

NEW RELEASE 2023



Susan Hefuna *Anagrams*

Texts by Venetia Porter, Stefan Weber
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Sculptures and drawings by the German-Egyptian artist in the collection of the British Museum, London

Susan Hefuna embraces a wide range of media, including drawing, sculpture, and installation as well as video, photography, and performance. From 2004, she began working with Cairene craftsmen who make the wooden screens known as mashrabiya that filter the light and create privacy in traditional houses. In her versions, Hefuna places within them words or short texts in Arabic or English. The designs of the wooden screens inspired her delicate abstract drawings, created from ink and layers of tracing and cartridge paper.

From the text by **Venetia Porter**, former curator of Islamic and Contemporary Middle East Art at the British Museum, London: *The three British Museum screens exemplify some of the different styles: In Knowledge is sweeter than honey (al-ma'rifa ahla min al-'asal), the proverb laid out in three lines is in the elegant angular style Hefuna favours for the text. Ana, meaning 'I', is a more complex composition. The word appears in Arabic and in both upper and lower case Latin across the different rows of varying size and shape. In Hilm, 'Dream', the screen itself has changed material, the turned wood structure now translated into bronze and the Arabic word whose sound alone evokes a dreamlike state, floats elegantly in the upper part of the screen.*

(...)

Drawing has been at the heart of Hefuna's practice since the early 1990s, and, quickly, the drawings began to take on an architectural form, highlighted by the recurring use of the title 'Building', the title given to both of the British Museum groups, made ten years apart.

From the text by **Stefan Weber**, director of the Museum for Islamic Art at Pergamonmuseum, Berlin:

At the Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, we were – like many others – inspired by this experience. Several late Mamluk and early Ottoman examples are in our collection, and we decided to follow this inspiration in the 'Cairo – Centre on the Nile' hall for the new galleries (due in 2027).

Susan Hefuna will add another contemporary female voice with her mashrabiya, accompanied by a picture and a quote. The inscription in the mashrabiya Woman Cairo is in agreement with the interviews of our colleagues from Cairo, widening the often male-dominated historiography of the Middle East. This addition of contemporary art in a museum of premodern culture follows a special approach that shall allow statements to connect the past to the present without blurring the difference between them.

Susan Hefuna (b. 1962) is an artist with a cross-cultural heritage of mixed Christian/Muslim, German/Egyptian origins. Hefuna's practice incorporates drawing, sculpture, video and photography as well as ambitious participatory installations. Hefuna's work has been exhibited at institutions such as the Louvre, Paris, and the Serpentine Gallery, London. They are in the collections of Centre Pompidou, Paris, MoMA, New York, LACMA, Los Angeles, British Museum, Tate Modern, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Guggenheim, New York and Abu Dhabi, Museum für Islamische Kunst (Pergamonmuseum), Berlin, among others.

Exhibition

Anagrams, British Museum, London, until October 2023

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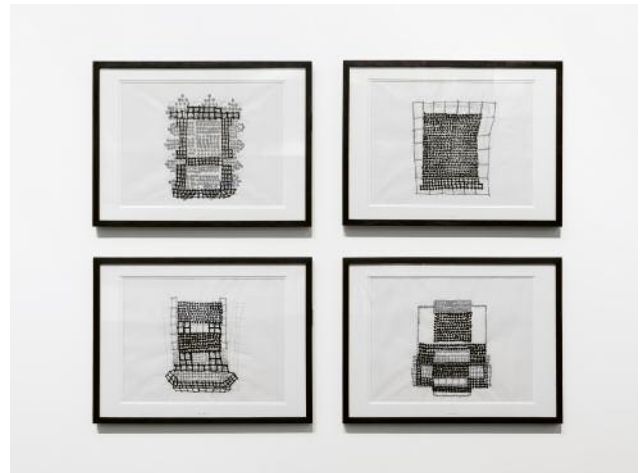
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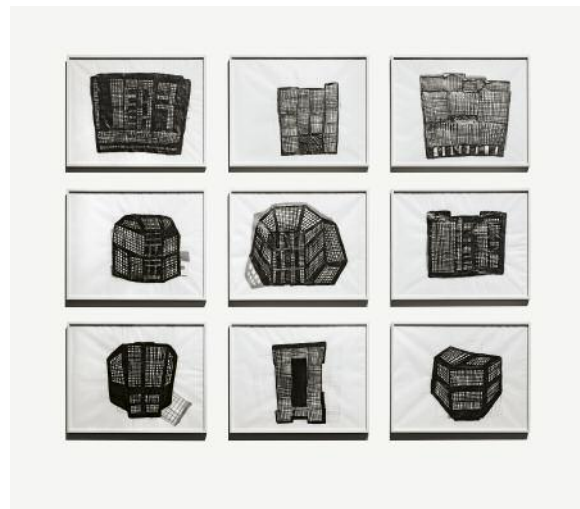
01_ Installation View
© Susan Hefuna; Photo © Francis Ware



02_ Building, 2004 (set of four drawings, ink on tracing paper)
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03_ Building, 2004 (ink on tracing paper)
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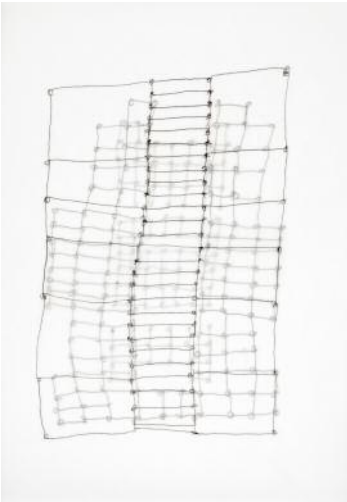
04_ Building, 2014 (set of nine drawings, ink on cartridge and tracing paper)
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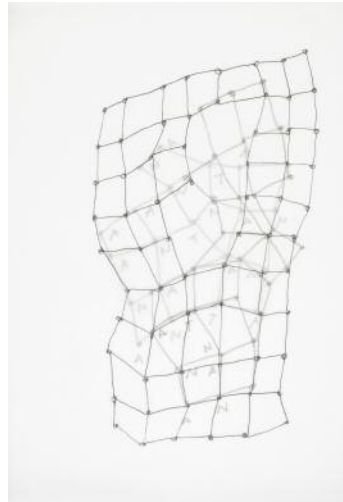
05_ Building, 2014 (ink on cartridge and tracing paper)
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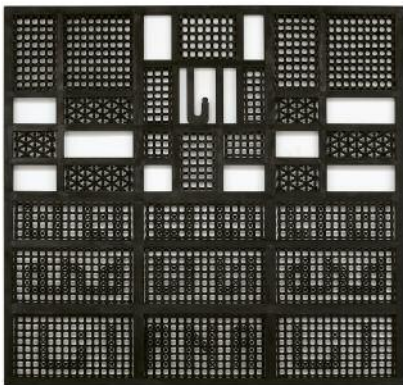
06_ Building, 2014 (ink on cartridge and tracing paper)
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07_ Anagram, 2007 (from set of 28 drawings, pencil on layered tracing paper)
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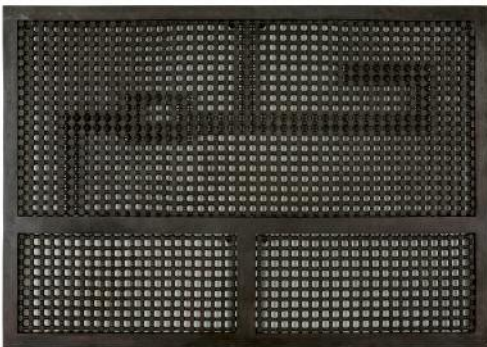
08_ Anagram, 2007 (from set of 28 drawings, pencil on layered tracing paper)
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09_ Ana, 2007 (wood)
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10_ Knowledge is Sweeter than Honey, 2007 (wood)
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11_ Dream, 2009 (bronze)
© Susan Hefuna; Photo © Francis Ware



12_ Woman Cairo, 2009 (wood)
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