

# I FELT THAT

CURATED BY JOSEPHINE BAILEY

30 JUNE – 3 JULY 2022

## An interview with Zayn Qahtani



**Q: Please can you introduce yourself and your practice.**

A: My name is Zayn Qahtani, and I'm a painter, drawer and sculptor. Recently I've been experimenting with creating work that blurs the space between the 2D and 3D.

**Q: What drew you to apply for I felt that?**

A: When I saw the call for 'I Felt That', I resonated deeply with the core concept of the project. As someone who suffers with an autoimmune disorder, I know very well the discrimination faced by womxn and non-binary folks in the medical industry. It just felt like the right time to be engaged with the history of the gender pain gap and to be part of a safe space exploring that within my practise.

**Q: You speak about how your work is "a dance between what is seen and what is felt", how has this been relevant to this project - where so much is UNSEEN but felt!**

A: 'I Felt That' has definitely provided a space to be able to give in to feeling. Every week, the 14 of us meet and give in to *feeling*, and something special in turn happens – a quiet yet unnerving unravelling of emotion, leaving behind only the bones of the structure that we've built as a society. I feel like it is this very act that has given me some ethereal yet very tangible and raw insight into what it means to feel, in reaction to the world that surrounds us and who we inherently are as people.

**Q: I love the name of your piece you are exhibiting, “The Milk that Feeds The Soul Is Often Curdled”. It’s very poetic, but also has a sharpness to it. How did you come up with it? How do you feel it relates to the project as a whole?**

A: During the entirety of the project, themes of corruption and power-plays in the role of the gender pain gap kept cropping up – it made me think of sour milk and the many metaphors that can have – the milk that feeds the babe, the calf being ripped from its mother, a spoiled breakfast. ‘The Milk That Feeds The Soul Is Often Curdled’ speaks to not having a chance to be nurtured, or nourished, in the ways that we deserve. It speaks to being fed corruption, instead of the safety and love we deserve from our communities.



*Zayn Qahtani, The Milk That Feeds The Soul Is Often Curdled, 2022*

*Graphite, Red ochre, Date palm paper, Found antique frame*

**Q: Given that you’ve been in Bahrain for most of the project, how have you found it working collectively in a different country?**

A: It’s provided a sense of ritual for me – meeting weekly for an hour at the same time every week for the past three months has given me the space to disconnect from my daily life, and allow myself to be fully present for the people and the project at hand. It’s also allowed me to take a long, hard look at the communities and society that we surround ourselves with / grow up with, and start noticing all the little hairline cracks in the structure, and ask the hard questions.

**Q: Has the project impacted your practice as a whole do you think?**

A: Without a doubt – there is so much thought and research that has gone into this – the sheer breadth of the stories, experiences, and histories shared in this project could extend for years of research and creative practise. There are many ideas that are still fledglings in my mind that I do want to explore further even after the project is published.

**Q: Finally, how would you want others to interpret the exhibition and project? Is there something important you feel they would need to know to fully grasp it?**

A: This exhibition is not just pictures on a wall or objects to look at – it truly is a global conversation. Every image, every object tells a story that is both collective and intimate. Some of them softly whisper their experiences of longing, nurture, and healing while others will bounce off the walls with rage, anger, desperation, and protest – but above all, the universal hum of the project will get back up on its feet, look you dead in the eye and say ‘I Felt That’.