

Huda Lutfi

*Unraveling*

15<sup>th</sup> April – 27<sup>th</sup> May 2025

The Third Line is pleased to present *Unraveling*, Huda Lutfi's fourth solo exhibition at the gallery. Bringing together works from three of her recent series—*When Dreams Call for Silence* (2019), *Our Black Thread* (2020–2021), and *Healing Devices* (2020–ongoing)—the exhibition traces the deepening introspective qualities of Lutfi's practice over recent years. *Unraveling* also features a selection of previously unseen miniature collages that precede *Healing Devices*, offering insight into Lutfi's artistic experimentations that culminated in these sculptural abstractions. The exhibition includes a new video work, *The Seven-legged Demon of the Night* (2025), made in memory of Lutfi's mother, whose lifelong work as a seamstress inspired the artist's practice centered on thread and fabric.



Huda Lutfi, *Missing Shoe*, 2018, Mixed media on paper, 70 x 50 cm

Owing to her background as a cultural historian, Lutfi's work has long engaged with the sociopolitical currents of her surroundings, particularly her longtime home, Cairo. In her earlier works, human figures—often fragmented, dismembered, or punctured through her signature collage technique—serve as both reactions to and reflections on the crises that unfolded during moments of political unrest in Egypt. In her series *When Dreams Call for Silence* (2019), the human figure remains but is now set within surreal domestic scenes or immersed in poignant silence, marking a shift in Lutfi's practice toward stillness and introspection, as described by writer and curator Sara El-Adl.

This contemplative direction deepens in *Healing Devices* (2020–ongoing), where Lutfi moves toward assemblages of organic and geometric paper cutouts carefully arranged against delicate silver or gold backgrounds. The series is inspired by Ismail al-Jazari, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Arab designer and polymath, whose manuscript, *The Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* (1206), contains over 100 illustrations. Initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic—a period of global uncertainty and isolation—*Healing Devices* embodies a sense of quiet resilience, healing, and spiritual reflection. Complementing this body of work, the exhibition also presents a selection of previously unseen miniature collages—spontaneous experimentations with form that preceded the *Healing Devices* series. These compositions offer a glimpse into the intuitive, exploratory process that became the foundation for the series.

In the *Our Black Thread* (2020-21) series, Lutfi further leans into the act of making as a healing practice. What began as a casual exercise at home—improvising with thread on used teabags and car-filters—evolved into a fully-fledged practice rooted in materiality, intuition, and ritual. Utilizing the mobility afforded by the medium's lightness, Lutfi sewed both at home and in her studio, creating a multitude of minimalist compositions with a restrained palette of black, white, gray, and off-white. The works not only amplify the introspective meditation that fueled their making but also evoke the historical association of craftsmanship as feminine labor and its complex relationship to art.

Gallery Two presents *The Seven-legged Demon of the Night* (2025), a new video made in memory of Lutfi's mother, Su'ad Hanim 'Abdul 'Aziz Wali, who was a seamstress. The work captures Su'ad's hands during a period of her illness, engaged in the miming of sewing and cutting. Interwoven with texts reflecting on her mother's relationship with sewing, the video invites contemplation on what sewing signifies to a female body, its ties to memory and healing, as well as kinship.

Collectively, the works in *Unraveling* offer a compelling portrait of Lutfi, whose embodied, deeply meditative practice remains ever relevant in a world increasingly grappling with political strife and violence. In the words of Lutfi: "*Art is a healing practice. You forget yourself—the burden of the ego, as well as its anxieties and desires—when you immerse yourself in a work of art.*"

### About Huda Lutfi

Cultural historian Huda Lutfi is a self-taught artist. An Associate Professor at the American University, Cairo, Lutfi holds a PhD in Islamic Culture and History. Her artistic practice is closely aligned with her research, both of which reflect upon history and traditions as they exist in the contemporary world. In considering the present-day interpretations and misinterpretations of the past, Lutfi investigates the human psyche as it relates to remembrance. Her practice has always been in conversation with a larger political context, incorporating strong elements of popular culture, political insignia, and a play on slogans and language. The human figure has also been an essential part of her language. In the recent years, her works have taken a more self-reflexive and inward turn.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Healing Devices*, Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, USA (2021); *Our Black Thread*, Gypsum Gallery, Cairo, Egypt (2021); *When Dreams Call for Silence*, The American University in Cairo, Tahrir Cultural Center, Cairo, Egypt (2019); *Still*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2018); *Magnetic Bodies: Imaging the Urban*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2016); *Cut and Paste*, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt (2013).

Selected group exhibitions include: *Imagine Climate Dignity*, Kunstlerhaus Wien, Vienna, Austria (2025); *The Circle Was a Point*, Foundry Downtown, Dubai, UAE (2024); *Being and Belonging*, The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada (2023); *Islamic Arts Biennale*, Jeddah, KSA (2023); *Women Defining Women In Contemporary Art Of The Middle East And Beyond*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, USA (2023); *History Leads to Twisted Mountains*, ARD for Art, Cairo, Egypt (2022); *Reflections on contemporary art of the Middle East and North Africa*, The British Museum, London, UK (2021); *There Is Fiction In The Space Between*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2020); *Occupational Hazards*, Apexarts, New York, USA (2019); *Tell me the Story of all These Things*, Villa Vassilieff, Paris, France (2017); *The Turn: Art Practices in Post-Spring Societies*, Kunstraum Niederoesterreich, Vienna, Austria (2016); *La Bienal del Sur*, Caracas,

Venezuela (2015); *Terms & Conditions*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2013); and *My World Images*, Festival For Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark (2010) to mention only a few.

### About The Third Line

Founded in 2005, The Third Line is a Dubai-based gallery that represents contemporary artists locally, regionally, and internationally. With over 19 years of dedicated commitment to the arts, it has become a pioneering platform for established talent and emerging voices from the region and its diaspora, building a dynamic program that explores the diversity of practices in the region.

In addition to its exhibitions, The Third Line engages in the production of art publications in English and Arabic and hosts numerous non-profit, alternative programs that add to the discourse on art, film, music, and literature in the region.

Represented artists include: Abbas Akhavan, Ala Ebtekar, Amir H. Fallah, Anuar Khalifi, Bady Dalloul, Farah Al Qasimi, Farhad Moshiri, Fouad Elkoury, Hassan Hajjaj, Hayv Kahraman, Huda Lutfi, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Jordan Nassar, Kamran Samimi, Laleh Khorramian, Lamya Gargash, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Nima Nabavi, Poursan Jinchi, Rana Begum, Sahand Hesamiyan, Sara Naim, Sarah Awad, Shirin Aliabadi, Slavs and Tatars, Sophia Al Maria, Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Vian Sora, yasiin bey, and Youssef Nabil.

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