GALLERI
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Noah Umur Kanber

سورة نوح Surah Nuh

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Christ on the cross is flanked by angels, the fallen, and the faithful. Serpents and mythical creatures writhe around them, while rosaries and prayer beads are clasped in the hands of the newly deceased. Masks of hair and fabric veil faces that seem to cocoon themselves within the earth, awaiting rebirth as new beings. Around them bloom wild, sap-filled flowers, burning candles, and hands reaching out toward us. Welcome to *Surah Nuh – The Book of Noah*.

Surah Nuh refers to the myth of the prophet Noah, who built an ark to save the earth's creatures from the Great Flood. It is a story of damnation and salvation, of death and resurrection, of civilizations that collapse only to rise again. Above all, it is a myth that has accompanied humanity across epochs and intellectual traditions, religions and social orders, continually rewritten and retold over thousands of years.

Today, the story of Noah exists in countless variations across the world's major religions. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism all recount the divinely ordained flood sent to cleanse the earth of humanity's sins. Yet the flood myth predates these traditions by millennia. It appears in the earliest civilizations—in Babylon, ancient Egypt, and Sumerian tablets recounting the story of the god Ziusudra, a precursor to the Noah we know today.

In *Surah Nuh*, we encounter works that revolve around death and resurrection. Familiar scenes such as Christ on the Cross and the Last Supper—among the most enduring images in the history of art—appear alongside references to the many narratives that preceded, and were later obscured by, the religions of the present. Unmarked graves are adorned with rosaries and Muslim prayer beads; beings cocoon themselves in hair and fabric before emerging transformed; plants bloom, wither, decay, and become nourishment for new life.

In Noah Umur Kanber's work, mythologies from antiquity and the present merge into a universal narrative of how power and destruction have repeatedly swept across the earth, carrying civilizations and their mythologies away in their wake. Time and again, new deluges have sought to erase what came before. Yet traces of earlier ways of thinking, imagining, and understanding the world continue to survive within the myths we tell today.

Working with materials such as ceramics, gold, and copper, Kanber creates images that connect contemporary mythologies with ancient ones. These materials point both to the Near Eastern origins of many foundational myths and to the violent histories embedded in the extraction and circulation of raw materials and cultural narratives alike. Kanber reverses this logic by embracing the images and materials upon whose shoulders we stand. Discarded works by other artists become frames for her ceramic reliefs, granting fragmented and abandoned artefacts a renewed existence.

In *Surah Nuh*, Kanber is deeply interested in the enduring presence of religious imagery within our ostensibly secular societies. Religious mythology continues to shape the rituals surrounding birth and death, marriage and family, while also informing our democratic institutions. One strand of the exhibition examines how mythological symbols—dragons, lions, and crosses—persist within national iconographies, while also being appropriated by extremist, ultranationalist, and racist movements as emblems of raw power and masculinity.

Within Kanber's mythological universe, angels and dragons exist on equal terms, beyond any binary distinction between good and evil. Here, the monstrous becomes an image of queerness—of that which resists categorization and recalls times and places where gender was understood as more fluid. Kanber's mythical creatures thus offer another way of seeing the world: a world defined by continuity rather than collapse, by care rather than exclusion, where both the earth and humanity are able to heal and be reborn in their own image.