

## **Art, Politics and Activism: Malina Suliman at Casa Rusca**

*Malina Suliman*

**15 May - 15 August 2022**

**Museo Casa Rusca, Locarno**

"My interest in street art is the result of the awareness that, in order to reach more people, especially young people and women, whose struggles I wanted to address, I would have to make my art accessible to those who are unable to visit museums and galleries due to social and cultural reasons." These words perfectly summarize the meaning of art according to Malina Suliman, a young Afghan woman with a tormented personal journey, marked by atrocities, suffering, escapes, that she has skilfully transformed into an art form intended as both a gesture of political condemnation and an instrument of social awareness. Malina is a thirty-two-year-old artist from Kabul, a city she abandoned as a child to take refuge first in Kandahar, then in Pakistan, and finally, a decade ago, in the Netherlands, where she completed her studies at the Dutch Art Institute.

A journey influenced by the tragic events of a country, Afghanistan, that is as beautiful as tormented, marked by violence, conflicts, and oppression: the themes developed and admirably translated by this young artist into street art compositions, where high-impact graffiti are combined and merged with live performances. The body is Malina's subject, and it is studied, reinvented, analysed in its many facets, starting from the image of those turbans and burqas that have indelibly marked the distance between men and women, between freedom and submission, between strength and weakness, power and obedience. Dichotomies personally experienced by this young Afghan artist who, attacked and stoned in her country, chose art as a form of activism and political condemnation, but also as a personal reflection on her own integration into the Western world.

Migration, travel, exploration of complex identities, the role of women in society: these are the themes at the centre of Malina's life, that she has made her own and then poured into her art through absolutely original and out-of-the-box creations, which question the past but also our own conscience and therefore our way of interacting with the world with its endless and sometimes tragic nuances. Since painting graffiti on the walls of Kabul, this young artist has matured an awareness that has led her to develop her own personal thoughts on the role of women in that land, apparently so distant but always at the centre of her thoughts, as are the reflections and the controversial relationship with a Western world that has welcomed her and offered her new opportunities.

Her projects in fact aim to explore space intended as a multitude of flows and diasporas of people and knowledge. By embracing and exploring the movement of cultural artifacts, her works – which combine multimedia installations, live performances, illustrations, letters, calligraphies painted on burqa fabrics, and murals – question the artificiality of culture which, after all, reveals a harsh criticism of the very idea of multiculturalism. In other words, Malina's art analyses the conflicts resulting from the juxtaposition of collective and exiled identities, in a wonderful mix of meanings that combine and blend thoughts, ideas, experiences, and exchanges between different people and cultures. With one single goal: raising awareness, shocking the audience, unlocking new opportunities, actively engaging the public.

This is why the artist's work has become – as already mentioned – an instrument of social and political criticism and of exploration of the mechanisms underlying social exclusion, discrimination and inequality, but also an in-depth reflection on the various hierarchies of gender, class, race, ethnicity and citizenship that have always characterized our tormented but also wonderful planet. In other words, her art is intended to ask questions about daily life and the struggles to survive, while reflecting on our ancestors and our identity, thus offering new possibilities and opportunities for cooperation. Delicate issues addressed with courage and conviction through fascinating interpretative journeys that will be sure to seduce, engage and captivate the largest audience.

Starting with the inauguration on Saturday, 14 May, the exhibition will present a spectacular

performance written and designed for the occasion by Malina herself. Starting in fact from the assumption that street art is a means to accomplish an artistic and therefore creative act, which is at the same time both imagination and rebellion, the young artist designs and offers an original exhibition that makes the veil and turban its central and dominant theme. These are in fact the two terms that represent the common thread of a real narrative, an absolutely unmissable opportunity for viewers to fully immerse themselves and learn about the condition of women in Afghanistan through the eyes of a young and yet mature and aware daughter of this wonderful land.

The exhibition is a new experience for Casa Rusca, where Malina is setting up a truly original introspective “journey”, the result of a personal itinerary that helped her view art as an instrument of representation but also of political and social activism, of condemnation and at the same time of dialogue: this is why the veil, the burqa and the turban become the basic elements of a personal and original reflection on Afghanistan, Europe and the possibly never healed contrast between men and women, a conflict that the artist wants to recreate through special murals displayed in the museum halls. An itinerary meant to end with this work specifically created for the Museum, a reflection by Malina Suliman on integration in Europe, an impervious path where so many migrants might still find themselves today.

## Biographical Notes

Malina Suliman was born in 1990 in Kandahar. In 2009, she attended a Fine Art degree program in Karachi, Pakistan, and then returned to Afghanistan to immerse herself in contemporary and street art while also committing to helping young people and women to become more aware of their rights. Her work generated a healthy discussion on the issue of violence, resulting in mobilization for social justice.

From 2010 to 2013, she was active as a street artist between Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif, participating since 2015, in several European festivals, specifically in Germany and Italy. Committed to denounce the normalization of injustices in the contemporary Afghan society, Malina directed her artistic efforts against gender inequalities, consequently finding herself clashing with reticence, fear, and artistic environments – even the official ones – that only interact with men.

Due to political and security concerns, Malina was forced to leave Afghanistan; upon moving to Eindhoven in the Netherlands, where she currently resides, she obtained a master's degree in Fine Arts at the Dutch Art Institute. Over time, Malina's artistic activity has diversified, merging together conceptual, performative and project-oriented art. As the winner in 2017 of a prestigious scholarship from the Artist Protection Fund (APF), she is currently an APF Fellow in Residence at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

## Information

**Location** Museo Casa Rusca / Piazza Sant'Antonio, 6600 Locarno

**Dates** 10 April - 17 July 2022

**Opening** Saturday 9 April 2022, 6:00 p.m.

**Hours** Tuesday - Sunday 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. / 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Monday closed

**Tickets**

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| Full admission                                 | 15.00 CHF |
| Reduced senior/disabled and groups             | 10.00 CHF |
| Students over 18                               | 8.00 CHF  |
| Free admission for schools and minors under 18 |           |

### COMBINED TICKET MUSEO CASORELLA-CASTELLO + MUSEO CASA RUSCA

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|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Full                               | 20.00 CHF |
| Reduced senior/disabled and groups | 14.00 CHF |
| Students over 18                   | 12.00 CHF |

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