

/Maryam Yousif/
in
/room/



Curatorial Note by Maxine Schoefer-Wulf:

Death Pit, Vol. 2 draws our attention downward. A thin layer of soil covers the floor. Edges sharply delineated, it has been shaped to mirror the scale of the office desk with which it shares its space. Low to the ground, the site is contained. A closer look reveals fingerprints, the traces of hands pressing into the soil. It could be a bed prepared for planting, but the cast of ceramic sculptures - anachronistic artifacts intentionally arranged - transforms the site.

A pink ceramic flower, a plant body with a round face and long-lashed eyes, has been laid on the soil. Rootless, its features are expressive. A grinning purple horse's head (or is it baring its teeth?) is guarding the site on one end. On the other, a woman's head sits on the floor, chin resting in her hand, nails polished green, piercing eyes slightly drooping. Nearby lie three plant-like scepters or spears (perhaps magic wands?) evoking protection. Dishes and vessels with handles that become limbs and lids adorned with women's faces encircle the soil, collapsing the domestic and ritualistic, utilitarian and aesthetic. It is not clear for whom these objects exist. Were they once buried, artifacts of a life passed? Are they still in use? Or are they projections, what the artist herself wishes to leave behind?

Maryam Yousif builds a gravesite with offerings shaped by her childhood memories. Tales of the legendary mythological Assyrian warrior princess, Shamiram, mingle with stories of Yousif's mother, who painted Shamiram and her horses long ago. These interwoven stories blur with impressions of the life of Puabi of the Sumerian kingdom of Ur in Southern Iraq, whose lavish royal tomb was excavated to reveal she was a queen in her own right. Yousif assembles a micro-mythology: one where fiction, the familial, and the political overlap in bright colors to project into the future and rewrite a past that lingers between death and aliveness.

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Maryam Yousif is a San Francisco based artist working in ceramics, painting and installation. She received her Master of Fine Arts degree from the San Francisco Art Institute. Originally from Iraq, she moved to Canada as a teen and the United States as an adult. Her work has been a means of processing diasporic shifts of cultural aesthetics inspired by western kitsch and Middle Eastern mythology particular to Mesopotamia. She has exhibited at R/SF Projects (San Francisco, CA), Brilliant Champions Gallery (Brooklyn, NY), CTRL SHFT collective (Oakland, CA) and Guerrero Gallery (San Francisco, CA).