

Memories We Carry, Stories
We Heal
By Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman
January 9 - March 5, 2026

Text by Vania Djelani



Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman. *Mourning Thoughts*. 18" x 11" x 14." Oil on cabinet, with fabric and print on fleece. 2025.

Trace

[verb]

1 to find someone or something that was lost

2 to find the origin of something

3 to copy a drawing or pattern, etc. by drawing over its lines

[noun]

1 a sign that something has happened or existed

Reflecting on the meaning of ‘traces’ prompts the questions: “What does it mean to draw from memory and heritage?” and “How do we preserve culture through reconnection?” Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman’s work addresses these questions and illustrates how we collect evidence of the marks left behind in our identity, and how to suspend that reality to resist the passage of time.

Through a series of mixed-media paintings and video art, Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman’s *“Memories We Carry, Stories We Heal”* explores the complexities between identity, memory, and loss. As a first-generation Canadian artist of Somalian and Indian descent, Abdourahman draws on childhood memories and reflects on how her family’s history relates to her own identity growing up in the suburbs of Ottawa. With a practice rooted in storytelling, the act of reconstructing memories becomes a way to heal and reconcile feelings of unresolved loss and grief often experienced by diasporic communities.

Warsan Shire's poem titled 'Home' contextualizes Abdourahman's painting "No One Would Leave Home Unless Home Chased You" and sets the tone for the exhibition. The poem discusses the Somali refugee experience of forced migration and colonial violence, which informs Abdourahman's exploration of the idea of a 'second chase' in longing to reconnect to her parents' homelands.¹ The phrase, which is also the title of her work, is written out haphazardly in foam alphabet letters over an oil-painted panel, which brings to mind an aesthetic of childhood nostalgia that is both innocent and bittersweet. Though the message behind her work can be seen as confrontational, her use of vibrant colours and playful composition makes the work approachable.

Delving into contrasting emotions plays a key role throughout *Memories We Carry, Stories We Heal*. It is particularly effective in the way Abdourahman highlights the tension between comfort and distress by centering the exhibition around references to the bedroom. In modeling the gallery after her own living space, Abdourahman transforms the canvas into a bedframe, and paints on duvets, quilts and pillowcases, as a way to express her interpretation of the physical and emotional aspect of the 'home.' Despite often being a site of shelter and refuge, the bedroom can also be seen as the site where nightmares occur. Fascinated by this duality, Abdourahman compares this tension with the diasporic experience of the 'chase.' As a

1 Shire, Warsan, 'Home,' *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head: Poems*, Random House, 2022, p.18-19.

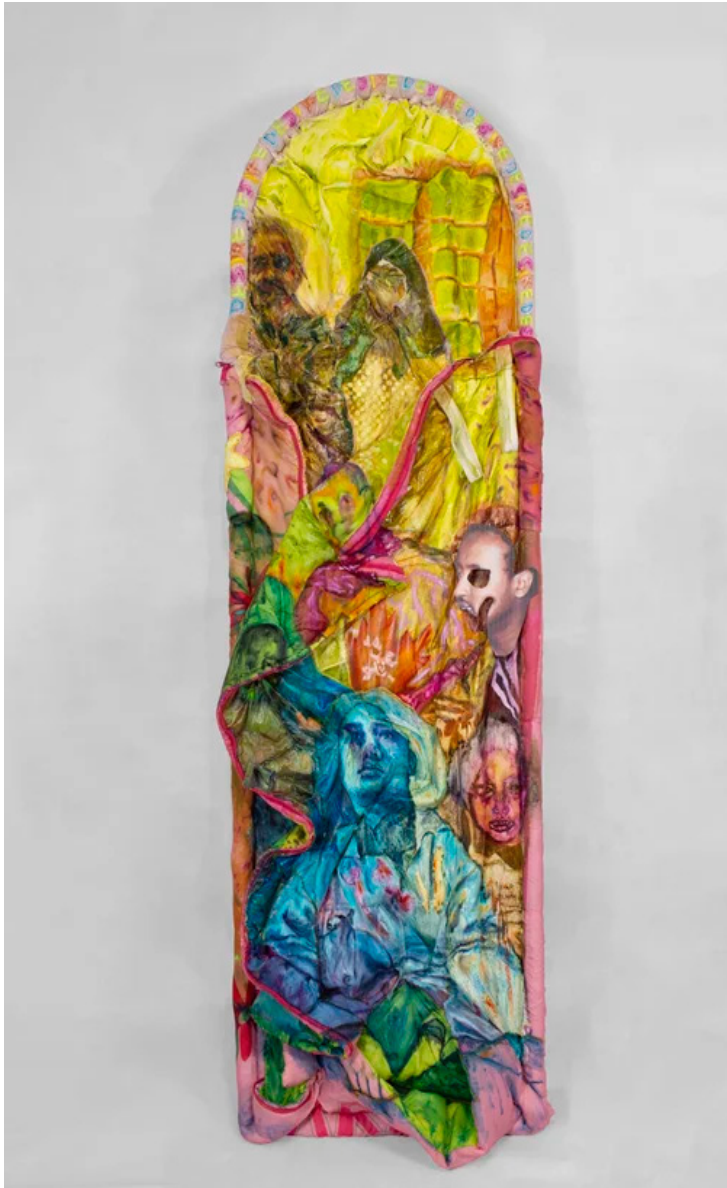


Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman. *No One Would Leave Home Unless Home Chased You*, 2024, oil on wood panel with foam, 10" x 8."

result, her multimedia practice offers a powerful interpretation of intergenerational experiences in the search for belonging that is simultaneously haunting and healing.

Shadowy images emerge as brightly coloured paint is superimposed over layers of fabrics. With no clear distinction between foreground and background, the forms and figures that appear from the surface blend into the scene as if the painting has caught them in a state of in-between. The use of blankets, often signifying care and protection, is juxtaposed by boldly painting over it and deliberately muddying the colours, resulting in a worn-out appearance as if the item is withered by time. The artist illustrates the freedom of not being fully understood by playing with organic and abstract compositions, which mirrors the insider/outsider dynamics that diasporic individuals often experience in foreign spaces.

Wavering between joy and grief, Abdourahman further incorporates objects from her childhood by embedding them within her paintings, thus encapsulating the 2000s girlcore aesthetic. Through a journey of bright colours and vivid textures, childhood memorabilia (glow in the dark stars, my little pony toys, children's accessories) are woven into her installation, creating a whimsical environment that is comforting yet chaotic. As the viewer focuses their attention on each article, details fade in and out of sight like spectres weaving between dense



Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman. *I Show Not Your Face but Your Heart's Desire*. 2025. 61" x 21" x 23." Oil on canvas and blanket, with print on paper and fleece.

colours, representing the dynamics of childhood innocence and its associated nightmares.

Acting as a site for both mourning and remembering, *Memories We Carry, Stories We Heal* materializes Abdourahman's imaginary and subconscious worlds. The combination of childhood memorabilia with reworked images from her family album allows the artist's stories to resonate on both the personal and collective level. She transports us to intimate moments, encouraging us to look through our own memories. In examining the relationships between memory and nostalgia, as well as trauma and reconciliation, Abdourahman creates new alternatives for her communities' histories. As a result, Abdourahman tenderly addresses the diasporic longing for a homeland by exploring cultural reclamation, preservation, and reconnection in her work.



Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman. *Make Their Resting Ground Spacious*. Oil on canvas, blanket, fleece, and latex glove. Print on fleece. With found fabrics, hair clip, keys, magnet, glow-in-the-dark stars, plastic flower. 2024.

Bios & Acknowledgements

Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman

Sarah-Mecca Abdourahman is a graduate of Concordia University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (2020) and is an MFA candidate at Columbia University (2027). She has been awarded the Salt Spring National Art Prize Joan McConnel Award (2023-24) and is a recipient of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council (2023). She has previously exhibited with Friedrichs Pontone (2025), Wassaic Project (2025), FOFA Gallery (2024), Gallery 101 (2022), and the Ottawa Art Gallery (2021). She has also led creative workshops with the Ottawa Art Gallery, Somerset West Community Health Centre, and the Ottawa Catholic School Board (2021-23). Her work is held in various private collections, including the City of Ottawa Art Collection.

Vania Djelani

Vania Djelani is an Indonesian visual artist and writer who has been living in Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal since 2012. Primarily interested in exploring how place and belongingness can be negotiated in a world of increasing globalization and migration, Vania's practice often draws on her outsider-insider relationship to place. As a writer, she took part in the 2021 Momus Emerging Critics residency and has contributed texts to Art Mur, Centre des arts actuels SKOL, Bradley Ertaskiran, Femme Art Review, Vie des Arts, and Phi - Antenna.



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To acknowledge this traditional territory is to recognize its longer history, one predating the establishment of the earliest European colonies. We also acknowledge the colonial frameworks within which Forest City Gallery operates and the need to identify and remove barriers on an ongoing basis.

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