

AVA MAKENALI

2021 ART & ART HISTORY
MFA THESIS EXHIBITION



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

MAY 5 - 21 2021

2021 ART & ART HISTORY MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

DEPS is pleased to present the *2021 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition*. This exhibition showcases a body of work from each artist formed and refined during their time in the MFA program, and features a range of media from painting, sculpture, photography, installation, and beyond. Taking place at Glass Curtain Gallery during Columbia's Manifest festival, this edition of the DEPS Artist Profile series is a way to connect audiences with the artists of the exhibition and give you an in-depth look into the processes and ideas that have informed this body of work.

Jack Bradley

Josué Esaú

Chelsea Noelle Fetherlin

Jake Himovitz

Ava Makenali

Sabrina Pastard

Baliyyah the Shotor

Ava Makenali is an interdisciplinary artist who identifies as a camel.

Makenali uses her camel identity to tell the story of her artworks and metaphorically plot revenge against people who broke her heart in her human form. She believes that while camels have a powerful bite, immense weight and have killed people, they are not belligerent, murderous, or predatory. Like the Persian idiom Kineh Shotori meaning “to hold a grudge like a camel” she is emotive and meticulous, and she remembers everything that affects her heart. Her artworks are a study of herself and her search for freedom and autonomy.

Using the repetitive creation of camels for this project, she asks herself “Am I becoming more like a camel, or is a camel becoming more like me?” Through these animals, Makenali playfully confronts those who have wronged her and occupy her mind. By playing with her hardships and turning them into stuffed animals, she hopes to show that she does not take anything too seriously.

Ava Makenali received her BA in Art and Architecture from Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch and her Contemporary Architecture certification from Polytechnic University of Milan. Ava is completing her MFA in Fine Arts from Columbia College Chicago in Spring 2021. She is the recipient of a 2021 Albert P. Weisman award.

[@ava_makenali](#)
[avamakenali.com](#)



My stupid chicken turned into an eagle and rooster at the same time. Not touching my eyes and mouth is like not to think of a Polar Bear. 2020

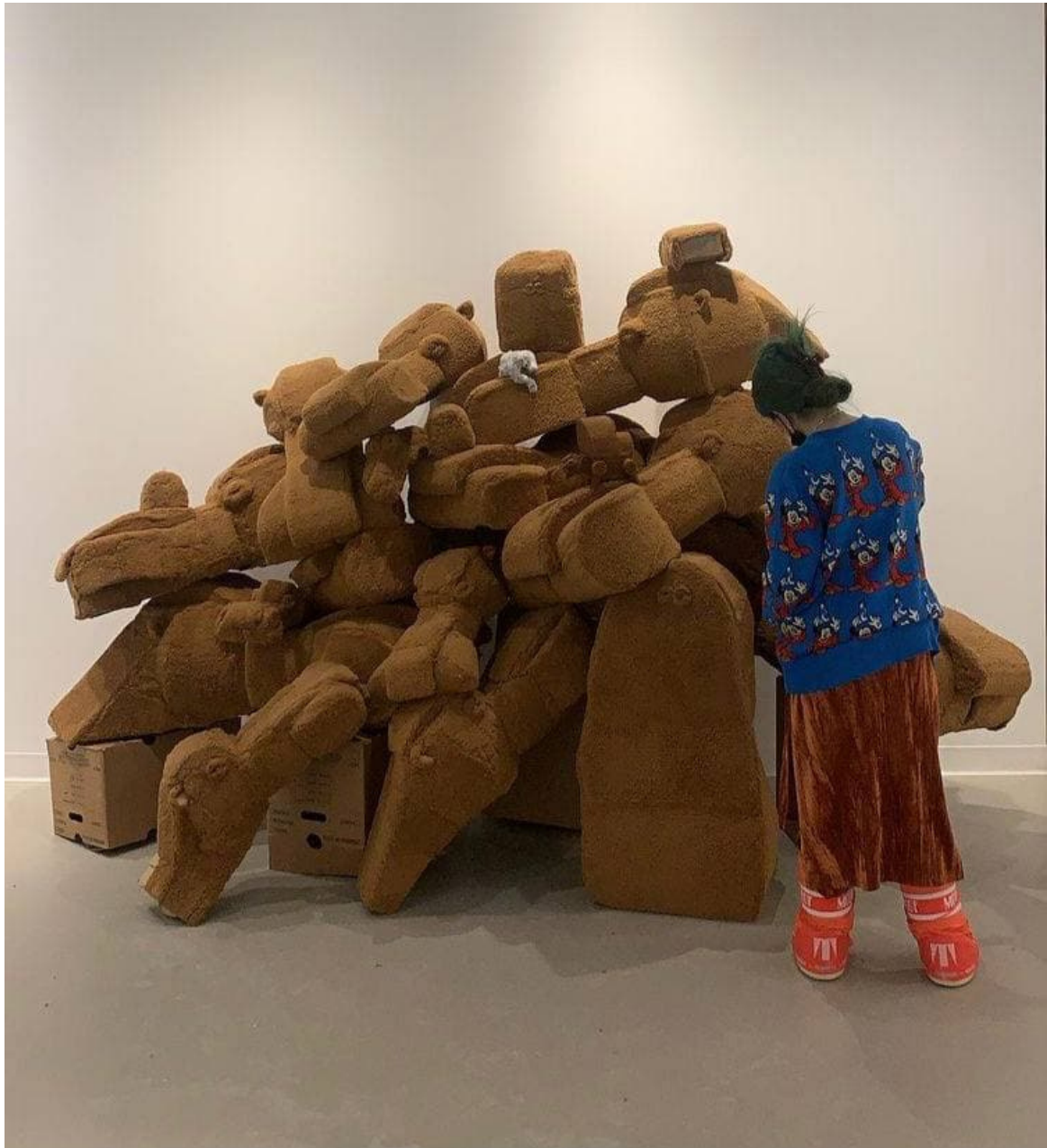
Colored pencil, black marker, acrylic paint

10" x 10"

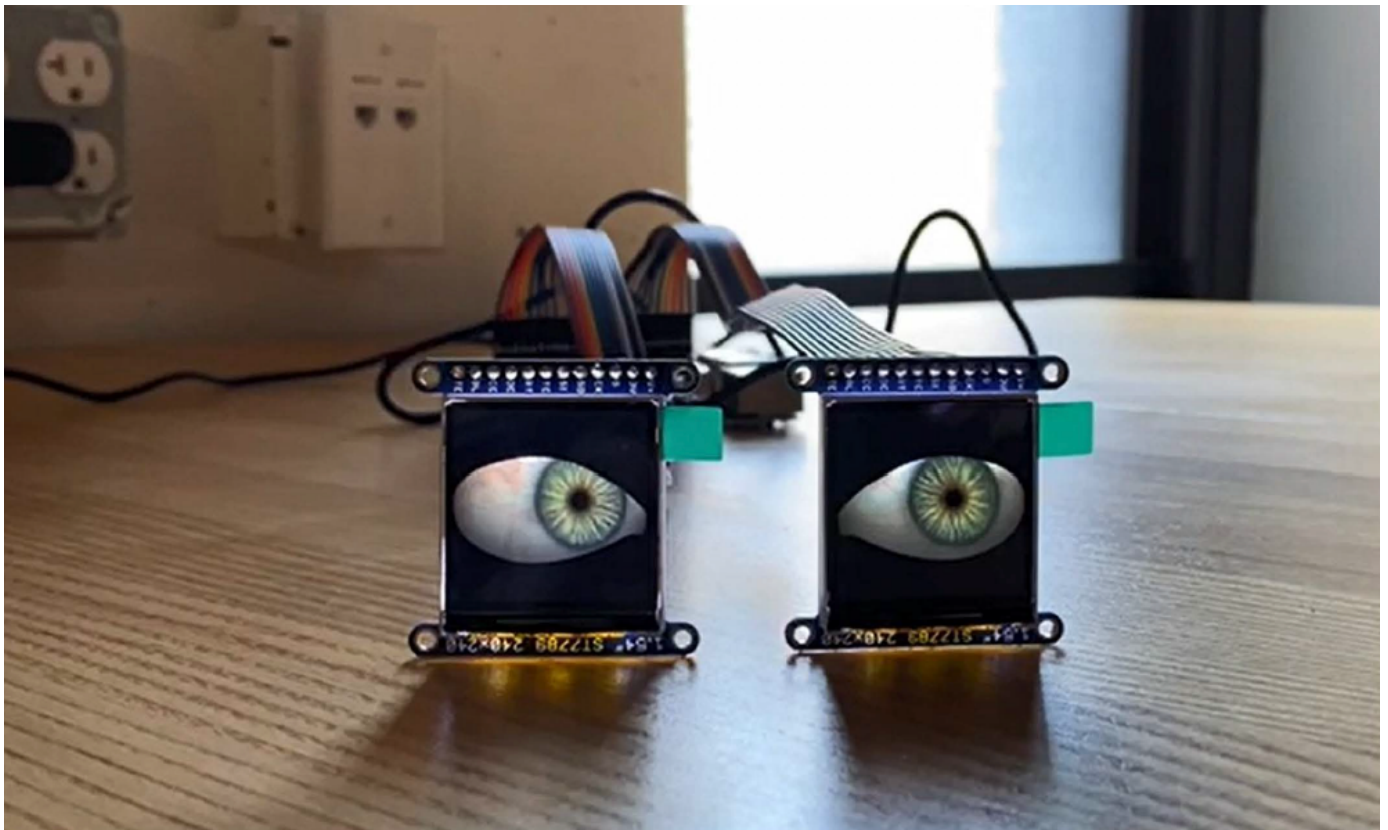


Cheers, 2020

Colored pencil, black marker, acrylic, milk box, cardboard
16" x 16"



Giant camel heads for *Baliyyah the Shotor*, 2021



Process shot of animated eyes for *Baliyyah the Shotor*
View: Vimeo



Process shot *Baliyyah the Shotor*
Ava Makenali working on giant camel head

INTERVIEW WITH AVA MAKENALI

Conducted by Kaylee Fowler

Kaylee Fowler: You cite the camel as an animal you identify with, and feature it in a lot of your art. Where did this association with camels start, and how long have they featured in your work?

Ava Makenali: As you know, I use my camels to plot revenge against people who have wronged me. My father's occupation as a veterinarian, forced me to compare myself and other people to animals specially when they did not treat me well. I remember for my first exhibition; I was looking for a name symbolically express the reason I make art. One day, my mother and I had a conversation about those people in my life, and she reminded me of the Persian idiom *Kineh Shotori* meaning "to hold a grudge like a camel." We realized that I use my art as a way to confront those people and, in doing so, became a naughty camel unafraid to kick people out of my life. So, I named my exhibition *Talking Camel*. Because of this name, I received camel toy and camel products as a gift from the participants. And then I was just known by camel rather than my own name and the story begun. I assume, the camel has existed in my work since I started to make art professionally (age 21). You know, I just discovered her a few years later and now I live with her and I am happy for that.

KF: The camel is the most common animal you use in your work, but you also use other animals as symbols, such as polar bears, and chickens. What do these other animals you use in your work represent? Do each of them communicate a specific meaning in a piece?

AM: The other animals are unrealistic human portraits! And I mostly use them to express my feelings such as joy, hurt, fear and anger to my targets indirectly. There is a rhythm between communication of these animals which camel is their leader,

just like an orchestra combining instruments from different families.

KF: You say that you use your animal symbolism to "plot revenge against people who broke [your] heart." Your work seems very personal then, would you say that it is autobiographical? Are you telling narratives and stories from your life with your work, and if so, how do you hope the viewer perceives them within the visual language you use?

AM: Most of these narrative stories are based on my personal life and sometimes I tell story which is about someone else perspective or my own imaginary life that I have never had. Honestly, I do not need the viewer to necessarily understand my personal life. At least right now, all I expect is teaching them pronunciation of camel in Farsi (Shotor) and grumpy feature of this animal. I like to be mysterious and I love my targets to discover me and treat my artworks like a puzzle. I love playing with people by giving them clues. And I think I already have given many signs to them.

KF: As an interdisciplinary artist utilizing a variety of materials, what are some of the reasons for which materials you chose to use for a particular piece, and what have you found yourself most drawn to working with?

AM: Experimenting different materials helps me to realize which material I am comfortable to work with. This comfort depends on my skills and my situation. For example, maybe I have time to learn using metal, but I am just not good at it or on the opposite side, I am talented in using a material, but the situation restricts me to learn, like the pandemic. I do not like to quit making art even in a difficult situation or even when I hate my art. For this reason, I try to use anything as much as possible to keep on working.

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

Apparently, I am comfortable with using cardboard, fabric and paper for my soft sculptures and color pencil and acrylic paint for my drawings. I am comfortable with these materials because they are light, cheap, and easy to use at home, especially during the social distanced life.

KF: In your artist statement and bio, you've written on how hard it's been immigrating to the US from Iran, and how you've often felt misunderstood in both places; by creating work that is so personal and tied to your identity, do you think you can bring viewers from both places to a better understanding of not only you, but to a better understanding of each culture and the experience of immigration between them?

AM: I would love to do it one day but right now there is no guarantee, because my main concern at this moment is not explaining cultural differences. While, teaching pronunciation of camel in Farsi (Shotor) can be a great start to talk about it. By the way, I have always loved my artworks to be like a theme park, combining with colorful lights and moving objects. I just want to have fun with my grumpy camel and showing my satisfaction, living with this animal, just like a movie trailer of my inner feeling.

KF: Which do you prefer, Dromedary or Bactrian camels?

AM: No difference to me! But I do like Bactrian more because she has more space to hold grudge :D

DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series, presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community.

The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by Fine Arts major and DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Kaylee Fowler. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at colum.edu

MFA Thesis Exhibition

May 5 – 21, 2021

Glass Curtain Gallery–Columbia College Chicago

1104 S Wabash Ave, 1st Floor, Chicago, IL 60605

Gallery Hours: Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Capacity of gallery is 10 visitors, and masks are required.

Note: This artist profile talks about revenge in a satirical nature. No physical revenge is being plotted.

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