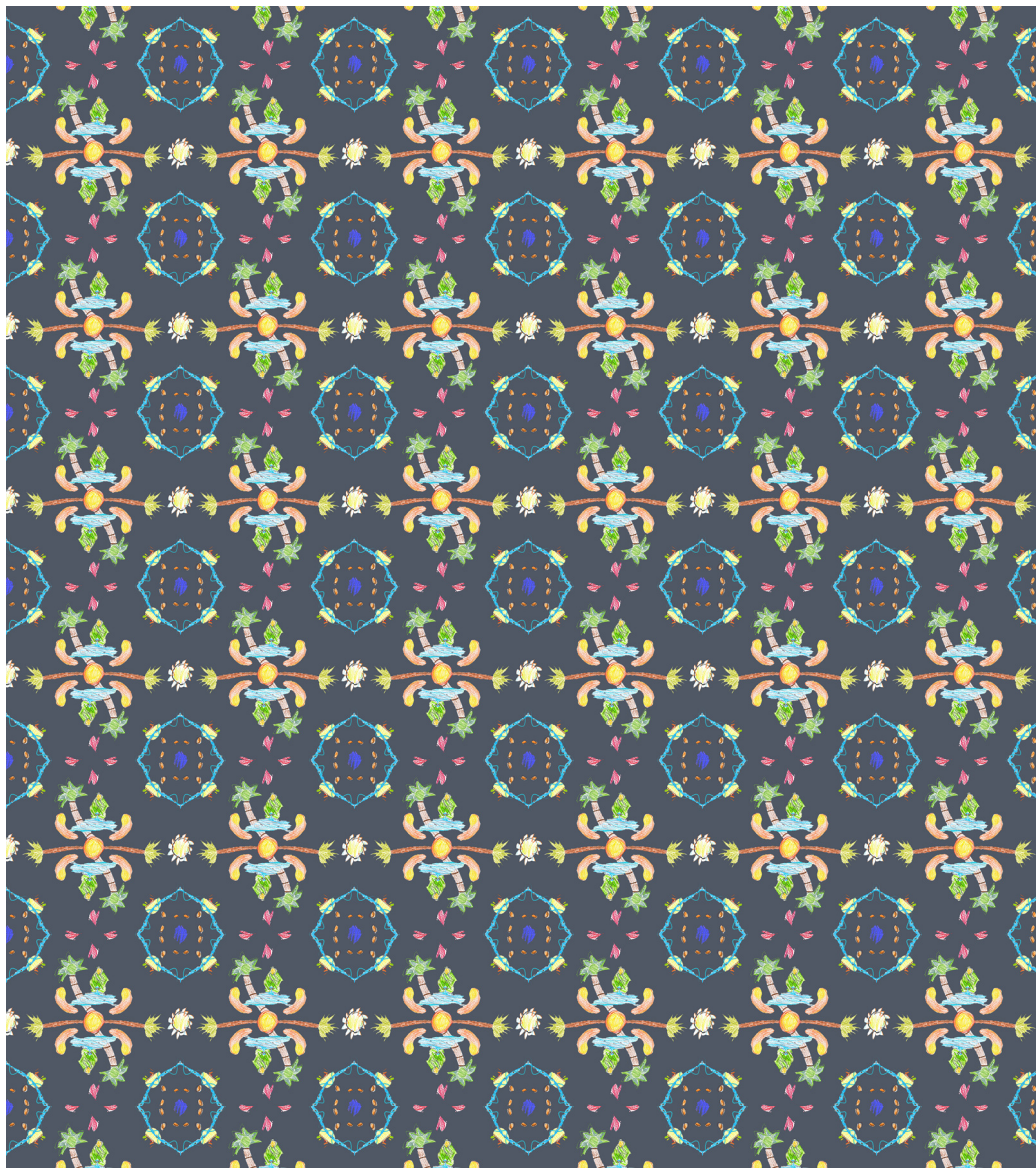


Modern Art Oxford



Back Toward Oneness

16 January – 9 March 2025

Back Toward Oneness

This exhibition is the outcome of a unique collaboration between artist Farwa Moledina and The Date Palm Tree group, a collective of around 350 Muslim mothers, carers and children based at Bullingdon Community Centre in East Oxford. Running since January 2014, The Date Palm Tree group offers a space with a faith-based ethos for all Muslim mums where new and experienced mums can come together and support one another in raising children.

Over the summer during a series of workshops Moledina worked with the group to create collective artworks using natural and recycled materials such as women's hijabs and culturally significant textiles inspired by each family's heritage from countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Somalia, and the UK. Mothers and children created artworks using a range of techniques such as drawing, collage, embroidery, heat transfer foil, and foam block printing. Through making and storytelling each collaborative workshop revealed personal stories reflecting this vibrant community. Together, the participants celebrated Ummah, the Islamic concept of a community that transcends borders, boundaries and governments.

"The Date Palm Tree is such a wonderful and welcoming community, and it was a real joy to be a part of the group over the summer. As a fairly new mum myself, I can appreciate the important work they do, and very quickly felt as though I had always been a part of them."

- Farwa Moledina



On display in the gallery are children's drawings made in response to the story of Maryam the mother of Isa (a.s.)*, otherwise known as Mary, the mother of Jesus, a narrative that celebrates motherhood and womanhood. It also has links to the name of the group, as the date palm is a significant part of the story. The fruits of the tree take a long time to bear, resembling the journey of motherhood, and the palms are a source of food, providing shade and symbolising wisdom.

During the workshops, children were asked to draw and colour-in a landscape or scene from the story, such as date palms, dates, rivers and mountains, or a feeling that it evoked, such as pain, peace or faith. Using the drawings as the starting point, Moledina then designed patterns that form the basis of a freestanding sculpture comprising three wooden frames hinged together with digitally printed textile and embroidery. Other artworks include wallpaper, textiles and a handmade patchwork floor mat which all incorporate traditional designs.

"The work is a celebration of motherhood in any sense – whether it be grandmothers, real or adopted aunts, big sisters, etc. Community is really important in Islam, and The Date Palm Tree group is a true testament to this, where it is clear that every adult cares for every child as their own, the title 'aunty' freely and meaningfully given to all."

- Farwa Moledina

*(a.s.) is an abbreviation of the Arabic term alayhis salaam, meaning peace be upon him/her. It is used when mentioning the name of a religious personality as a sign of respect.

The exhibition's title is borrowed from a poem by Ahlaam Moledina, Farwa's sister. By bringing together community-focused artistic practice and creative participatory opportunities for adults and children to contribute to, *Back Toward Oneness* celebrates creativity, making and storytelling as a powerful tapestry of unity and connectedness.

Ahlaam Moledina: *Synchronicity 3*

And this one not for saying—

just the stream of the tap
to the base of the glass

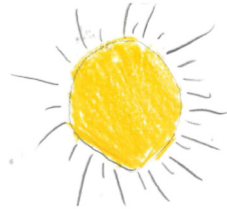
convinced enough of itself to keep rising

I swoop
and miss

watch it spiral back toward
oneness again

(both) thinking how that's

something,
this flowing.



This exhibition is supported by the Al Tajir Trust, with additional thanks to the University of Oxford's Small Community Grants Scheme. Discover more about Farwa Moledina and The Date Palm Tree online at modernartoxford.org.uk.

Images:

Farwa Moledina and The Date Palm Tree group, *Back Toward Oneness*, 2024.
Courtesy of the artists

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