

# FORA

## Sahar Ghavami

b. 1996, Tehran, Iran

*“Whether the art gets darker or it gets softer, it was always a way to express myself. For me, it was a way of existing. I had to fight back, and I had to find a voice. That’s why my practice is always personal”.*

Sahar Ghavami is an Iranian multidisciplinary artist based in Dubai, working primarily through painting, drawing, and immersive visual storytelling. Her work engages personal narrative as a method of constructing shared symbolic codes, while concepts of memory, protection, vulnerability, and decentralized agency expand her creative focus. Across her practice, Ghavami develops multidimensional environments populated by human and non-human protagonists, often positioned within relational dynamics that question hierarchy, care, and coexistence.

Ghavami’s engagement with art began in early childhood through drawing as a habitual mode of communication and empirical exchange - first as a collective family ritual and later as a private necessity. Raised in a household where creative practice and care for animals formed parallel systems of daily life, she developed an understanding of art as a fundamental mode of expression. Drawing functioned initially as a shared activity with her mother, gradually evolving into a form of self-definition. This resulted in an attentiveness to small gestures and details that now structure the visual rhythm of her paintings.

For the artist, a line of text, a brief note, or a sensation recorded at a moment of heightened sensitivity can precede painting. Recording and writing therefore frequently become the first gestures in her process, with the visual framework following later.

Working primarily with acrylic on canvas, that suggests speed and flexibility, allows the artist to shift between painterly registers, at times resembling watercolor or gouache, at others building toward denser opacity. Her work often starts with small pen sketches, thumbnail studies that test rhythm and presence, before expanding onto larger canvases.

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The artist holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Education from the American University in Dubai. She has exhibited since 2017, beginning with independently produced solo presentations, where her early works explored aquatic ecosystems and imagined water-based worlds. Her formative years were shaped by navigating cultural and social expectations that often positioned artistic practice outside conventional definitions of academic or professional success. Nonetheless, such experiences ultimately affirmed her commitment to art, pursued not as an alternative, but as an independent and primary space of agency.

Central to Ghavami's practice is the creation of protective environments and dream-like states. Visually, her paintings unfold with a pronounced sense of fluid continuity: forms do not end so much as they become. A human hand holding an animal may gradually dissolve into its fur or skin, while the animal merges into the surrounding environment. These transitions occur without rupture, guided by an internal logic that resists hierarchy or separation.

Her practice can be positioned within a contemporary lineage of narrative-driven figuration, where painting functions as a site for alternative relational orders. Her work resonates with post-surreal and neo-symbolist approaches, reframing the subconscious through intimate, often domesticated scales rather than monumental registers. Ghavami mobilizes symbolic inheritance as a responsive system, that is continuously reconfigured through personal experience, and cultural translation. This situates her work within a broader contemporary movement of adaptive frameworks for concepts of individual and collective identity in fragmented social landscapes.

Animals appear in her works as recurring figures, shifting between roles of guardian and dependent, reflecting cyclical relationships of care and vulnerability. Rendered in vivid palettes, they are often depicted in naturalistic colors and recognizable anatomies, yet their presence evokes visual traditions associated with Superflat and kawaii aesthetics: flattened forms, gentle exaggeration, and a deliberate disarming quality. This visual language operates as a threshold, inviting viewers into worlds that appear accessible, while sustaining complex emotional and cultural meaning systems beneath the surface.

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Informed by narratives rooted in Persian mythology, literature, and oral traditions, Ghavami's work frequently references mythological creatures such as the Simurgh, which in her work function as conceptual archetypes of transformation and moral continuity. Her figures are depicted in moments of companionship, shared dwelling, and mutual care. They live alongside one another, exchange shelter, and invite each other into their respective realms, proposing fantasy as a model of relational possibility.

Color, scale, and character formations for the artist often operate as mechanisms of visual engagement, forming layered entry points into works that may initially appear playful or disarming. In her implementation, this strategy developed in response to early episodes of criticism, leading Ghavami to form image systems that prioritize connection with the viewer over explanation.

Ghavami's production consistently expands toward shared perceptual fields. Her practice continues to evolve through experimentation with scale, narrative sequencing, and potential expansion into installation and performative storytelling formats.

## EDUCATION

2021 - 2023      Master of Education (M.Ed), American University in Dubai

2021 - 2021      BFA, Studio Arts, American University in Dubai

## EXHIBITIONS

2026      "Home Again" / FN Designs Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, UAE

2025      "Totems" / Khawla Art Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE

2024      "Totems" / Khawla Art Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE

2024      "Expectations" / SheSays Dubai, AUD Main Rotunda, Dubai, UAE

2024      Khawla Art Gallery, Dubai, UAE

2024      "Kunstroute Leuven" / De Melkerij, Veltem, Belgium

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- 2024 "Longings" / LDC D'Ontmoeting, Herent, Belgium
- 2024 "Sugar-Coated" / Church of Veltem, Veltem, Belgium
- 2024 "Happy Chinese New Year" / Musée du Carnaval et du Masque, Binche, Belgium
- 2023 "Kunst in Vervuuring, en toen was er licht" / De Creaxe, Herent, Belgium
- 2023 "Qassemিয়া Student Showcase" / Sharjah, UAE
- 2023 "Ekta'23" / ToDa – Theatre of Digital Art, Dubai, UAE
- 2022 "Brandvertising" (Campaign Magazine Middle East Cover Design) / Rotunda Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2021 "Qodorat" / Aqdar World Summit, Expo 2020, Dubai, UAE
- 2021 "Beyond Translucency" / American University in Dubai (AUD), Dubai, UAE
- 2021 "Off-Guard" / Rotunda Gallery, American University in Dubai, UAE
- 2021 "In-Flux: Once Upon a Dream" / Zimzy Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2020 "In-Flux: Once Upon a Dream" / Rotunda Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2019 "Wetex Dubai – DEWA Green Week" / World Trade Centre, Dubai, UAE
- 2018 "Zayed, Leader and Human" / University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE
- 2018 "Universities Creative Art Festival" / University of Ajman, Ajman, UAE
- 2018 "Innovation Week Art Show" / University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE
- 2018 "Dive" / Rotunda Gallery, American University in Dubai, UAE
- 2018 "Beyond" / Rotunda Gallery, American University in Dubai, UAE

## Grants and Awards

World Zodiac Competition / Musée du Carnaval et du Masque, Binche, Belgium

Dubai Lynx, Student Advertising Contest / MENA

The Global Undergraduate Awards / Ireland

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Outstanding Visual Communication Student Award / AUD Gala Awards

Marine Debris Design Competition / Azraq Marine Conservation Organization (1st Place Winner)

RAC Fahrenheit 451, Poster Design / American University in Dubai (1st Place Winner)

Dubai Lynx, Student Advertising Contest / MENA

"Zayed, Leader and Human" / University of Sharjah

Universities Creative Art Festival / University of Ajman

UOWD Art Attack / University of Wollongong in Dubai (1st Place Winner)

8th Annual Uni-Care Wellbeing Days / University of Wollongong in Dubai (1st Place Winner)

## Museums and Collections

"Chinese Zodiac: Year of the Dragon" / Musée du Carnaval et du Masque, Binche, Belgium

"Three Sheikhs Portraits" / Salma Children's Rehabilitation Hospital, Abu Dhabi, UAE

"Fahrenheit 45" / AUD Library, Dubai, UAE

"In-Flux: Once Upon a Dream" (Painting Series) / Zimzy Gallery, Dubai, UAE