



# Hajra Waheed

## A Solo Exhibition



Hajra Waheed, *Hum*, 2020. Multi-channel sound installation with custom speaker casings, 36 minutes, 17 seconds. Installation view, Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany (July 11–September 6, 2020). Courtesy the artist. Photo courtesy Diana Prammatter.

Hajra Waheed’s multidisciplinary practice explores the tangled legacies of colonial and state violence with a uniquely poetic approach and engagement with the world. The exhibition presents Waheed’s distinct language of using the ordinary as a means to convey the profound. Her works visualize landscape as a medium to transpose human struggle, shaped by a politics of resistance and resilience. Weaving between the intimate and infinite constellations of the communities of which she is a part, her works—while rooted in the historical—imagine new possibilities towards a radically collective and borderless future.



### Audio Tour

Visit [camstl.org/audio](https://camstl.org/audio) to hear directly from the artist and curator.

### Digital Guide

Explore more about CAM’s exhibitions using our virtual guide on Bloomberg Connects! Scan the QR code to download the app and get started.



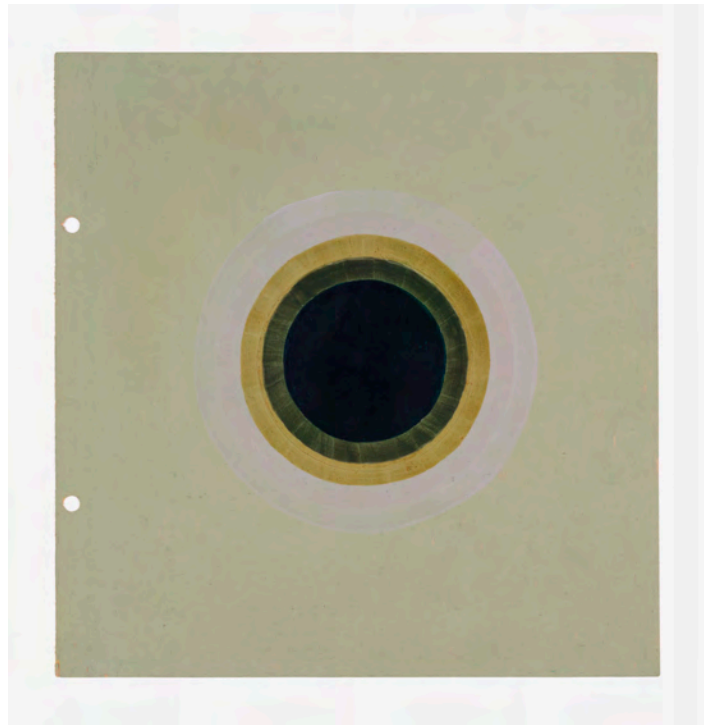
Featuring new and recent works including video, sculpture, painting, and works on paper, the exhibition also activates CAM's main galleries with a new iteration of *Hum* (2020)—an immersive multi-channel musical composition and sound installation. *Hum*, whose title translates to “We” in Urdu, is composed of eight hummed songs of resistance by poets and singers who have all experienced imprisonment and/or self-exile as a result of speaking out against state oppression, the rise of authoritarianism, and the plight and hope of working people, the marginalized, and dispossessed. All of these songs have been suppressed or banned at various moments in recent decades, yet continue to be sung widely today, across social movements, preserved and passed down to a new generation. Defiantly reimagining these songs through the medium of humming, the work moves beyond borders to envision a future of collective action through interconnected struggle and solidarity.

Sound plays a vital role in Waheed's practice, as evidenced in her sound chamber studies or in what the artist describes as sound meditations. Across each of the artist's drawings, painted works, and sculptures featured in the exhibition, sound finds new resonances. Here, sound not only becomes a language of resistance, as *Hum* insists; it also opens up new pathways for listening. Elsewhere in the exhibition, her works emphasize both the importance of abstraction and our relationship to the natural world, culminating in *The Spiral* (2019). This poetic film, narrated by the artist, reflects on the notion of change while reminding us of the need to maintain the long view, especially in relation to social transformation.

### Select Works in the Exhibition

#### **We Need A Whole Lot of Trees 1-10**

*We Need A Whole Lot of Trees 1-10* was written and translated from Urdu by Taimoor Shahid, a multilingual poet, writer, scholar, translator, and the artist's brother-in-law. In an ongoing and intimate collaboration between Waheed's drawings and painted works and Shahid's poetry and inscriptions, each embedded stanza urgently calls for the need to reaffirm and wholly integrate the natural world—as the very breath and balm of our existence—at every level of human life and its subsequent struggles.



Hajra Waheed, *Sound Studies 1-6* (2023), Oil stick and acrylic on paper, 17.75 × 18 in. Courtesy the artist. Photo courtesy Richard-Max Tremblay.



Hajra Waheed, *Hum II: Studies for a Sound Chamber*, 2023. Ink on 100% Cotton Arches Watercolour Paper, 10.5 × 13.5 inches. Courtesy the artist. Photo courtesy Paul Litherland.

**Sound Studies 1–6**  
**Sound Studies 1–9**  
**Studies for a Sound Chamber 1–9**

Sound plays a vital role in Waheed’s practice of abstraction. Whether evidenced as studies for a sound chamber or what the artist describes as sound meditations, across each of her works on paper in the exhibition, this form finds new resonances. Here, sound not only becomes a language of resistance but an opening from which to build new pathways for listening.

**Hum**

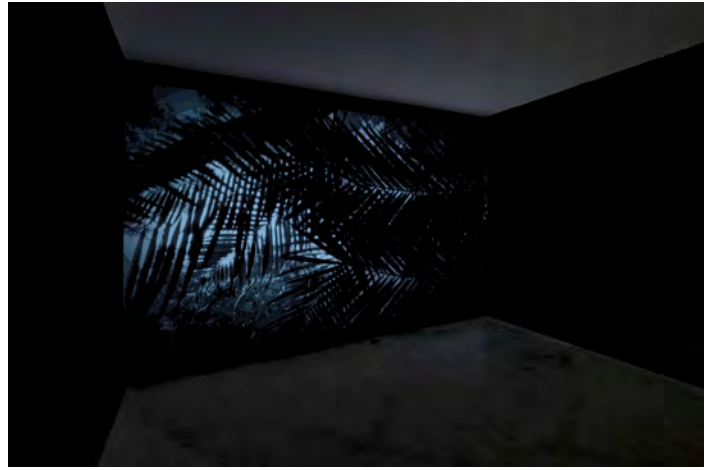
*Hum* is a large-scale, multi-channel musical composition and sound installation that employs humming as a means to explore radical forms of collective and sonic agency. The work’s title, which translates to “We” in Urdu, reflects on international solidarity movements that emerged in the second half of the 20th century during processes of decolonization in the Global South. Driven by the need to critically engage these histories and reflect on their implications for our time, the composition features eight songs of resistance from South, Central, West Asia, and Africa. Shared across each of these hummed verses are stories of struggle against state oppression, the rise of authoritarianism, and the plight and hope of working people, the marginalized, and the dispossessed. All of these songs are being resurrected in social movements today.

*Hum* was initially created upon invitation for *Lahore Biennial 02* and shown within Lahore Fort’s historic Diwan-i-Aam. Built by Shah Jahan in 1628 and styled after Isfahan’s Chehel Sotoun, a 40-pillar audience hall, Diwan-i-Aam was conceived as a space for the public to air their grievances. In Waheed’s work, humming acts as a medium, meditation, phenomena, and language of resistance. It cuts across hardened differences, challenging border constructions and, for a moment, transcends divisions around ethnic, religious, linguistic, and national affiliations into larger calls for solidarity.

**Apparitions 1–18**

*Did you know that even in blindness, total darkness, we possess an innate ability to sense blue light? That we turn to light just before dust?* —Hajra Waheed

*Apparitions 1–18* consists of a set of painted works that meditate on light, death, and renewal. For the artist, whose practice of abstraction is deeply informed by the natural world, *Apparitions 1–18* focuses on nature’s miracles, specifically the sun as a source of energy and a life force. These quiet paintings invite viewers to slow down, look closely, and listen in a way that is more patient and attuned to the Earth’s natural cycles.



Hajra Waheed, *The Spiral*, 2019. Video with narration, 7 minutes, 10 seconds. Installation view, *Hold Everything Dear* at The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada (September 20, 2019–January 5, 2020). Courtesy the artist. Photo courtesy Toni Hafkenshied.

**The Spiral**

This poetic video work begins with a compelling statement by the artist: “The spiral is much more than just a form.” Universal and ubiquitous, centrifugal and centripetal, representing both growth and decay, spirals are one of the most widespread forms found in nature. The spiral grants us insight into the consciousness of self and the expansion of this awareness outwards—a springboard for reflecting on individual upheaval and collective human experience. The film builds upon Waheed’s existing practice of mapping patterns of colonial and state violence, reflecting on change while reminding us of the importance of maintaining the long view, especially in relation to social transformation.

## Artist's Suggested Reading List

- Booth, Marilyn. "Sheikh Imam the Singer: An Interview." *Index on Censorship* 14, no. 3 (1985): 18-21.
- Chattopadhyay, Budhaditya. *Sound Practices in the Global South: Co-listening to Resounding Plurilogues*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.
- Farzana, K.F. "Music and Artistic Artefacts: Symbols of Rohingya Identity and Everyday Resistance in Borderlands." *ASEAS - Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 4, no. 2 (2011): 215-236.
- LaBelle, Brandon. "On Acoustic Justice." *The Listening Biennial*, July 2023. PDF downloadable for free on [www.listeningbiennial.net](http://www.listeningbiennial.net).
- McDonald, David A. "Al-Naksa and the Emergence of Political Song (1967-1987)." In *My Voice Is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.
- "Nûdem Durak: Meet the Kurdish woman imprisoned for singing in Turkey." *Al Jazeera Plus* (Documentary). April 30, 2015.
- Waheed, Hajra. "INFO Unltd with Hajra Waheed on 'Hum' and Abolitionist Modes of Listening." By Reece Cox. *Cashmere Radio*, December 3, 2020.
- Waheed, Hajra. "Hum II with Rayya Badran, Reem Shadid and Hajra Waheed." *Radio Alhara*, forthcoming Fall 2023.
- Waheed, Sarah. "Foreword." In *Hidden Histories of Pakistan, Censorship, Literature, and Secular Nationalism in Late Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- This text is written by the artist's sister and focuses on "Hum Dekhenge" (one of the songs in *Hum*, 2020).
- Woodland, Sarah and Wolfgang Vachon, ed. *Sonic Engagement: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Community Engaged Audio Practice*. London: Routledge, 2022.

*Hajra Waheed: A Solo Exhibition* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, former Ferring Foundation Chief Curator, with Misa Jeffereis, Associate Curator.

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## Related Programs

Free and open to the public. For a complete list of programs, please visit [camstl.org](http://camstl.org).

## Artist Talk: Hajra Waheed

Saturday, September 9, 1:00–2:00 pm



Hajra Waheed. Photo courtesy the artist.

**Hajra Waheed** (b. 1980, currently lives and works in Montréal) is a multidisciplinary artist whose recent international exhibitions include: *O Quilombismo*, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2023); *Sharjah Biennial 15*, UAE (2023); *State of Concept*, Athens (2023); *Relations: Diaspora and Painting*, PHI Foundation, Montréal (2021); *Hum*, Portikus, Frankfurt (2020); *Globale Resistance*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2020); *Lahore Biennial 02*, Pakistan (2020); *Pushing Paper: Contemporary Drawing from 1970 to Now*, British Museum, London (2019); *Hold Everything Dear*, The Power Plant, Toronto (2019); *57th Venice Biennale*, VIVA ARTE VIVA, Venice (2017); *11th Gwangju Biennale*, South Korea (2016); *The Cyphers*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK (2016); *Still Against the Sky*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2015); *La Biennale de Montréal*, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Quebec (2014); *Lines of Control*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, NY (2012); and *(In) The First Circle*, Antoni Tàpies Foundation, Barcelona (2012). She is the recipient of the Sharjah Biennial 15 Prize (2023), the Hnatyshyn Foundation Award (2022), the Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award (2014) for outstanding achievement as a mid-career artist, and a finalist for the Sobey Art Award (2016).



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