

Toronto Exhibition

## Rihab Essayh

*dwelling for the dear one*

Nov 4 – Dec 17, 2022

Opening:

Friday, Nov 4, 5 – 8 p.m.



*a view from the dwelling, 2022, Setasilk paint on silk organza, cotton twill ribbing, cotton twine, plywood, 20" x 36" x 1".*

Arsenal Contemporary Art Toronto is delighted to present *dwelling for the dear one*, an installation of textile works and paintings on silk organza by interdisciplinary Canadian-Moroccan artist Rihab Essayh.

Essayh's interest in world-building is realized through immersive environments that are as rich and expansive as they are subtle and delicate. Oriented towards a future of softness, belonging and social reconnection, her works suggest a space for slowing down the outside world to contemplate these possibilities. Combining the personal with the analytic and universal, Essayh incorporates various perspectives in the making of her work, particularly Southwest Asian and North African contexts that displace Eurocentrism and Orientalism.

In *dwelling for the dear one*, the gallery space is used as a dressing room, complete with gossamer windows painted to look out onto an open desert. Evoking this seemingly empty landscape of isolation alongside the security of the home, the cumulative effect is an equivocal feeling of whether we've been invited or if we are intruding. The central piece is *soft armure* (2022), a set of garments sewn as a personal armour, which is exhibited for the first time as its own piece. Hung deliberately on the wall, it is implied that our main character has stepped out into the desert without her protective attire.

As we wonder about the fate of the dear one, the painted windows offer a view towards her outside world. With an acute focus on diaphanous texture and surface, Essayh discloses visual influences of her homeland, layered with material elements from embroidered and painted fabric, to handmade wooden frames and hangers. Glimpses of the rolling desert horizon from within the interior of the home speak to the push and pull of the domestic and the unknown. This inherent vulnerability is a key to understanding softness and slowness as political gestures for the future.

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