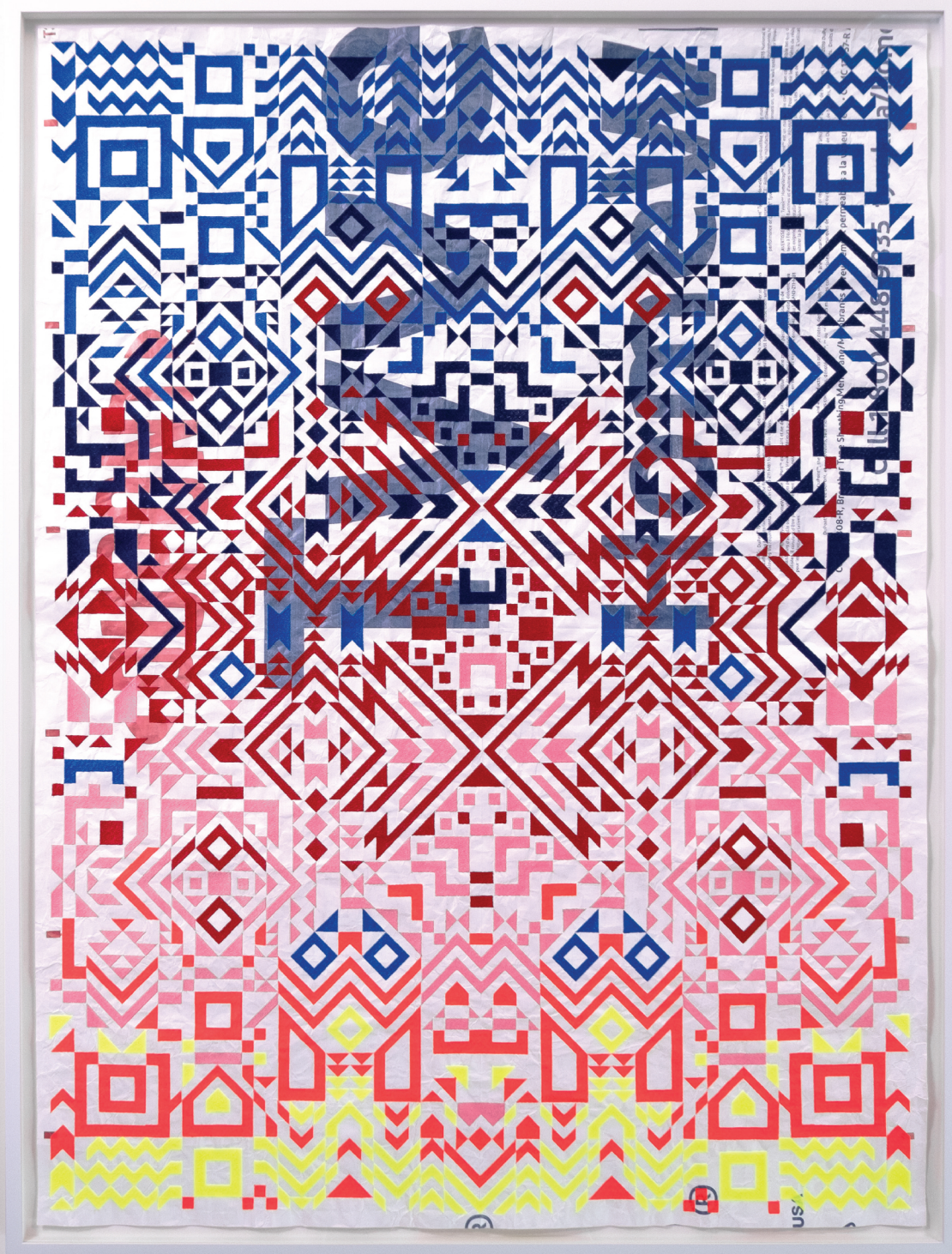


Studio

Craft and Design in Canada

VOL. 18 NO. 1 SPRING | SUMMER 2023



\$9.95 Display to Sept. 2023

studiomagazine.ca

Studio

Vol. 18, No.1 Spring|Summer 2023
www.studiomagazine.ca

\$9.95 per issue

Subscription Rates
Within Canada: 1 yr \$15.95, 2 yrs \$26.95
International: 1 yr \$30.00, 2 yrs \$50.00
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Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement #40015899.

Return undeliverable copies to:
Craft Ontario, 1106 Queen Street W., Toronto, ON M6J 1H9.

PUBLISHER



Craft Ontario
1106 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario M6J 1H9
416-925-4222
www.craftontario.com

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Craft Ontario is a not-for-profit service organization that works to have craft
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craft through providing member opportunities, and advocate for craft practice
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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada,
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Caroline Monnet,
Snowbird, 2022. Embroidery
on Tyvek, 123 x 94 cm.
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Oluseye Ogunlesi,
Black Ark, 2021. Polished
aluminum, burnt wood and
soil. 366 x 305 x 183 cm.
PHOTO: Cassandra Popescu.
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.



ABOVE: Azza El Siddique

OPPOSITE PAGE: Azza El Siddique, *gate of flaming-front, hidden back* (detail), 2022. Dry stone, iron oxide, 14 x 64 x 8 in. PHOTO: SEBASTIAN BACH. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HELENA ANRATHER, NEW YORK.

FOCAL POINT: THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF AZZA EL SIDDIQUE

by Sequoia Miller

THE VISUAL CENTREPIECE of artist Azza El Siddique’s recent exhibition *Dampen the flame; Extinguish the fire* was a rust-coloured cobra with two heads and a zigzag body. Set within a steel framework with unfired clay vessels, flower-shaped incense and a slow-drip irrigation system, the cobra contributed to an air of ritual and reflection evocative of a temple or funerary site. El Siddique’s double-headed cobra showcases how her process and choice of materials—specifically mould-making, 3D printing and clay—inform the internal logic of her practice.

El Siddique’s practice is informed by her Sudanese heritage and extensive research she conducts into ancient funerary practices. Born in Khartoum and raised in Vancouver, she explores memory, entropy and transformation through a densely packed network of both highly personal and broadly cultural imagery. Describing her research practice as informed and influenced by archeology, the artist navigates absence and loss by harnessing not just specific and evocative imagery, but also certain processes and materials that expand the work and reveal a logic that emerges through making.

Seeking to evoke a memory or an idea through a generalized object type rather than a specific artifact, El Siddique typically sources vases, statuettes and other forms in her installations through thrift stores and websites like eBay. And in the past, she would make a mould off the form and then cast it, removing a degree of specificity and detail in both the physical characteristics of the object and in the associations it evokes.

For example, the vase form in the installation *Memory of One*, commissioned by the Gardiner Museum in 2020, originated from an online retailer. The vase reminded El Siddique of the many similar forms she saw in Sudanese and Egyptian homes growing up. She then made a two-part plaster mould and cast the form in clay, leaving it as a fragile avatar of the past rather than a specific object. Casting the vase also made it reproducible. The artist included 75 casts to evoke the many manifestations of the sun god Ra, allowing each one to transform individually through a slow-drip irrigation system—from specific to generalized object, and from solid to hydrated form. These two acts of transformation exemplify how a change in material state opens up new meanings and interpretations.





ABOVE & RIGHT: Azza El Siddique, *Multi-part plaster mold with clay cast*, 2022. Plaster and clay. PHOTO: KOHLER CO.; COURTESY OF THE JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Azza El Siddique, *Dampen the flame; Extinguish the fire*, 2022. Installation view, Helena Anrather Gallery, New York. PHOTO: SEBASTIAN BACH. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND HELENA ANRATHER, NEW YORK.

For the first time in her work, the cobra sculpture has a digital origin. Rather than source a cobra-shaped item from a thrift store, El Siddique based the form on an ancient Egyptian wand in the collection of the Louvre in Paris. The original cobra shows the distinctive zigzag body, but has only one head and is made out of copper. For her sculpture, El Siddique built the form as a 3D computer model.

Starting with a computer model allowed El Siddique to change scale and proportions. She replaced the tail with a second head, evoking both an ouroboros and the double cobra crowns of the Nubian pharaohs of the Kushite Empire. The work was then 3D-printed in a hard gypsum stained with iron oxide, a material that resonates with the rust appearing elsewhere in the artist's work.

The double-headed cobra continues to transform, most recently into ceramic. El Siddique recently participated in the Arts/Industry residency program at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, long celebrated for making space for artists on Kohler's factory floor for industrial ceramics. At Kohler, she scaled up the cobra, printing

a version in ABS plastic (think LEGO) that measured 10 feet long. With the help of factory technicians, she then made a complex mould of the model and cast ceramic versions.

The cobra's transformations of material and process have allowed themes central to the artist's larger practice to come into the work. The piece grew to an architectural scale, overwhelming the individual much like the temple-esque spaces she creates out of steel, while also amplifying the magical aspects of the original wand. The fabrication of the complex mould itself brought skilled makers together into a communal process; it also required them to dismantle and invert the object in their minds as they worked through how to construct it. As with the earlier vase, the mould-making and casting removed a layer of specificity to the work, erasing details and creating the effect of a reflection, much like a glitchy scan or photocopy. Casting also re-centres clay, a recurrent medium of body and transformation in the artist's work. The giant ceramic cobra appears in *"that which trembles wavers,"* El Siddique's solo exhibition at Bradley Ertaskiran in Montréal. ■

