

# Gender, sexuality, oppression

*Cairo-born artist explores the struggles of women in her fifth Korean exhibition*

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The works of Cairo-born artist Ghada Amer have predominantly dealt with gender, sexuality and the social oppression of women. In her latest exhibition in Seoul, the 50-year-old explores new methods to convey her ideas and messages.

While Amer was mostly known for her paintings, the current exhibition at Seoul's Kukje Gallery K3, her fifth in Korea, is highlighted by her new sculptural works.

Amer was educated and cut her artistic teeth in France and now lives and works in New York. However, her Egyptian background always seems to be an obvious influence in her work.

An oval-shaped piece called "The Blue Bra Girls" is a sculpture that feels like a painting. Swirling lines of stainless steel portray eight women in a physical struggle, but with glaring eyes aimed at their oppressor.

Amer said the inspiration for this piece came when she saw a photo of a young female protestor being dragged and beaten by police during the Egyptian unrest of 2011. Her torso was bare, expect for her blue bra.

"This is my way of making a eulogy to the brave women who endure physical violence for democracy," Amer told reporters in English.

"The woman in the photo was tacked to the ground, but the women in my sculpture stand proudly with their eyes wide open."

Another notable piece was "The Words I Love the Most," a big and black, globe-shaped sculpture put together with some 100 Arabic sentences related to love. As with "The Blue Bra Girls," "The Words I Love the Most" is a hollow sculpture, with the words placed in a way where they could be read from the reverse side.

"I wanted to make empty sculptures as if I am drawing in space," Amer said.

Amer explains that her passion for Arabic letters began when she was growing up in



Ghada Amer

Egypt, where image representation was restricted for religious reasons. Her passion as an artist, therefore, began with an interest in the shapes and meanings of Arabic text.

Her sculptures have different texture inside and out, intent on symbolizing what Amer sees as the double-sidedness of politics and sexuality or freedom and subordination experienced by women in the society.

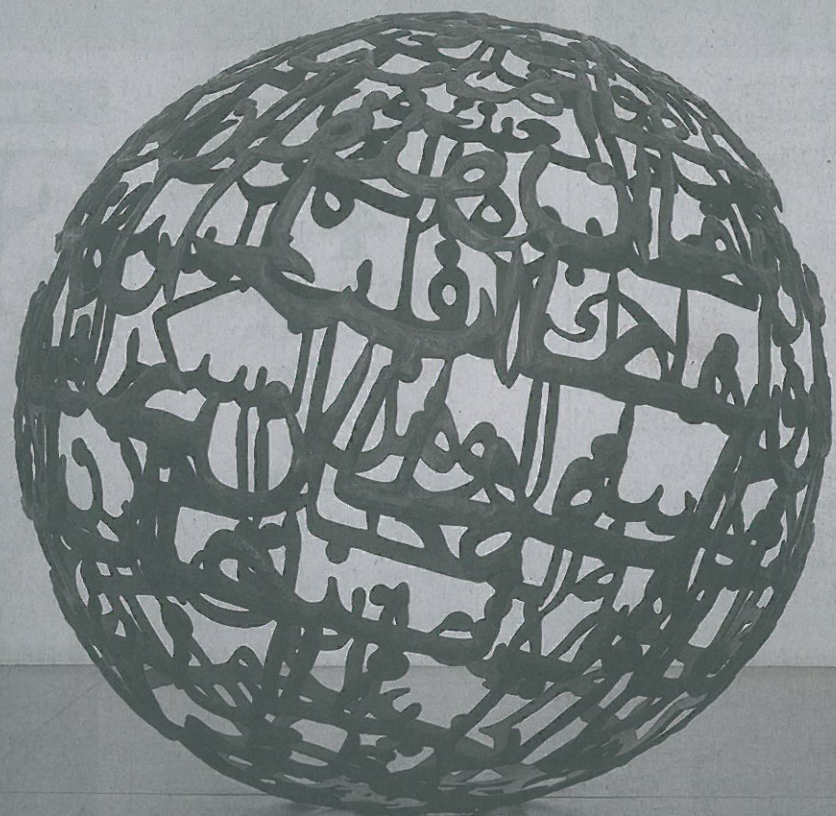
The exhibit also features four of Amer's signature embroidered paintings. At first glance, they resemble abstract paintings, but upon closer look, visitors will find that the threads are actually shaped like the bodies of naked women. The female figures in the paintings vary from images taken from pornographic magazines to oppressed Islamic women.

"Sewing is a universal method used in Korea, Europe, Africa or anywhere in the world. It is a female medium and I want to discuss about woman in a medium of womankind," the artist said.

Amer doesn't want to be categorized as a Muslim artist or a "female" artist.

"I don't understand why people call male artist just artist and female artist 'woman' artist. I am an artist and I create works that I am interested in. I am a woman and probably interested in feminine things. My F-word is 'feminist' word," Amer said.

"Though, it is better to be called a feminist



Ghada Amer's "The Words I Love the Most," top, and "The Blue Bra Girls" are among her works displayed in Seoul.

Courtesy of Christopher Burke Studio and Kukje Gallery

artist than a Middle Eastern artist, which sounds too exclusive."

The exhibit runs through June 30. Admis-

sion is free.

For more information, visit [www.kukje-gallery.com](http://www.kukje-gallery.com) or call (02) 3210-9885.