

Marian Abboud

Sister +++++ Familial Formations III, 2026

vehicle, digital prints on fabric, CRT monitors, turquoise, quartz, amber, frankincense, rose, rock sugar
Courtesy of the artist
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Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney.

Education Resource (K-6)



Courtesy of the artist © Marian Abboud.



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Overview

Have you ever looked at old family photos and wondered about the people in them? Those photos tell stories about who we are and where we come from. Lebanese-Australian artist Marian Abboud works with her sisters to make art that shows how family stories belong to whole communities. She creates artworks that help us see how who we are is shaped by the people and places around us.

Marian grew up in Western Sydney, where families from all over the world have come to Australia to live side by side. Her family came from Lebanon, bringing their own objects, stories and traditions. Like many migrant communities, Marian's family carries stories that make Australia richer and more diverse.

This artwork combines many things: her father's old car that's been sitting quietly in the garage since he passed away, as well as 23 photos of four generations of Abboud family women that you can see through. When fabric layers overlap, some pictures hide while others show, just like how memories work. There is also sound and moving image around, helping us feel connected to Marian's family and their memories. When art combines different things like this, it becomes powerful because it shows us ideas in ways we can see, hear, and feel.

The car and photos show who Marian and her sisters are, how they remember their father, and how the women in their family stay close across many years. Marian's family story is special to her, but it's also like many other families who came to Australia from different countries. By sharing her story, she helps us understand what lots of families experience. These connections matter because they help us understand where we come from and who we belong to, making us feel less alone in the world.





The Secret Handshake, 2016 (detail view),
Courtesy of the artist © Marian Abboud.



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Discussion Questions

Marian and her sisters use their father's car, photographs, and special objects to make art about their family.

The car is from 1964, that's over 60 years old! What **makes** something **look old**? What **details** tell you this car has been sitting for a long time?

Rock sugar and spices are things you might find in a kitchen. **Why** would an artist put food items in an **artwork about memory**?

If you were making an artwork about your **family**, what **object from your home** would you put in the centre? What would you place around it?

Marian prints photographs on see-through fabric that overlap. Some faces look clear and others look blurry.

Count how many **photographs** you can see clearly versus how many are blurred by overlapping. What might this **tell us about memory**?

Marian chose **see-through fabric** instead of thick paper. What **effect** does this create? What would be **different** if the photographs were on **cardboard**?

Standing among hanging photographs of people who are connected across many years might create **different** feelings, such as curiosity, wonder, calm, or something else. What **feeling** do you think this artwork creates? **Why**?

Practical Activities

Activity 1

Take a piece of paper and pencil and draw one object that's important to you. It could be a toy, a pet, a favourite food, a piece of clothing, or a special place.

Draw it big so it fills most of the page.

Now carefully tear your drawing into 4-6 pieces. It's okay if the edges are rough and uneven. That's what we want!

With the person next to you, give them half of your torn pieces and take half of theirs. Now you both have pieces of each other's drawings.

On a new page in your exercise book, arrange all the torn pieces (yours and your partner's).

Let some pieces overlap so they touch and cover each other. Leave gaps between other pieces.

Use your pencil to draw connecting lines and patterns between the pieces in a way that feels right to you.

Think to yourself: Why did you connect certain pieces? Do they look similar in some way? What about the pieces with gaps between them? Did you leave space on purpose, or did it just happen? Sometimes artists make choices on purpose, and sometimes beautiful things happen by accident. Both are okay!



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Write both your names at the bottom as co-artists.

Activity 2

Take another piece of paper and fold it in half, then in half again. Open it up so you now have four boxes.

These represent four generations of people connected across time.

In the first box, draw a simple pattern or shape. This could be a spiral, a series of lines, a leaf shape, or a wave pattern.

In box 2, redraw your pattern but change one thing (make it bigger, turn it sideways, add more lines, make it darker).

In box 3, take box 2's version and change one more thing.

In box 4, take box 3's version and change it one final time.

Now look at all four boxes. What stayed the same through all four?

Write this down in your exercise book. This element that stayed the same is what connects them all together, even though they changed. This is what artists call a motif.

The changes you made are called variations.

When artists use motifs to represent people or families, the motif shows what connects them (like shared features or traditions), while the variations show how each person or generation is unique.





Salat Sisters, 2021-2023,
Courtesy of the artist © Marian Abboud.

