

Observe, Analyze, and Interpret

Artist: Hanaa Malallah

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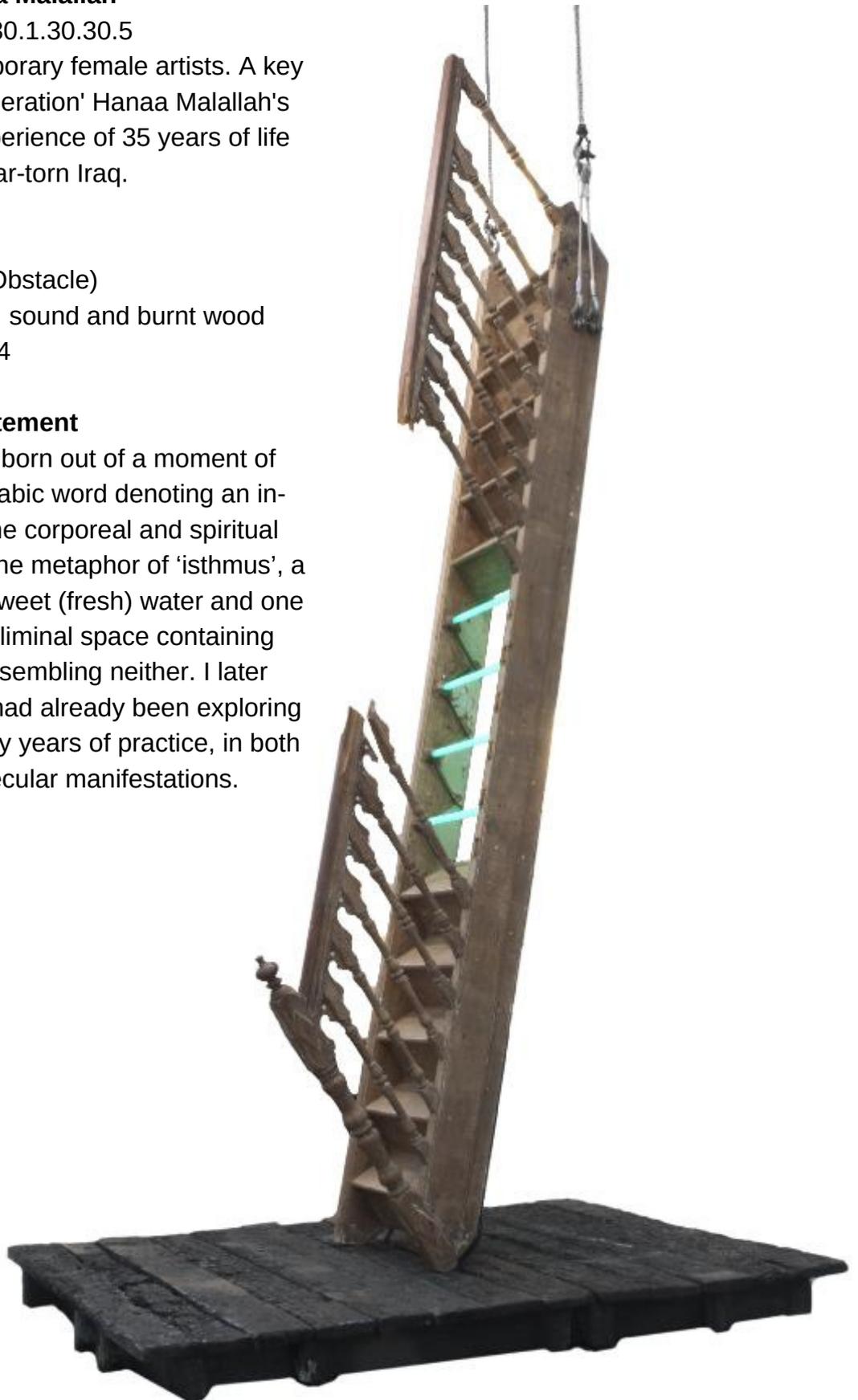
One of Iraq's leading contemporary female artists. A key member of the 'Eighties Generation' Hanaa Malallah's work emanates from her experience of 35 years of life and work in war-torn Iraq.

"Barzakh" (Obstacle)

Antique stairs, neon lights, sound and burnt wood
2014

Artist Statement

The title for this series was born out of a moment of indecision. Barzakh is an Arabic word denoting an in-between state separating the corporeal and spiritual worlds. The Qur'an employs the metaphor of 'isthmus', a meeting of two seas: one of sweet (fresh) water and one of salt. In this sense, it is a liminal space containing properties of both whilst resembling neither. I later realised that, conceptually, I had already been exploring the idea of barzakh over many years of practice, in both its spiritual as well as secular manifestations.



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OBSERVE

This may seem pretty obvious, but it is so important that it is worth calling special attention to. Allow yourself to take the time to slow down and look carefully. Notice the details, colors, lines, shapes, layers. Really take it in.

Describe what you see in as much detail as you can.

What material(s) is this artwork made of?

What colors do you see?

ANALYZE

Read the artist statement. Ask questions about the work. What objects and settings do you recognize? How do the objects and settings you identified in your description fit together to tell a story.

What do you think is going on in this artwork?

Where is this ladder going?

What will happen when you try to climb this ladder?

INTERPRET

Now, what can you learn from the artwork?

Make assumptions. Challenge yourself to not only understand what you are seeing, but to ask yourself what the artist may have been thinking about. Ask yourself why you see it the way you do. Forming a personal interpretation builds a relationship with the artwork, making it more meaningful to you.

What do the broken rails and green lights mean?

What is the artist trying to say or what is the meaning of this artwork?

How can you connect this artwork with your own life?

BONUS: To take it another step, apply what you've learned in your own artwork.

- Write a story inspired by this artwork.
- Explore the world around you with a camera and identify places that could represent the in-between place illustrated in the artwork.