

# Zeinab Alhashemi

Metempsychosis: The Soul's Journey Through Material



# Zeinab Alhashemi

Metempsychosis: The Soul's Journey Through Material

## “METEMPSYCHOSIS: The Soul’s Journey Through Material ”

Leila Heller Gallery – November 2024

“METEMPSYCHOSIS” is a reflection on transformation, where the raw materials of industry and history meet personal healing. This body of work represents Zeinab Alhashemi’s ongoing exploration of the elements that shape her artistic practice, while also responding to the trauma of a life-altering car accident. Metal, now a permanent part of her body in the form of screws and hardware, is exposed in her sculptures as a metaphor for the structures that define contemporary existence. These elements highlight the impact of human intervention in reshaping the environment.

At the heart of the exhibition are sculptures made from PVC Roman pillar molds, enveloped in camel hides—a material that symbolizes the tension between heritage and industrialism, death and rebirth. The visible screw bolts serve as both functional elements and symbols of mechanization, echoing the hardware in her own body. These bolts, a recurring motif in Alhashemi’s work, ground her in the industrial era while transforming personal trauma into art.

Bronze sculptures in the exhibition further challenge the traditional role of monumental sculpture by elevating industrial objects, particularly nut and bolt, into iconic symbols of modern strength and resilience. This casting reflects the times we live in, where industrial materials have become monuments of human ingenuity.

“METEMPSYCHOSIS” is a meditation on the transformation of material, memory, and self. It captures the tension between the natural and industrial, while also delving into the intimate process of healing. Alhashemi’s work stands as a testament to resilience, reminding viewers that even the harshest forms can hold beauty and meaning in their transformation.





Nexus A  
2024  
Bronze Green Patina  
80 x 20 cm



Nexus B  
2024  
Bronze Green Patina  
90 x 20 cm



Nexus C  
2024  
Bronze Green Patina  
80 x 20 cm



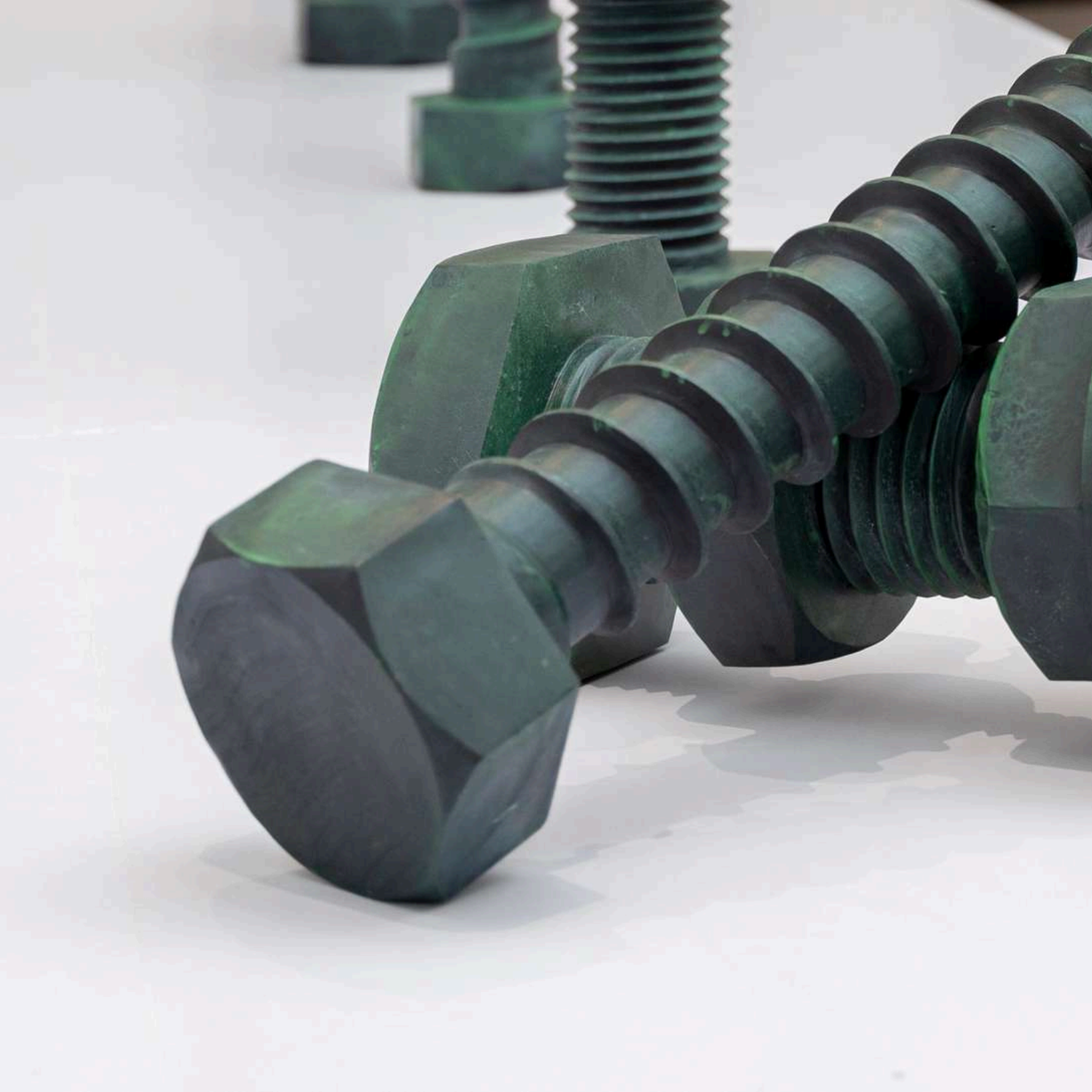
Nexus D  
2024  
Bronze Green Patina  
90 x 20 cm





Nexus E (on top)  
2024  
Bronze Green Patina  
80 x 20 cm









Doric A  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
200 x 50 cm



Doric B  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
200 x 50 cm



Doric C  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
200 x 50 cm



Corinthian A  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
200 x 50 cm





Corinthian B  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
220 x 50 cm



Corinthian C  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
220 x 50 cm



Corinthian to the power of  
two  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
440 x 50 cm







Composite A  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
220 x 60 cm



Composite B  
2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel  
hide, Nut and bolt  
220 x 60 cm









45 angle  
Wood, Camel hide, Nut  
and Bolt  
220 x 160 cm  
2024



45 angle  
Wood, Camel hide, Nut  
and Bolt  
220 x 160 cm  
2024



45 angle  
Wood, Camel hide, Nut  
and Bolt  
220 x 160 cm  
2024



45 angle  
Wood, Camel hide, Nut  
and Bolt  
220 x 160 cm  
2024









## Metempsychosis in Art: Transformation of Soul and Material

In the context of Zeinab Alhashemi's solo exhibition "METEMPSYCHOSIS: The Soul's Journey Through Material," the concept of metempsychosis—an ancient philosophical theory suggesting the soul's transmigration or reincarnation—serves as a profound metaphor for artistic transformation. In art, metempsychosis can be interpreted as the cyclical process of creation, destruction, and rebirth, where materials transcend their original forms to embody new meaning, much like the soul passing through different bodies.

Artists, much like the soul in this theory, engage in continuous metamorphosis. They take raw, sometimes inert, materials and breathe life into them, giving rise to forms that possess spirit, intention, and narrative. This is particularly visible in Alhashemi's work, where industrial elements like screws, bolts, and camel hides are not simply objects but metaphors for the human experience. Her sculptures, enveloped in the tension between the industrial and the organic, demonstrate the soul's passage through these diverse realms of existence.

The idea of metempsychosis in art emphasizes the belief that materials, like the soul, carry histories and energies from their past states. In Alhashemi's case, the camel hides, once part of a living creature integral to the region's cultural heritage, now serve as vessels for new artistic life. The hides, combined with industrial bolts, signify the duality of permanence and transformation—heritage and progress, life and death. These materials, reshaped by her hands, undergo a metamorphosis that speaks to the soul's journey through trauma, healing, and self-reinvention.

In broader artistic practice, the theory of metempsychosis can be seen in how artists recycle and repurpose materials, breathing new meaning into the mundane or forgotten. Industrial objects like screws and bolts, which dominate much of the modern world's infrastructure, become monuments to resilience and creativity in Alhashemi's sculptures. These components, originally utilitarian, gain new significance when cast in bronze or exposed as symbolic elements of her personal narrative.

This idea of the soul passing through various forms parallels the artistic process, where the artist's internal world is externalized through matter, reshaping not only the materials but the artist's identity and experience. In Alhashemi's case, the screws and metal hardware that became part of her body after her accident are now part of her artistic lexicon. They are the physical evidence of trauma yet transformed into vessels for self-expression, suggesting that metempsychosis extends beyond the material into the artist's lived reality.

By intertwining the personal with the industrial, the natural with the man-made, Alhashemi's work suggests that transformation is not just a physical act but a spiritual journey. In this sense, "METEMPSYCHOSIS" captures the essence of rebirth, not only in the materials she uses but in the way these materials tell a story of resilience, healing, and the endless capacity for renewal that both the human spirit and the artistic process possess.

Throughout art history, many artists have explored themes of transformation, rebirth, and the relationship between material and spirit, often resonating with the concept of metempsychosis. These themes have appeared across various art movements, with artists using diverse media to reflect the cyclical nature of life, death, and renewal.

## About the Artist

Zeinab Alhashemi is an Emirati conceptual artist known for her large-scale, site-specific installations and public art. Deeply inspired by the UAE's swift transformation into a global industrial hub, Alhashemi deconstructs familiar landscapes through innovative and experimental art. Her work merges natural and industrial elements, emphasizing the effects of human intervention on the environment and encouraging viewers to rethink their connection to the spaces around them.

Alhashemi's art has been exhibited at prestigious events and venues, including the Richard Mille Art Prize at Louvre Abu Dhabi, There May Exist at Theseus Temple in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum (2024), Art D'Egypt at the Pyramids of Giza (2022), Mirage at Desert X AlUla in Saudi Arabia (2022), and Takween at Expo2020 Dubai's Sustainability Pavilion (2021). She was also an Artist in Residence at the SETI Institute and Montalvo Art Center in San Francisco (2018).

Alhashemi holds a BA from Zayed University (2009).

## Artist Statement

As a conceptual artist, I explore the intricate relationship between nature and industrialization, drawing on the rapid transformation of my surroundings in the UAE. I am deeply inspired by Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, particularly the idea that intelligent species adapt to their environment in ways that favor their survival. This process of adaptation is fundamental to evolution, shaping not only biological life but also human progress in areas like business, culture, and society.

In my work, I often examine how this concept applies to human life—how we continuously adapt to our changing environments and the challenges that arise. By blending natural materials like camel hides with industrial elements such as metal and stone, my installations embody the tension between nature and human intervention. These works reflect on our ability to innovate and evolve in response to environmental shifts.

I believe that by understanding the principles of natural selection, we can better navigate and thrive in an ever-evolving world. My art is a meditation on adaptation, resilience, and the balance between tradition and progress. It invites viewers to reconsider their place within a rapidly changing environment and to engage with the forces shaping our collective future. Through my installations, I seek to create spaces that challenge perceptions and evoke a dialogue between the past, present, and future.



## COMISSIONS AND EXHIBITIONS

- 2024** Matter that Matters, Bait Alsherbatly, Albalad, Jeddah KSA
- 2023** The Story Teller, Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE  
Alain Oasis, DCT Abu Dhabi, Alain, UAE
- 2022** Richard Mille Art Prize, Louvre Abu Dhabi, UAE  
Noor Riyadh, KSA  
Art D'Egypt Second Edition, Pyramids of Giza, Egypt  
"Sarab" exhibition, Misk Art Grant, Riyadh, KSA  
"Mirage" exhibition, Desert X AIUla, KSA  
"Portrait of a Nation 2", ADMAF Abu Dhabi, UAE  
Solo Show "Constructivism: We see things as we are, Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2021** Hypersensitivity" Sharjah Islamic Art Festival, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE  
"Takween" Sustainability Pavilion, Expo2020, Dubai, UAE
- 2019** Masdar City, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2018** Artist in Residence, Seti Institute, Montalvo Art Center, San Francisco, USA  
"Metalmorphosis" Sharjah Islamic Art Festival, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE  
"Metamorphic" Co-Lab: Contemporary Art and Savoir-faire, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi UAE
- 2016** "hexalite"x Swarovski, Dubai Design Week, Dubai, UAE  
"Alharaka Baraka" Unlimited Arab Explorations, Maraya Art Center, Sharjah, UAE
- 2015** "The time is out of joint", Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE  
"Emirati Expression" Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2014** Solo show "Urban Phantasmagoria" Cuadro Gallery, Dubai, UAE  
"Tanween" Design Program, Tashkeel, Design Days Dubai, Dubai, UAE
- 2013** "Circumvolution State of Mind" Sharjah Biennial 11, Sharjah, UAE  
"Time and Space Matters", Capital D Studio, Dubai, UAE  
"Design Road Pro" Dubai Arts and Culture, Dubai UAE
- 2012** "Prayer On a Wheel" Art in Residence, Sikka Art, Dubai, UAE
- 2011** "Present" Maraya Art Center, Sharjah, UAE  
"Mind" Made in Dubai, Ductac, Dubai, UAE
- 2009** Solo Show "Pop & Culture" Art Connection Gallery, Dubai, UAE



Published on the occasion of the exhibition  
"Metempsychosis"  
November 14th, 2024

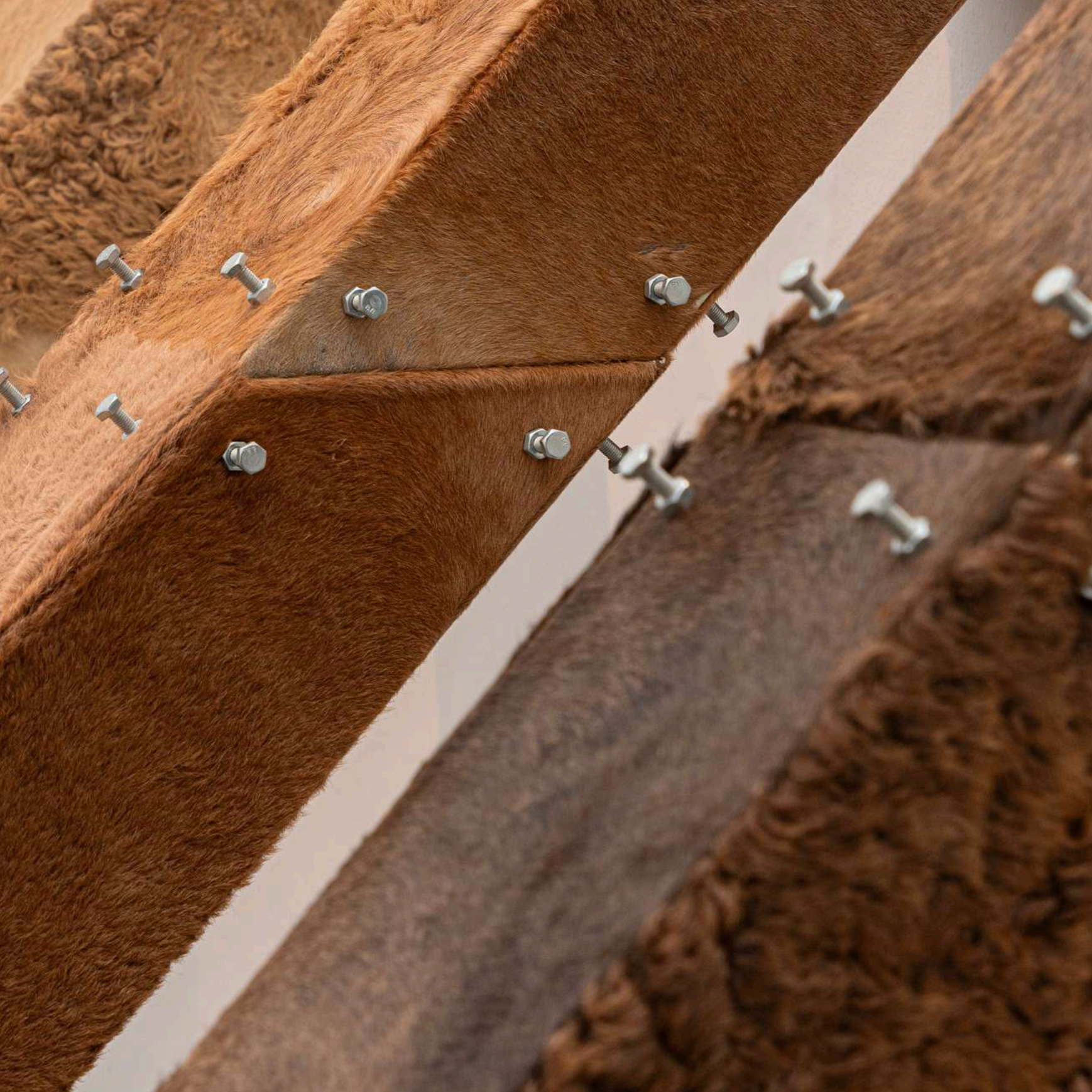
Catalogue design by Kamyra Pratap  
Front cover Image: Doric A, 2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel hide, Nut and bolt  
200 x 50 cm

Back cover: Corinthian A, 2024  
PU paint on PVC, Camel hide, Nut and bolt  
200 x 50 cm

Artist's statement by Zeinab Alhashemi

LEILA HELLER GALLERY  
I-87, Alserkal Avenue, PO Box 413991,  
Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE  
[www.leilahellergallery.com](http://www.leilahellergallery.com)  
Publication © 2024 LEILA HELLER GALLERY, Dubai

**LEILA HELLER GALLERY.**







LEILA HELLER GALLERY.