

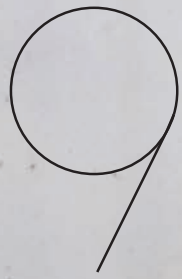
# Harper's BAZAAR INTERIORS



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## ARTFUL LIVING

*An exclusive look inside Emirati film director  
ABDULLA AL KAABI's Jumeirah home*



# TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE

*Sensuality, desire and femininity meet simultaneously through a series of interactive displays in Beirut based designer **NAJLA EL ZEIN**'s first exhibition in New York, writes Ayesha Shehmir*



Right: Najla El Zein  
This image and far right:  
Installation views of *Distortion*

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**T**itled *Transition*, Najla El Zein's first solo exhibition at Friedman Benda in New York reveals work inspired by motherhood and comprises three series: *Distortion*, *Fragmented Pillar* and *Seduction*. With an educational background in product design and interior architecture from Paris, in her first show Najla depicts a woman's journey through pregnancy via a range of abstract forms. The exhibition is influenced by the artist's personal experiences, and further complemented by the overarching themes of sensuality, desire, femininity and the subconscious.

The *Distortion* series embraces femininity with an exploration of the female body during pregnancy, through a number of bench-like structures that are made up of fibre-reinforced concrete. *Distortion* was a way for me to dissect the different feelings sensed during pregnancy, says Najla. Pregnancy relates to the transformation of the body, hence the distortion, but it also involves the awareness of various contradictory feelings such as alienation, femininity, sensuality, weight, warmth and coldness. Through these sculptures, the artist narrates the story of the remarkable psychological and physical journey that a woman undergoes during pregnancy. The body transforms, the way you see life changes, the perception of the self changes, and that is something no one can prepare you for, or describe, where at the same time it is very personal, she says.

Crafted with plaster and sand, *Fragmented Pillar*

demonstrates the fragility of human condition, or of any given entity, through a series of varying sculptures.

If disturbed, the pillar won't necessarily break, but will become fragile, says Najla. This metaphor applies to one's own foundation, to the notion of the self. The altering pillars represent the resulting consequences produced by the disturbance of a being's foundation.

The *Seduction* series is created using a form of limestone, travertine, and it explores the relationship between a woman's body before pregnancy, and its connection with the new, growing body. When the body of a woman changes, not only physically but as well internally, one needs time to adjust and re-connect to the new body, says Najla. This happens through a first stage where one of the bodies is introverted, folded and closed, to finally opening up and desiring.

The sculptures place a focus on the relationship between the subconscious mind and the physical realm through a range of interactive displays that are open to interpretation. I think it is fascinating to think about intuition as a choice one makes driven by the subconscious, says Najla.

For the future, the artist says that she will seek new inspirations and materials for her work. I discovered new horizons while working with stone, a true revelation, she says. I hope to continue working with this material and explore new ones. It will all depend on the story.

*Transition* runs from 28 February until 13 April 2019 at Friedman Benda in New York [friedmanbenda.com](http://friedmanbenda.com)