

Yara Kassem Mahajena: Highway 65

A Two-Part Exhibition:

Highway 65 (Home) | Bread and Roses Gallery, 3 Shvil HaMeretz St., 1st floor

Highway 65 (Garden) | Beit HaBe'er Cultural Center, 6 Salame St., Jaffa

Curators: Leah Abir, Riki Elkayam

November 6 to December 20, 2025

The exhibition Highway 65 by Yara Kassem Mahajena unfolds simultaneously across two art spaces in Tel Aviv–Jaffa: Bread and Roses Gallery and Beit HaBe'er. The two parts of the exhibition opened on consecutive days and are presented in parallel. The exhibition features installations, sculpture, robotics, painting, ceramics, and more. The titles Home and Garden—corresponding to the works on display in each venue—deconstruct and reassemble the portrait of a displaced home, through presence and absence.

This two-part exhibition is the result of a years-long artistic process in which Mahajena traced possible forms of resistance among animals to the occupation and appropriation of land—whether as endangered species or invasive ones. At its core lies the inner experience of uprooting and exile. As a third-generation descendant of Palestinian refugees—of destruction, longing, and hope—Mahajena now faces the possibility of becoming a refugee herself and losing the home in which she grew up. The emotional, political, and existential space-time of this condition is populated by objects, human figures, and animals, all seeking their way through unfamiliar surroundings.

At Bread and Roses Gallery – Highway 65 (Home) – the gallery space transforms into the interior of a home, where functional robots scurry about like restless pets. What appears to be an active, living present is saturated with traces of the past, urging the viewer to position themselves and decide upon their relationship to the elements of the home and its inhabitants. At Beit HaBe'er – Highway 65 (Garden) – the historic structure, once a water source for the Jaffa orchards, becomes adorned with colorful Islamic ornamentation, upon which animals emerge in various scenes blending nature and humanity in delicate, unexpected ways.

Mahajena articulates the questions that guided her throughout the creation of the exhibition: “Who holds power? Who is granted the right to exist? What can we carry with us, and what must we leave behind? How does the past continue to shape the future? What, if anything, remains predictable in times of instability? Who and what accompany a person and offer companionship? What is the meaning of compassion and care within the experience of displacement? And finally, what are ownership and belonging?”

Yara Kassem Mahajena was born in 1993 in the village of Mu’awiya, to families expelled from their homes in 1948. She lives and works in Mu’awiya and graduated with distinction from both the Bachelor’s and Master’s programs in Fine Arts at the University of Haifa. Mahajena is the co-founder of a digital platform connecting Palestinian artists. She has presented solo exhibitions in Haifa, Cairo, and Switzerland, and participated in group exhibitions in various venues, including the Museum of Islamic Art, the Hecht Museum, and Beit HaGefen in Haifa, the Edmond de Rothschild Center, the Umm al-Fahm Art Gallery, and the Autonomous Art Biennale in Tel Aviv–Jaffa.

On Yara Kassem Mahajena's Highway 65

Fadi Far

"The Triangle Communities consist of Kafr Qara, Ar'ara, Baha al-Gharbiyye, Umm al Fahm, Qalansawe, Tayibe, Kafr Qasim, Tira, Kafr Bara and Jaljulia. These communities, which largely self-identify as Palestinian, were originally designated to fall under Jordanian control during the negotiations of the Armistice Line of 1949, but ultimately were retained by Israel for military reasons that have since been mitigated. The Vision contemplates the possibility, subject to agreement of the parties that the borders of Israel will be redrawn such that the Triangle Communities become part of the State of Palestine. In this agreement, the civil rights of the residents of the triangle communities would be subject to the applicable laws and judicial rulings of the relevant authorities."

- *from Peace to Prosperity, a vision document for peace and prosperity published by the White House in January 2020*

The uprooting of a person from their home and homeland is not a momentary act, but rather the culmination of an ongoing process, one that begins with the formation of an ideology that lays the groundwork for displacement, continues with the slow and gradual development of an intent to act, and is only realized at the final stage through the physical act of exile and transfer. Throughout this process, the displaced person exists in a continuous state of liminality—a suspension between temporariness and permanence—that places them on a continuum between an uprooting that has already begun and one that continues indefinitely.

Highway 65 is one of the major arteries of northern Israel, serving as a central transportation route connecting the south and north of the country. The road passes near the city of Umm al-Fahm—the birthplace of artist Yara Mahajna—and in fact cuts through it, separating the 'Ein Ibrahim neighborhood from the rest of the city. This highway has acquired heavy political symbolism as part of the "Populated-Area Exchange Plan" first introduced in May 2004 by Avigdor Lieberman, then serving as Minister of Transportation. Within that plan, the possibility was

raised that the part of Umm al-Fahm defined and enclosed by Highway 65 would be transferred to the Palestinian Authority as part of a comprehensive resolution to the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict." This proposal resurfaced in

public and international discourse in 2020, with the release of then-U.S. President Donald Trump's "Peace Plan," which included a similar idea.

In this exhibition, Yara Kassem Mahajna draws on the charged symbolism of Highway 65 as an axis of separation, relocation, and displacement suspended in a state of continual liminality. She envisions an uprooted Palestinian home situated within the boundaries of Highway 65, constructing a site for a multilayered visual narrative that brings together the initial 1948 Palestinian displacement with a new and potential one. The artist explores the relationship between the first uprooting and the lessons learned (or perhaps not learned) in anticipation of a possible recurrence. Alongside this, she poses deeply human and everyday questions: What becomes essential? What is left behind? What must be prepared if the moment to leave returns? And how does a home defend itself? The exhibition spans across two distinct spaces. At the Bread and Roses Gallery in Tel Aviv's Kiryat HaMelacha district, various objects form an uprooted Palestinian domestic space, fortified by items meant to protect it. Some have practical function, while others bear symbolic purposes: a guard dog, a robot that waters the plants, a printer that documents those entering the home, and a lamp preserving the warmth of the space so that, upon their return, its owners will find it lit and welcoming.

At Beit HaBe'er Culture Center in Jaffa—a location that ironically serves as an example of a displaced home in and of itself—a video installation presents a surreal journey of a young woman through a distorted world ruled by foreign powers, struggling to liberate herself and her surroundings from systems of surveillance and oppression before losing her identity and memory. Alongside it are paintings rooted in Islamic ornamental tradition, exploring the interrelations between human, animal, and nature within a continuum of ongoing displacement.

This two-part exhibition forms a natural continuation of Mahajna's documentary practice, which merges historical documentation with personal testimony and local storytelling to reconstruct the memory of the Nakba and experiences of dispossession. What began from a personal and familial place has evolved into an integral aspect of her artistic work, a visual storytelling practice that oscillates between tragedy and humor, exploring the Palestinian landscape and home as active spaces of memory and resistance. Within these spaces, stories, objects, and surroundings transform into a visual language revealing the fragility of survival against the continuity of identity, one that continues to unfold beyond physical geography and historical time.