

Ahmed Umar  
*Glowing Phalanges*  
15 Sep 2023–7 Jan 2024

Ahmed Umar, *Glowing Phalanges*, 2023,  
installasjonsbilde Kunsternes Hus. Foto: Uli Holz



Bergen Kunsthall is proud to present the solo exhibition «Glowing Phalanges» by the Sudanese-Norwegian artist Ahmed Umar. The exhibition is a continuation of the artist's ongoing and ever-growing project *Forbidden Prayers* and includes an installation of 99 sculptural works in various materials, spread out across the four main galleries of Bergen Kunsthall. Each work is held by an acrylic cast of the artist's right hand, suggesting the use as a prayer bead – a ritualistic use to count or contemplate during prayer.

The materials used in the works include ebony, red palm, crocodile back shell, limestone from a 19th pyramid in Meroë, leopard skin, buffalo horn, ivory and kidney stones from a human. For several years, Umar has collected materials originating from African and Asian countries, found in commercial souvenirs and imported to Norway mainly through missionary work and tourism. In addition to these materials, several of the sculptures also consist of organic material from the Nordic region, such as reindeer horns and whale skeleton. Juxtaposing materials with cultural meaning from different cultural contexts, the sculptural objects give form to the ways in which contemporary biographies as well as materials often transgress normative notions of identity.

All the works in the exhibition are held or balanced in a cast of the artist's own hand. The different positions of the hand mimic movements that are often performed during prayer and point to how the hand can be a symbol for both politics and religion, but also creative power and the ability to imagine a new reality. While most works are small in scale and installed as a series in a long line, two of them occupy each a gallery of their own, giving visitors a possibility to enter and rest in the space.

Umar grew up in a conservative Wahhabi community in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, with his parents from Sudan practicing Sufism. Though both Wahhabism and Sufism are branches of Islam, the difference between the two is considerable and often contradictory. The exhibition's title, «Glowing Phalanges», points to Umar's upbringing between these two faiths. In Sudan, the use of prayer chains and amulets is deeply rooted in Sufi traditions, while in Wahhabism, the knuckles of the right hand are used in prayer. As a reward for this practice, the legend says that the hand will glow and light up the darkness on Judgment Day.

*Forbidden Prayers* has previously been shown in several exhibitions, initially as a series of 15 objects, then 33 and now 99 objects, most

recently at Kunsternes Hus in Oslo. Umar aims to make a total of 1,000 sculptural prayer beads, in reference to the largest prayer beads used in the Sudanese Sufism.

**Ahmed Umar (b. 1988, Sudan)** lives and works in Oslo, where he completed his MA at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Through his work, Umar has become an important figure for the queer community in Norway and Sudan. He has exhibited at The Biennale of Sydney and is currently nominated for the Lorck Schive Art Prize at the Trondheim Art Museum.

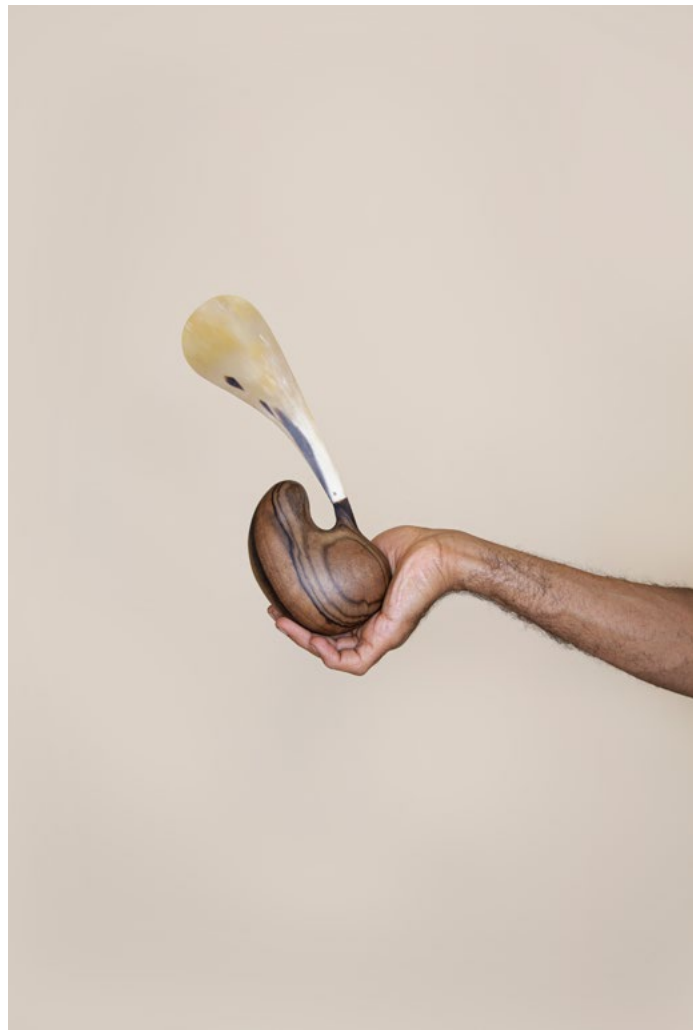
## Save the date

### Opening

Fri 15 Sep 20:00 Free

### Plattform: Artist talk

Sat 16 Sep 14:00 Free



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### Press package

[Press package with PDFs and hi-res images](#)

### Press contact

Emilio Sanhueza  
emilio@kunsthall.no  
+47 99 29 89 84

### Bergen Kunsthall

Rasmus Meyers allé 5  
5015 Bergen  
Norway

www.kunsthall.no  
@bergenkunsthall  
@landmark.bergen