change in their association with a growing economy and emerging consumer culture. According to World Toy Industry statistics, over 85% of all toys are produced in China. In *MEMBRANE OF THE NEW* (2024–ongoing) Kammerloch questions the ecological cost of economic advancement. The installation consists of photograms of the packaging of toys, many of which are vacuum-sealed in plastic wrapping, once viewed as part of progress in its ability to facilitate global trade by extending the shelf life of products, but today signifying pollution.

Building upon these previous works, Kammerloch has produced a new film for this exhibition. *MADE IN CHINA* (2025) is accompanied by a specially commissioned soundtrack composed by Paul Ebhart. For the film, the artist visited the Chinese border town of Manzhouli, a tourist trading city that her grandfather visited frequently in the 1990s. Several attractions in Manzhouli emphasise a friendship between Russia and China. These include altered replicas of Saint Basil's Cathedral in Moscow and the so-called Matryoshka Square dedicated to Russian culture. The film provides a fascinating case study into how Russian and Chinese identities are both shaped by the other and how this is materialised in objects or architecture. Kammerloch retraces her grandfather's footsteps with a contemporary perspective on these two superpowers, interrogating the social and environmental implications of overproduction and the commodification of culture.

The Prize Jury

The jury of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

For the Academy: Veronika Dirnhofer (Professor for Art and Image | Drawing), Johan F. Hartle (Rector), Iman Issa (Professor for Art and Space | Spatial Strategies)

For Kunsthalle Wien: Michelle Cotton (Artistic Director), Astrid Peterle (Head of Curatorial), Nicole Suzuki (Publishing)

External juror: Sarah Johanna Theurer (Curator, Haus der Kunst, Munich)

Chair: Johan F. Hartle

Organisation: Christine Rogi

The jury of the University of Applied Arts Vienna

For the University of Applied Arts Vienna: Cosima Rainer (Head of the art collection and archive), Petra Schaper Rinkel (Rector), Bärbel Vischer (Curator, Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna)

For Kunsthalle Wien: Michelle Cotton (Artistic Director), Astrid Peterle (Head of Curatorial), Nicole Suzuki (Publishing)

External juror: Sarah Johanna Theurer (Curator, Haus der Kunst, Munich)

Chair: Petra Schaper Rinkel

Organisation: Jasmin Vogl

Exhibition publication

The exhibition is accompanied by a new book published in German and English by Kunsthalle Wien. Designed by Theresa Hattinger, it is richly illustrated with images of works by Rawan Almukhtar and Ida Kammerloch, containing interviews between the artists and the exhibition curator Hannah Marynissen, as well as specially-commissioned essays by Alicja Melzacka and Rijn Sahakian.

The publication is available at Kunsthalle Wien Shop Museumsquartier and Karlsplatz as well as online at a price of € 12.

Artist talk

Rawan Almukhtar and Ida Kammerloch in conversation with Hannah Marynissen, Curator *Kunsthalle Wien Preis 2024*

→ 6 February 2025, 6pm

Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz

Guided tours

Guided tours are offered in German, English, Einfacher Sprache [Plain German] and Austrian Sign Language.

More information on the programme:



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A...kademie der
bildenden Künste
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di:'angewandte
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University of Applied Arts Vienna



DERSTANDARD



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