

## 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.

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## Education Resource (7-12)



*Divinations, 2024*

Courtesy of the artist © Marian Abboud.



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## Overview

When families migrate, they leave behind extended family and the physical places where history lives. What remains are fragments: objects, photographs, stories. Lebanese-Australian artist Marian Abboud and her sisters have spent two decades gathering, transforming them into *Sister +++++ Familial Formations III*.

In Abboud's female-dominant household, sisterhood preserves cultural memory. Their father's 1964 Isuzu Bellett sits in this space following his passing — no longer an ordinary object, but a vessel holding his presence and absence. In a powerful act of reclamation, Abboud and her sisters move it from private garage to public view for the Biennale of Sydney. Around it, they arrange 23 photographs of four generations of women from their matrilineal bloodline: great aunts, aunts, sisters, and nieces. Printed on semi-sheer fabric, we experience the photos overlap. Some faces emerge clearly while others blur and recede. This mirrors how diasporic memory work: some stories are vivid, others fade; some exist only because a sister tells you.

Moving through the space, you piece together what the sisters have spent 20 years piecing together. One fragment alone cannot reconstruct identity; it emerges from collaborative assembly. Protective amulets of turquoise ceramics, rock sugar, and spices create ritual boundaries. Sound and moving image fill the space, immersing you in the felt experience of Lebanese-Australian sisterhood — how women inherit trauma, carry ritual, and build resilience together across a matrilineal line fractured by geography and loss.





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

## Discussion Questions

Abboud's work explores themes on migration and cultural continuity and does so through three memory fragments — the car, photographs and protective amulets as



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ritual objects.

How does each **fragment** gain meaning by being **placed** next to the others?

What role do **objects** play when living **people and places** are **absent** and no longer accessible?

How does using **personal objects** in art **challenge** what we consider **important** or gallery-worthy?

How does Abboud's **collaborative authorship** with her sisters **challenge** the solo artist genius model?

Abboud's work is a hybrid artwork that combines installation (the car as sculptural object), photography (printed on fabric, not paper), sound, moving image, and performance.

What does the **contrast** between **static** decay (car) and **active** preservation (photographs on moveable fabric) **communicate** about **different** approaches to memory something?

How does **moving** through the space with your **body** change your **relationship** to the artwork? What does this teach about the **active** work of remembering?

## Practical Activities

### Activity 1

In your visual arts diary, identify three distinct fragments from the installation that catch your eye.

This could be a detail from the car or a pattern from a photograph, etc. Observe and choose which ones are interesting to you.

Create a composite drawing where these three elements overlap on a single page. Instead of drawing them side-by-side, draw them on top of one another.

Use varying pressure with your pencil to make some elements appear faint and receding, while others are dark and dominant.

Look closely at where your three drawings overlap and cross each other.

At these exact intersections, draw short, dark, dashed lines that look like stitches or sutures.

These stitches should visually connect the separate images together.

### Activity 2

Think of an object or heirloom from your family history that acts as a connector between people.

Some examples include a photo album, a specific dish, a piece of jewellery, etc.

Do not draw the object realistically. Instead, represent the object as a simple geometric shape in the centre of your page.

Treat this shape as the anchor. Draw lines radiating outward from it to map the invisible network it holds together.



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On these lines, write the names of the people, specific places, or dates connected to this object.

Look at the web you have created. Use colour or thickness to trace the strongest lines. Does this object hold these memories together like a magnet?



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

