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PRESS RELEASE

MONA SAUDI

Poetry in Stone

25 May – 16 July 2015

Lawrie Shabibi is pleased to present *Poetry in Stone*, the first solo exhibition in the UAE for renowned Jordanian sculptor Mona Saudi.

Mona Saudi's sculptural practice stretches over five decades, creating forms full of vitality, beauty and a clear sense of equilibrium. Mona Saudi is a sculptor who lives and breathes her Middle Eastern heritage. One of the very few Arab women artists to pursue sculpture, her achievements and unique style place her as an important figure in the history of modern Arab art. She has lived through times of great political turmoil – including a civil war in Lebanon - and yet her artworks feel timeless and serene.

A central theme of Saudi's work lies in creating an organic connection through her materials to life itself. To quote the artist: '*sculpture is a pure exploration of form, an endless process of research and creation where the variations are infinite*'. Drawn to the Arabic expression *takween* roughly translated as creation or formation, she named her first sculpture in stone *Mother/Earth* (1965) and frequently returns to ideas of fertility and growth. Always starting with basic shapes, the square, circle, cylinder, rectangle, she goes on to give them a life of their own creating new, graceful compositions.

Featured in this exhibition are seven sculptures from the period 2003 - 2012, showing the breadth and range of Mona Saudi's vision. To Saudi, born in Amman, Jordan, a long-time resident of Lebanon, studying in Paris, with a mother from Syria and her father's family originally from the Hejaz, the world has no borders. Her choice of material expresses this notion. She revels in using different kinds of stone from the Middle East: black diorite from Syria, alabaster from Yemen and from her native Jordan pink limestone from Irbid and the distinctive, signature green stone, Jordanian marble, Italian and South American marble, Lebanese yellow stone, Iranian travertine and African granite.

Another important element of Saudi's artwork is her love of poetry, typified by a series of seven silkscreen prints of drawings made between 1976 and 1980 inspired by the writings of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, Saudi's friend from the early 1970s until his death in 2008. Phrases from *Earth Poem*, *Hymn for the Green*, *Her Image* and *Suicide of the Lover*, become part of the composition of her drawings. Also inspired by Adonis's poem, the *Petra Tablet*, Mona Saudi created twelve drawings in silkscreen prints in 1996 that glorify the Nabatean city carved in stone. Saudi's drawings are inspired by poetry and relate clearly to the sculptural forms she creates, with their strong graphic line and totemic imagery.

About Mona Saudi:

Mona Saudi was born in Amman on the 1st of October 1945. As a young girl she was passionate for art – a love of poetry and music – Mona Saudi's dream was to leave to Paris. When her father refused her permission to go to university at seventeen she left for Beirut in defiance, immediately thrown into the vivid circles of artist and intellectuals such as Adonis, Paul Guiragossian and Michel Basbous who were to become lifelong friends. She stayed for a year and held her first exhibition of drawings at Café de la Press in 1963, making enough from sales to afford a ticket to cross the Mediterranean to Paris.

Enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Saudi soon focused her studies on the art of sculpture, inspired equally by frequent visits to the Louvre to contemplate Etruscan, Greek, African & Egyptian art and the Museum of Modern Art where she was immediately taken by Picasso, Miro, Van Gogh, Giacometti, Calder and Constantin Brancusi. While a student at the Beaux Arts she created her first sculpture in 1965 by carving stone. Mona started her own organic abstract style in sculpture that evolved until these days.

Over the last half century, Mona Saudi has been shown in solo and collective exhibitions worldwide, recently at the Mosaic Rooms in London, and also at venues that include Musee d'Art Moderne, Paris, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C., the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, and the British Museum, London.

Her works are featured in the collections of the National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington DC, the Barjeel Foundation (Sharjah), The National Gallery of the Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan, the Sharjah Museum, UAE, The Khaled Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan, the Sursock Museum, Beirut, Lebanon, Dar Al Athar Al Islamiyya, Kuwait and the Museum of Modern Art, Kuwait, the Ministry of Culture, Cairo, Egypt, the Assila Museum, Morocco, and the French Embassy, Amman, Jordan.

A monumental work by Mona Saudi entitled *Spiritual Geometry* (1987), stands outside the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, the only sculpture permitted to grace the surrounding precinct by its architect Jean Nouvel. The Institut also owns two more works of hers.

Recent acquisitions have included those by The British Museum and the Sharjah Art Foundation.

Mona Saudi lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon and Amman, Jordan.

Mona Saudi who writes poetry explains her love of stone in a poem entitled:

An Ocean of Dream

*To stones from which we build an ocean of dreams
To stones where beginnings and endings abide
To stones pregnant with the longing for revelation*

*To stones from which I weave the light of joy
To stones in which I chisel a path for the soul
To stones that I touch, and the vapors of love arise
And as I polish them my soul thins out
And the gods of mystery talk to me*

*To stones that thought me the radiance of creations
To stones I lean on whenever I am touched
By fatigue, and despair knocks my door
To stones that connect me with what I know
And with what I do not know*

*I learnt incarnation so as to touch the invisible
And I dwelt between the orbits of action
And the orbits of dreams.*

About Lawrie Shabibi

Lawrie Shabibi is a contemporary art gallery housed in a 3000 square foot warehouse in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. The gallery's programme supports international contemporary artists mainly from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. By holding a regular programme of exhibitions, screenings and talks, publishing catalogues and participating in international art fairs, the gallery engages the wider local and international community.

The gallery represents Hamra Abbas, Adel Abidin, Farhad Ahrarnia, Wafaa Bilal, Asad Faulwell, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Taus Makhacheva, Nabil Nahas, Driss Ouadahi, Nathaniel Rackowe, Marwan Sahmarani, Larissa Sansour, Yasam Sasmazer, Mona Saudi, Shahpour Pouyan and Adeel uz Zafar.

For information on Lawrie Shabibi please visit www.lawrieshabibi.com

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