

# CARBON.12

## PRESS RELEASE

WHEN THE GROUND WAS

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-- SARAH ALMEHAIRI

In *When the Ground Was*, Sarah Almehairi takes us along for a walk.

*Upon entering the space, viewers are met with visual pathfinders laid out by Almehairi to trace walks taken by her, revisiting trails she frequented and pockets of temporary remarkableness she observed. The exhibition title suggests a timeline, but it isn't clear if the works are meant to present a chronicle or an invitation. It does, though, gently suggest maneuvering between the physical act of motion and the abstract provocation of finding intimacy in the everyday.*

*The collective body of work ranges across floor sculptures, made of concrete, and works on paper and canvas installed at varying heights. Sometimes architectural, other times cartographic, together they toy with the notion of scale and perception.*

*Shapes are like thoughts...*

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*Four series, (2. Shapes Are Like Thoughts, 4. No Day Without a Line, 6. Adjustments of the Daily, and 7. Momentary Palettes) each beginning with a poetic text, followed by painted, collaged, and embossed works-on-paper, contain visual accounts of different environments. In one series, Almehairi puts together a color log from each walk, representing encounters with light and material through, what she calls, momentary palettes. Nine gouache-on-paper works, with three richly pigmented rectangles on each, represent shades that stood out in different strolls and helped create the visual symphony for that day.*

*One work has shades of bubble gum pink, blood red, and rust brown. At first, these remind one of roses and brickwork, but closer inspection reveals delicately scribbled words next to the colors in which the artist has woven a poem out of the detritus of urban living:*

*Plastic Wrapper, Confetti, A Sickly Shade...*

*Each is a portal to another story, phantasms left behind by other individuals, here today, gone tomorrow, altering the same patch again and again, forever.*

*Sculptural forms on the ground mimic the color of the floor as they recreate random shapes of missing bricks, irregular grass patches, and other formations mapping the architecture of walks taken elsewhere. Grouped in squares and multi-sided polygons, the masses of forms nudge visitors to walk certain paths around them or pause and observe color anomalies that are echoed in some of the works on the wall. For the artist, this sensitizes the viewer to their own step and prompts the need to look down.*

*These works are punctuated by large paintings that lend their title to the exhibition: *When the Ground Was*. Rendered in terrazzo-like abstract documentation, the artist depicts mundane surfaces, and the marks upon them, imagining manifold possibilities of worlds within worlds. Lines, shadows, patterns, grid breaks, broken shapes – familiarity and curiosity mix with play and contemplation. All of these are conjured from the simple but profound act of looking down.*

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*A scientifically recognized condition, 'Pareidolia is the tendency to perceive a specific, often meaningful image in a random or ambiguous visual pattern' (Merriam-Webster). Almehairi seems to arm herself with this tool to embark on a walk that traverses multiple realms and find meaning where others might not; a perception hinted in the titles of the works:*

*When the ground was...  
a jumbled word;  
a changing season;  
a celebration.*

*As she annotates the ground underneath, Almehairi demonstrates that no path is the same, however many times it may be trodden – not in stride or pace, nor mood or encounter. The walk is a new poem, written across the land each time.*

— By Saira Ansari