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Ghada Amer in her studio in New York in August. Ms. Amer, 60, made her name with embroidered paintings on canvas.
(Maansi Srivastava/ New York Times)

CHANNELING HER ANGER, GHADA AMER LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

BY TED LOOS

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The artist [Ghada Amer](#), whose works will be on view at [Frieze Seoul](#) next week in the booth of [Tina Kim Gallery](#), is hardly the first artist to get mad — or to channel that feeling into her work. But few artists talk about it so openly, and even cheerfully.

“My paintings are angry,” said Ms. Amer, 60, referring to her embroidered works that depict women.

During a lively chat in the large, multi-floor studio in the Harlem neighborhood of New York that she shares with her partner, the artist Reza Farkhondeh, she explained that the emotion dated back to 1986, when a teacher at her French art school would not let her join a painting class. “He didn’t want to teach any women,” she said.

Her fury has other fuel, too. "I'm not collected as much as white artists," Ms. Amer added. Born in Egypt, she is a citizen of that country as well as of the United States and France.

"I don't see why," she added. "But I'm a woman, as well — who makes art about women. It's frustrating."

But instead of cursing her bad luck, she threw her head back and let out a laugh. The phrase "happy warrior," usually applied to politicians, seems to apply to Ms. Amer, too.

The embroidery in her signature works on canvas — which have an underlying drawn or painted element — gives them the quality of a relief. "I wanted to paint with thread," she said of her first forays in the medium.

The threads appear to be weeping from the eyes of some of her female figures, and the embroidery riffs on the idea of sewing as women's work, highlighting gender dynamics throughout art history.

Sometimes the works depict sexual situations, referencing pornography. Ms. Amer has a sense of humor about it all: She titled a 2005 embroidered work featuring naked women "Knotty but Nice."

Over the past dozen years, she has also moved more fully into new media, making sculptures in ceramic and, most recently, bronze.

"I am very excited for this body of work," she said of the bronzes in particular, one of which will be in the Tina Kim booth next week.

That sculpture, "The Red Portrait" (2023), a tabletop-size bronze Ms. Amer created, resembling a paneled screen, depicts a female face in the manner of her paintings; the booth will also feature "Another Revolutionary Woman" (2022) and other embroidered works.

In October, Ms. Kim will have a New York gallery show dedicated to Ms. Amer and will also display her work at that month's fair Frieze London.

"Tina really encouraged me on the bronzes. It opened a door," Ms. Amer said of working with her dealer. (She is also represented by [Marianne Boesky Gallery](#)).

She added that, as opposed to the anger-fueled paintings, "The sculptures are more lyrical."

Her work is on display closer to her New York home now, too: One of Ms. Amer's thread paintings, "Heather's Dégadé" (2006), is on view in the [Brooklyn Museum's](#) controversial exhibition "It's Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby," a harshly critical look at the artist's complicated legacy, partly curated by the comedian and writer.

The New York-based collector Miyoung Lee, a trustee of the Whitney Museum of American Art, owns two of Ms. Amer's paintings and has her eye on a garden installation by the artist.

She said she was surprised that Ms. Amer was not a bigger name in the art world. "She's one of the most underappreciated O.G.'s out there," Ms. Lee said. "She's ahead of her time."

That sentiment was echoed by Melissa Chiu, the director of the Smithsonian's [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden](#). The Hirshhorn showed a piece by Ms. Amer in 2013, and it has another project in the works for the future, Ms. Chiu said.

"She instilled gender and politics in her practice early on," Ms. Chiu said. "She's now more relevant than ever."

Ms. Amer was born in Cairo and lived there until age 11, when her family moved to France. "I grew up in the West," she said, noting that she gets frustrated when people emphasize her Muslim heritage. "Sometimes, I feel French," she added.

After her discouraging time in art school there, she set her sights on moving to the United States, which she did in 1995. But she said that her frankly sexual works have met with some resistance in all of her home countries.

"People were shocked by this," she said of the way that viewers reacted to her more explicit New York gallery works in the late 1990s. "Just like the Muslim culture I had left."

She added, "Sometimes, I think there's nowhere I can go."

Her first solo gallery show was a flop, with no sales, but the second one sold out, she said, and she was off and running in her career, working with a succession of prominent dealers, including Gagosian.

Her work with textiles was, at the time, unusual. "She pre-empted the idea of coming back to materiality," said Michelle Grabner, an artist and a longtime professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago who follows Ms. Amer's work. "We're fully there now, as fibers and textiles have made a return."

Now that she has turned some of her attention to bronzes, Ms. Amer has to manage a complicated process that involves many stages: a drawing on cardboard that is turned into a stenciled maquette, then a clay model. Later, a wax-filled resin or rubber mold has molten bronze poured into it, creating the finished piece using what is known as the lost-wax process.

The high cost of fabricating the sculptures forced her to move the last stage of the process to a foundry in Seoul, where she traveled last year to work on them.

"The sculpture isn't selling very well so far," Ms. Amer acknowledged — but then again, the same thing was true of her paintings 25 years ago.

But the pleasure she is taking in creating truly three-dimensional works makes her think she is on the right track. "This is the future," she said of the bronzes.

Ms. Amer added that, having reached the milestone age of 60, "I think I'm doing the best of my art. I'm done with proving myself."