

FAIRFIELD CITY MUSEUM & GALLERY

AMANI HAYDAR

THE  
MOTHER  
WOUND

24 AUGUST - 23 NOVEMBER 2019

# THE MOTHER WOUND

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Having lost both my maternal grandmother and my mother to different forms of violence, I have spent a lot of time reflecting on the grief, fear and sadness that I have inherited matrilineally. The title of this exhibition refers to a concept sometimes used in psychology to refer to the process of being un-mothered; of losing maternal connections and the security they provide. It examines the pain associated with being a woman living in a patriarchal world and how that pain is passed down through generations of women.

The ideas behind this exhibition started as I rummaged through some of my mum's old things; photos, documents, objects and even clothes I salvaged from her home. There is photo of my mother taken in Lebanon in 1987. In it, she is wearing a hot pink outfit, with her face nestled between the branches of an Oleander bush. The photo seems filled with optimism. It got me thinking about the reasons why women migrated in the 80s and the hopes they had for the future.

My mum grew up during the Lebanese Civil War and under Israeli occupation. She described hiding in the basement of her parent's home listening to rocket fire and artillery above. Exams were sometimes cancelled because it was too unsafe for students to walk to school. War and occupation restricted women's options in a society where it was unsafe and frowned upon for a single woman to move away from her parents to study. When my mum migrated to Australia as a young bride in 1987, she believed she had found freedom and security.

My mum raised four children and struggled through an abusive marriage before she could revisit her own dreams and aspirations. She was un-mothered twice; first when she left her mother and the rest of her family in Lebanon and again when her mother (my grandmother) was killed by an Israeli drone in July 2006.

In March 2015 my mum was murdered by my dad as she was preparing to finally leave the marriage. I was left with the impression that violence is inescapable, and justice is elusive. This violence caused me to question almost everything about my upbringing and my role in society. The artworks in this collection reflect who I have become since then. They include references to home and homeland, but both places have been disrupted and fragmented by violence. My intention is to interrogate whether any space is safe for women, to be all that they want to be, actualise their ambitions and to express their spirituality.

My memories of childhood, my identity and my sense of security have all been affected by trauma. Without proactively searching for ways to cope and recover from those wounds, it is easy to lose hope and feel overwhelmed by the darkness and cruelty of those experiences and the knowledge that people all over the world continue to be displaced physically and psychologically by violence.

There are also nostalgic references in these works including kitschy migrant décor and the timeless 80s music I grew up hearing as my mum chauffeured us to and from school. The use of needlework and crochet reflects the influence of my grandmother who was a seamstress. It also symbolises the therapeutic role of these crafts in women's lives and is a metaphor for the healing process; the process of reconnecting things, stitching the wounds shut.

I read somewhere recently that if trauma can be inherited then so can strength, resilience and joy. The works in this exhibition are my way of honouring the experiences of the women who came before me and creating something hopeful out of the traditions, ideas, skills and objects I inherited from them.



Amani Haydar in studio 2019. Photograph: John Feder, courtesy of The Australian

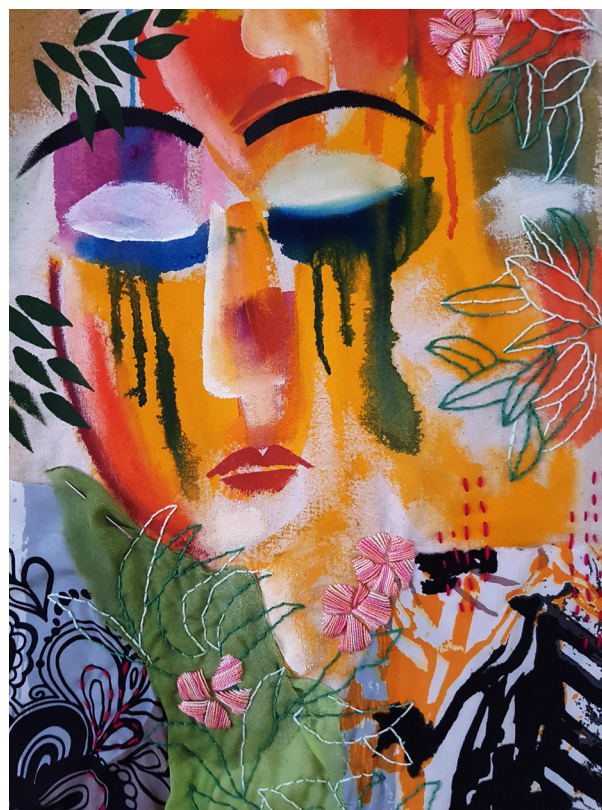
# ARTIST STATEMENT

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In these works, I reflect on the inter-generational effects of trauma and abuse. The exhibition is a personal and political exploration of my family background with recurring themes of violence, loss, innocence and aggression.

*The mother wound* takes its name from the psychological theory that the relationship between mothers and daughters is affected by unhealed traumatic experiences being passed down matriarchal lines. In this exhibition I consider the wounds caused figuratively and literally to women in my family as a result of male aggression, armed conflict and migration. I am influenced by the retro aesthetic of old family albums and my maternal grandmother's talent for sewing and have incorporated references to photographs, textiles and hand stitching into some of the works. There is an underlying question throughout all of these works; are some traumas too deep and too abstract to fully heal or is there hope that the cycle can be ended through self-awareness, creative practice and activism?

*At the end of all things* (detail, incomplete), 2019, mixed media. Image courtesy of the artist



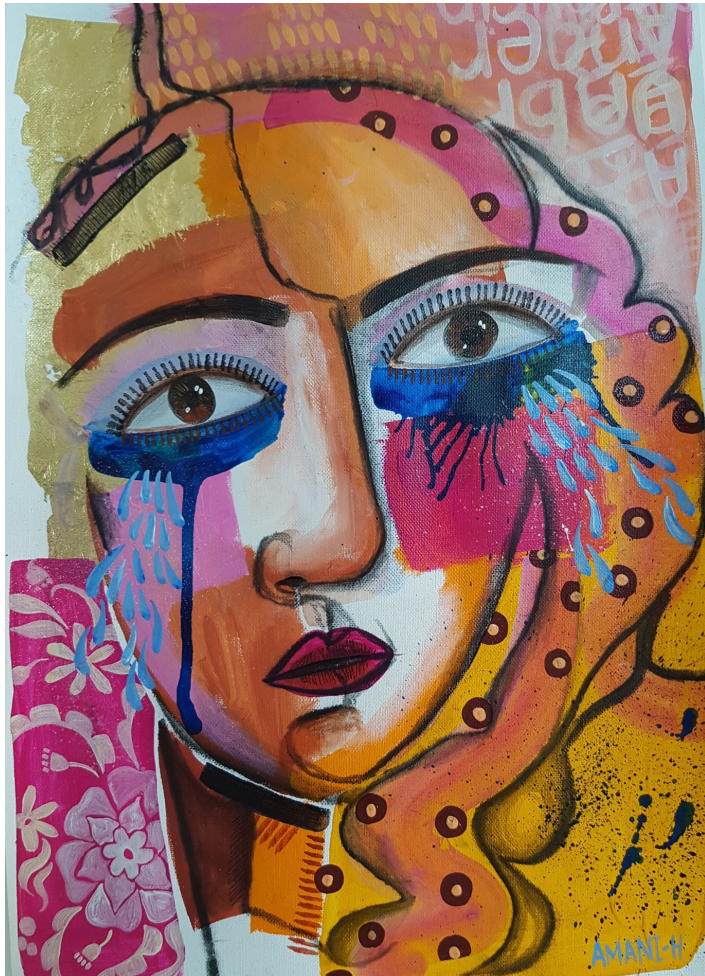
*This is all your fault*, 2019, mixed media.  
Image courtesy of the artist



*Bride 3*, 2019, mixed media.  
Image courtesy of the artist

# ARTIST BIO

Amani is an artist, lawyer, mum and advocate for women's health and safety based in Western Sydney. Amani's writing and illustrations have been published in ABC News Online and SBS Life and her self-portrait *Insert Heading Here* was a finalist in the 2018 Archibald Prize. Amani uses visual art and writing to explore the personal and political dimensions of abuse, loss, identity and resilience.



*Rage in Silence*, 2019, mixed media.  
Image courtesy of the artist



*The weight of justice (incomplete)*, 2010, mixed media.  
Image courtesy of the artist



*War stories I*, 2014, mixed media.  
Image courtesy of the artist

## Fairfield City Museum & Gallery

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Cover image: Amani Haydar, *One Year in Recovery*, 2019  
acrylic paint on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist.

