

Husseino, Dana. Interview: Rema Ghuloum. Canvas: Art and Culture From Southwest Asia and North Africa, Issue 124, September - October, 2026.



Rema Ghuloum
Blood Moon, 2026
 Oil and cold wax on canvas
 35 x 35 in
 88.9 x 88.9 cm

Through layers of colour, paint and erasure, the LA-based artist transforms her canvas into a space where memory can linger and resurface.

Dana Husseino: Your paintings are often defined by their rich and nuanced use of colour. How did your relationship with colour develop, and what role does it play in your artistic process?

Rema Ghuloum: Colour is something that is very innate to me – I connect and relate to the world through colour. I'm actually what is called a colour-tactile synaesthete, which means I associate colour with feeling and sometimes with taste, too. It's something I've always experienced and understood intuitively. I've always just understood the world through colour.

Colour has such a weight to it. It can express every range of emotion. The reason I chose painting as my medium is because colour is always in the foreground of painting. Its pigment comes from the earth or is synthetic, so it's very much part of culture and history. Colour has the ability to shift and change, particularly in relation to pigment and light, and that's important to me because that's what I want to convey.

Your paintings, such as *Waking Dream*, *Reflected Light*. (2025), are made through layers of thin stains of paint, sanding and reworking the surface. How does this gradual process influence the way colour emerges and transforms within your work?

The first layers of my paintings are painted horizontally, on the floor, and I pour the paint. At that stage, I'm using aqueous paint, mostly acrylic-gouache, although sometimes acrylic, and I dilute it like watercolour. It's very physical – I'm pouring paint, splattering it, spraying it and manipulating it to create this active ground. At that point, I don't really know what I'm going to be making, I just have a feeling for a palette. Maybe I'll be pouring a lot of reds, or reds and blues, or reds and greens.

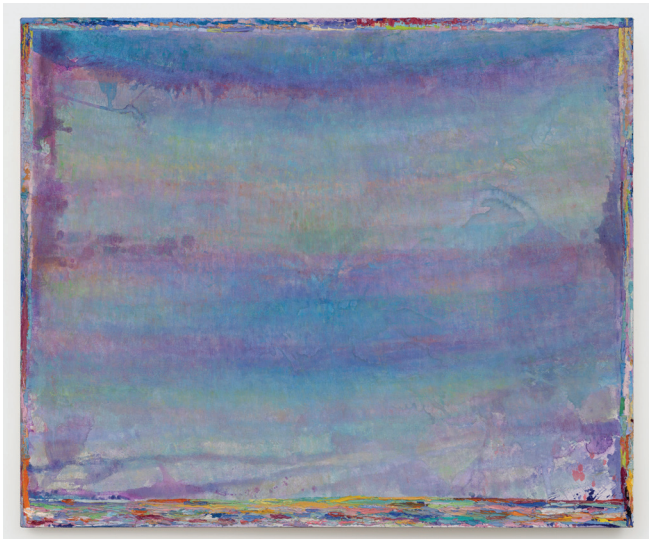
I then build up the painting slowly with thin layers of oil paint, sanding in between every layer. At the end of a session, the next day or whenever, I sand it all down. I don't sand specific parts, I sand the whole thing with very fine-grit sandpaper. What happens over time is that the process becomes part of the surface of the painting. It's a kind of memory that lives in the surface of the canvas. Over time, that builds up and creates this optical sensation because there's a density to the colour, but then there's also this erasure happening. So it's light, but it's dense, and that's how it manifests over time.

Are there particular colours, combinations or relationships between colours that you repeatedly return to in your practice? What draws you to them?

I would say no and yes. There were a couple of years when I tried to work with full-spectrum rainbow paintings, but that was because I felt like it was the hardest challenge – to make a full-spectrum painting feel like it has different emotional tenors. Then I started working with the full palette, literally every colour of the rainbow, but with different degrees of each colour. I would combine them with neutrals, for example more greys and browns, to create this range of feeling within the palette.

In sculptural works such as *28 Pieces in Memory of the Sun* (2015),

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Rema Ghuloum
In Silence, 2025
 Oil and acryla-gouache on canvas
 48 x 58 in
 121.9 x 147.3 cm

how do you approach choosing the materials for each piece? What guides your selection, and how does the material influence the development of the work?

I started working with sculpture in 2008, when I was in graduate school. I was doing this kind of meditation on loss because I had lost my sister a couple of weeks before I went there. Going on walks, I started noticing all this trash along the route to my studio and all these amazing arrangements that looked like they were pieces of art. Slowly, I started collecting discarded objects and working with those materials.

I began making daily sculptures out of cardboard, found foam, wire and really whatever I could find. Foam was such a quick way of working, I could work very immediately with the material. I would prime the sculptures and then apply oil and other materials. *28 Pieces in Memory of the Sun* are all hand-sized. I often like to use my body as a reference, so each sculpture was about the size of my hands put together.

Your paintings exist between abstraction, representation and the illusion of three-dimensional space. What interests you about working within these shifting boundaries?

I don't like to pin anything down. I think that is why I choose painting as well, as there is more opportunity to be both vague and specific simultaneously. I'm a trained observational painter. I can paint, render and do all of that, and I go to great lengths not to do it. Part of that is a way to push myself and grow as an artist, but I also want to create spaces that are challenging in that way. I like playing with that discordance, that in-between, liminal space, because that is how we actually experience the world.

You recently participated in the group exhibition *Fertile Dreams* at Tabari in Dubai. How did you respond to the theme of the show?

It was the first time I had ever exhibited in the region, which meant a lot to me personally. Renewal and growth are always part of my work because of the actual ritual of sanding. It's about letting go of what is there and allowing something else to emerge. There is this entropic element to the work where it's constantly transforming, and that was what the initial painting was about.

How has your understanding of colour changed through your career? Are you approaching colour differently today compared to your earlier works?

When I was an undergraduate, my work was more political. I was working with entropy and very specific colours associated with an eroded landscape and that kind of thing. Then, in graduate school and after, it became more related to the different places that I was in. I would do residencies and travel, so the colour would respond to the location. Now, I think it's more to do with feeling. I don't need to be in a specific place. Colour is more about what is going on in the world or something that I want the viewer to feel, rather than necessarily what I'm feeling.