

sarabadr Schmidt



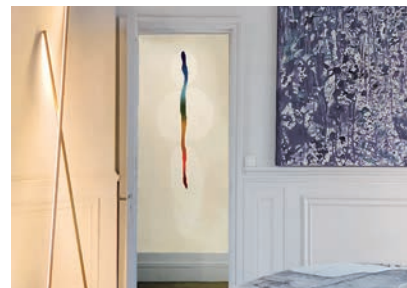
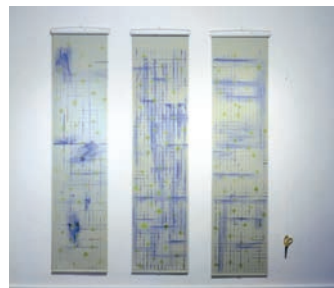
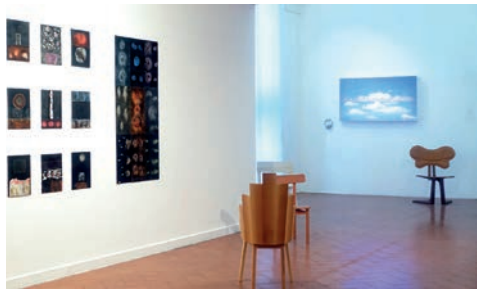
Sara Badr Schmidt, visual artist born in Stockholm. Swedish and Lebanese, she has lived between Lebanon, France and Sweden. She currently lives and works in Paris.

Her approach is poetic and inclusive, in order to arouse emotions and questions. Abolishing limiting borders is her wish. To make the spectator an actor, by cancelling the border between the work and the individual, whether through immersive installations during exhibitions or functional works with which an appropriation is established. In her work, the various senses, whether sight, touch or hearing, are often called upon.

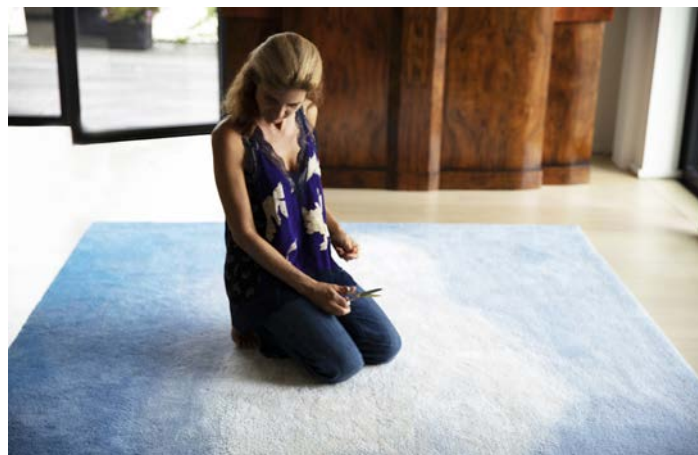
Her ideas are expressed mainly in paintings, photographs, videos and functional works. Her work has been shown in Paris, Beirut, Milan and New York. Her works reflect on the impact of geographical boundaries and the relationship of man to his environment. The functional works, in turn, embody her desire to bring art back into our daily lives, transforming it into a sensory experience.

The universe of Sara Badr Schmidt may be mysterious but it is free of anguish. It is a mystery in the light of day, certainly all the more disturbing for that; filled with forged evidence and pseudo-simplicity. Pascal Bruckner, philosopher et author





In her work, Sara Badr Schmidt combines different techniques and media, from painting to photography, video, textile and screen printing. Images and texts, light and matter, sound and touch are interwoven in the form of installations. She reflects on the cohabitation between cultures, on the unresolved problem of territorial belonging, on the political and social identity of places, on the possibility or dream of a balance and cohabitation between peoples, regardless of violated borders. Her projects question the limits of borders but also the enrichment of different cultures. She proposes another reading of the geographical and temporal borders between countries through their skies and languages. Her works underline the reality and absurdity of borders. They also address the limits of the body and its environment, thus questioning the place of each individual. Both poetic and political, Sara Badr Schmidt's works attempt to convey the bipolar relationship between beauty and tragedy.



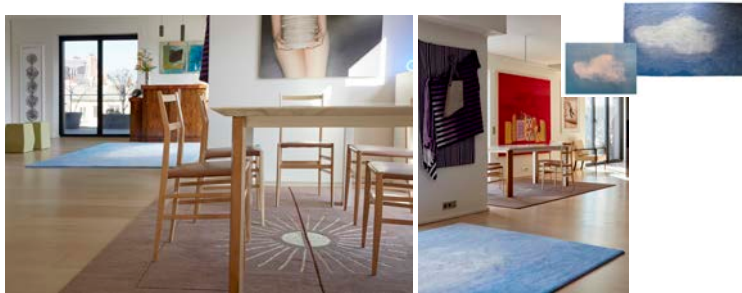
Perhaps because, from a very young age, she has admired the sky up close, travelling through it on numerous aeroplane trips between Lebanon (her father's land), Sweden (her mother's land) and France (the middle land), dragged along by her wandering family, fleeing from war, but often finding their homeland. She looked at the sky from all angles: from above, from below; like a snowball that you roll in your hands. From the memory of this experience, anchored in her memory, an existential matrix project was born, a reflection on the limits of the ether, on the ever-changing atmosphere, on the freedom that the immensity of the sky implies. Considering the history of ancient art as a classical source of inspiration, she discovered how, in an empyrean of astral panoramas open to the infinite, the painting of the past knew no boundaries... Chiara Gatti, art critic

Sara Badr Schmidt brings art into our daily lives through sensory works, especially textiles. Pieces that are as much about function as they are about personal expression. They question the traditional applications of materials. Each of these works tells a specific story in a poetic way, opening the door to the imagination. When she discovered the craft of rug making, she decided to integrate it into her creative vocabulary. Tailor-made rugs that appeal to the different senses, visual and tactile. The design initiated by a drawing or a painting, the dyeing of the fibres reproduced by eye according to the colours she creates and the selection of materials, all contribute to the creation of unique and artistic rugs. These creations are often the object of a particular order, occasionally being the object of a limited series. Contemporary works combined with ancestral manufacturing make these pieces a bridge between the past and the present for an art object of tomorrow's world. The textile works become part of everyday life and thus an integral part of the family history.



« Take two worlds that are completely different from one another, the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales and the wars that are tearing apart the Middle East, and look for possible connections between the two. Seemingly there are none. But Sara Badr Schmidt is an artist who forms connections where the common mortal only sees walls and borders ... Sara Badr Schmidt's aesthetic choice here is paradoxical: she depicts violence with gentleness, the red of blood with the blue of the sky, the rain of bombshells with the flight of birds. She is not trying to contend with what so many other artists have done, piling up corpses, showing ruins, and photographing mutilated and injured bodies. She avoids bloody expressionism and adopts subdued symbolism. She recreates the war with an image of conceivable happiness. It is this intention that makes her work so powerful: the eye is at first unarmed.»

Pascal Bruckner



Take two worlds that are completely different from one another, the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales and the wars that are tearing apart the Middle East, and look for possible connections between the two. Seemingly there are none. But Sara Badr Schmidt is an artist who forms connections where the common mortal only sees walls and borders. Very affected by the wars in Lebanon which tore apart her childhood, she is even more so disturbed to see the phantom of such conflicts catch up to Europe and burden our streets with a terrifying threat. It is the child in her and the mother of two children that inspired this installation. In choosing the Princess and the pea, her impact is twofold: she evokes a wonderful story and distorts it to feed into our fears of today. For the little girl perched on a pile of mattresses is lying beneath a bombshell green like a pea that lies on the bed frame. The mattress, symbol of a refugee or a homeless person – in the absence of a roof, you need to at least have something to lie on, a meager means to protect oneself from the bombs coming from the sky or canons.

Nothing depicts the vulnerability of child more than the mannequin sitting up high threatened by a suspended lethal weapon. When we no longer have a home, a dwelling to protect us from the madness of mankind, the only escape left is to look towards the sky. These five light boxes are photos of Beirut taken at the same time in five different neighborhoods

in the city. Men kill each other even though they share the same planet, the same nature, the same climate. When the killings start and degenerate into a civil war, we need to begin by reminding ourselves of what is essential – what people have in common, their sense of belonging to the living world, to the elements. And the wonderful carpet that supports the mattresses, an essential feature in Lebanese homes, reflects the sky, the clouds, the cosmos like a mirror image. Here, blue is a soothing image of peace where the green of the cannonball embodies madness, hate and murder. War always comes to this blue sky in a little cloud, initially inoffensive and invisible, and darkens and then soon spits out its shrapnel. The ferments of division that Sara seems to remind us of, are initially minor then the seeds of hostility are sowed throughout all societies. This is why the term, “together” has become one of the most difficult words to understand in all languages.

This installation gives us a sense of profound peace and almost of serenity. The mattresses, the carpet prompt relaxation, especially with a little girl immersed in the deep sleep that only children know how to attain. But neither sleep or meditation are possible when threatened by war. Beneath our closed eyelids roams the phantom of mass murders, the madness of fanaticism, forced conversion, hostile communities ready to massacre their neighbors to calm their rage. Sara

Badr Schmidt's aesthetic choice here is paradoxical: she depicts violence with gentleness, the red of blood with the blue of the sky, the rain of bombshells with the flight of birds. She is not trying to contend with what so many other artists have done, piling up corpses, showing ruins, and photographing mutilated and injured bodies. She avoids bloody expressionism and adopts subdued symbolism. She recreates the war with an image of conceivable happiness. It is this intention that makes her work so powerful: the eye is at first unarmed. Believing that it is entering a world familiar to it, little by little the eye discovers realities hidden by this environment, and understands that the two can coexist peacefully together. Somewhat like the towns situated a few hundred meters from the war front and where life continues, unshakably, while fighters are cutting each other's throats not far away. But this gentleness is all the more troublesome.

It does not calm us, it shows two worlds contaminated by the same virus of aversion and killing. We all become, through the magic of this representation, princesses on the pea, powerless and vulnerable faced with the crime that is approaching. And regardless of the height of the mattresses we pile up to protect us, death creeps in, atrocious, ready to strike its prey, insatiable and greedy.

Pascal Bruckner, philosopher and author

As a boy, stretched out on a beach on the French Riviera, Yves Klein looked at the sky and imagined signing it with his finger, as if it was a work of art. “When I was a teenager, in 1946, - he recounted - on the wings of an exciting fantasy-realistic voyage, I saw myself writing my name on the other side of the sky. That same day, while lying on the seashore in Nice, I felt hatred for the birds that were flying here and there across my breathtaking, cloudless blue sky because they were trying to pierce the greatest and most beautiful of my works of art.” The idea of the sky as a work of art comes from far away and pushes us even further. Since Medieval times in Italy, from Giotto’s revolution, up to modern times with Anselm Kiefer’s tragic constellations, many artists have been seduced by the divine mystery of the celestial canopy in all its immeasurable vastness.

It bewitched Sara Badr Schmidt, too. Perhaps because, since even as a child, she admired it from close up, she crossed it during dozens of flights from Lebanon (her father’s homeland), Sweden (her mother’s homeland) and France (the land in between), the result of an errant family, fleeing from war, but often returning to a native place. She has looked at the sky from every angle; from above, from below, like a snow globe that you turn in your hands. The recollection of this experience, rooted in her memory, gave life to an existentialist matrix project, a reflection on the boundary of the ether, on the atmosphere in continuous change, on the liberty offered by the immense space of the sky.

Looking to ancient art history as a classic source of inspiration, she discovered how the painting of the past knew no borders in an empyrean of astral panoramas open onto the infinite. In the heart of the Middle Ages, in the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, the first brushstrokes tinted with lapis lazuli appeared. It was Yves Klein, enchanted by Giotto, who said, “In the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi there are monochrome frescoes that are entirely blue.” Even in Padua, in the Scrovegni Chapel, the father of modern art conceived the regal skies, palpitating, scientifically perfect, and drew, in the background of the Adoration of the Magi, the fiery tail of Halley’s comet that sliced through the European skies in 1301.

A century later, at the dawn of the Renaissance, Donatello actually began to think about the skies in perspective, projecting the foreshortened clouds in his reliefs carved into marble, while Tiepolo, the genius of illusion, went so far as to definitively erase the limits between painting and architecture, his clouds spilling out beyond their frames. Life entered into the work, the sky moved outside the margins like a dense vapour; an inundation of blue.

Sara Badr Schmidt imagined the pouring out of the sky like a cosmic gas leak between the crevices of virtual borders. If the Earth - seen from above - is a checkerboard of circumscribed countries, a wilderness marked by private properties, weakened by conflicts between peoples, the sky cannot be divided into a lattice of egoism.

The sky is an anarchic territory, a spiritual place that absorbs the moods that arise from the ground, the features of nature, the temperaments of diverse cultures, and eventually demolishes them, transforms them into smoke. Sometimes into rain. For Sara Badr Schmidt, the sky is a lagoon suspended in a void, overlooking the world. It is a mirror of what takes place at its feet, in its cerulean shadow, sliced by the flight of black birds (“The birds that were flying here and there.”) like holes in the backdrop of a set. The great French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, in his lecture “The Evolution of Art Toward the Immaterial” held at the Sorbonne in June of 1959, affirmed that, “The poet suffers from the irony of the blue” alluding to the contrast between the great beauty of an uncontaminated space and its corruptibility due to the variable and mercurial course of nature or to the drastic intervention of man. In the video Skyprint, with music by Jean- Daniel Consoloni, flocks of birds in formation appear and disappear. One by one, like ink spots, the birds draw lines in the blue, tracing their route only to slowly disappear into nothingness. Our eyes follow them like they follow a trail on a map; we seem to float with them, in the absence of gravity. The effect is alienating; the body is immaterial (quoting Bachelard). All of a sudden though, an interference brings us back to reality; we plummet into another sky, the one painted by Chagall in 1964 for the Opéra Garnier in Paris. The camera frames the frescoed dome, which is swallowed up by the shadow of night. Among the gilded stuccoes, a carousel of life whirls

to the syncopated rhythm of a chant. The leap from the real sky toward the painted sky is dizzying; the juxtaposition is strident like that experienced by Sara Badr Schmidt in her continuous, exhausting journey between the immutable landscape of Sweden, its primordial silence, and the horizon of the war in Lebanon, where the Beirut sky, locked in a room, loomed threatening, suffocating. Chagall's swirling painting, scarred by other wars, by other tragedies, suddenly becomes calm in the clear sky that reappears before our eyes, like an epiphany. Once again it is blue and light, it is cool. The birds materialize intermittently on the line of a travel itinerary. Where do they come from? Where are they going? It matters little. Sara Badr Schmidt orchestrates them like the notes of a musical score, dreaming of being able to move both them and the sky to lands that need to breathe clean air. "I would like to put the sky in another place," she confesses. The infinite, though, has no elsewhere. It has no borders. Borderless, in fact, intones the title of the project. The allusion to a place, a land without maps, flutters in the undercurrent while glimpses of blue, like windows opened onto the celestial canopy, tell bits of stories about faraway places, which have left traces of their own life engraved in the heavens. A voice, a phrase, an ideogram, words suspended between clouds speak different languages: French, Arabic, English, Sanskrit, Italian. A dictionary of regional terms nails messages to the sky that are tied to landmark episodes or to universal

aspirations. "Témoin" (witness), we read in the sky over Paris, set afire by the sunset in January 2015, just a few hours after the massacre of Charlie Hebdo. A year has passed, yet this news still leaves a knot in your stomach. "Sawa" (together), emerges in the sky of Beirut, a city where living "together" seems utopian. "Borderless" stands as a warning exactly at the precise border between Lebanese and Israeli territories. Jezzine is the city that, hung at the top of the mountains in the south of Lebanon, often covered with snow, indicates the threshold between two nations. But, the sky above Jezzine, even on the gloomiest days of winter, has no fences. "Nowhere everywhere" - writes Sara Badr Schmidt with a finger (like Klein in Nice) in a corner of blue photographed who knows where, while flying between Paris and Stockholm. This time Sara Badr Schmidt is the bird that draws her flight plan, over an open panorama. The sky moves with her. A handkerchief of space in a pocket. Coexistence between cultures and religions, the unresolved problem of territorial belonging, of the political and social identity of places, the remote possibility of balance and cohabitation among peoples, beyond violated (and violent) borders, all gnaw at her. During every voyage, there is always a sky that is as heavy as asphalt. A thick veil of dust and fog fluctuates over Ground Zero in New York, in the haze you can make out the top of the Liberty Tower, the word "empty" is dense with drama and memory. It grabs at your throat like smoke in a fire. In Nepal, the word "Karma"

is written in Devanagari characters at the top of Annapurna on the day of the last earthquake on 25 April 2015, alluding to the mystical sense of acting according to one's own fate. In the audio background, Sara Badr Schmidt's voice recalls the tragedy of that moment when the earth trembled under an immobile sky. She was there. "Young people were walking and singing, taking a break in nature, and then everything stopped. Even the air was still because, in fact, everything was shaking. Life stopped. First, nature took back its right and, after, we could hear the Buddhist drum roll in the background. Or, maybe, it was in a secret room of our hearts." Looking at her fourteen light boxes, fourteen luminous windows thrown open to the blue, you can fly from Dalarö to Beijing. Here, in the middle of nowhere, the Chinese ideogram that means "Wall" is suspended above a wall that divides nothing from nothing; expanses of pristine nature are wounded by a sterile barrier. More romantic and provocative is the view of Italy: "Arrabbiata" (angry) writes Sara Badr Schmidt in squared, red letters in a steely grey sky that obscures Lake Maggiore. The sky in storm, the sky at sunset, the furious wind that comes from the north, every morning, tousling the water and the hearts of sailors.

Chiara Gatti, art critic and curator

There are individuals who spend their lives waiting : door-men, sentries, watchmen, caretakers, priests or pastors, some for closing time, others for everlasting life, each appointed to this fundamental function for different reasons. Through their presence they testify to what does not yet exist but which one day will occur, as important for the salvation of mankind as what already exists. Sara Badr Schmidt's canvases, particularly the most recent ones, belong in this category : in her work we always find a chair, sofa or armchair, empty and available, inviting us to settle down, to sit before making room for others. The chair awaits the passer-by in the same way as the painting awaits the visitor who through it will get back in touch with his inner self. It invites repose, a welcoming absence, a stage on a journey that never finishes. This waiting is not painful or impatient, it is calm. Sara Badr Schmidt has a summarizing approach to painting : she goes back in time, encountering both the abstract and the figurative, experimenting with collage, sprinkling her works with poems by Prévert and ironic or poetic phrases. This revisiting

of styles is not only playful, it is also educational : Sara Badr Schmidt "summarizes" so as to be able to create in her turn and find her own path. She shows a desire to include everything as art, mixing shapes, colours, remarks and materials, even the most trivial and unexpected of these, such as oilcloth : writing and drawing exchange their prerogatives, contradicting and reinforcing each other.

One is sometimes reminded of haiku or koan zen which escape meaning, rejecting explanation, stating themselves and refusing to be resumed. This dialogue, as I have said, is free of aggression and hysteria. Her paintings question without provoking, inviting the viewer with humour and tact, showing a confidence in art rare today.

Sara Badr Schmidt's universe is possibly mysterious, but it is free from anxiety. This is mystery in daylight, the most disturbing form no doubt, full of false obviousness and pseudo-simplicity.

The symbols she uses, eyes, birds, peacocks or bicycles, add a dreamlike dimension, but one that is never threatening. The

artist makes her confession. These confessions do not tell us anything about her: she exposes herself without admitting anything, creating an enigmatic ambiance in which we can all recognize ourselves. The pastel or pale colours show a disposition naturally benevolent towards life. We can possibly find here the influence of her Oriental background and interest in Buddhism. Her paintings are made not just to be looked at but also to be meditated. There is nothing to understand, everything to be experienced.

Even when seated, her characters appear to be flying, to be landing or taking off, born in an endless present by an elevated imagination. They appear to be beings floating in the expectation of some renaissance or metamorphosis. In her canvases Sara Badr Schmidt achieves a quality rare in painting and one which gives these works their charm : serenity in suspension.

Pascal Bruckner, philosopher and author

Our notions of landscape art are much too reasonable. We envision two planes, one above the other, divided horizontally. In our minds, the line of the plain, the sea or the mountain separating the air and the land represents a border. Landscape is thus understood as a matter of territory that the drawing defines by its contours and that the color connotes by its shades.

Sara Badr Schmidt reduces this genre to its widest common denominator: the sky. To create her series, *Borderless*, she simply photographed blue swaths of sky, pierced by undefinable profusions of clouds. The skies, which she captured during her travels, are printed on canvas and mounted in light boxes. The abstract forms of distant spheres are retranscri-

bed into several languages - "Arrabbiata," "Lagom," "Hello" - simple terms that lend a context to these portraits of the skies. For Sara Badr Schmidt, each sky has its own vocabulary. "Mots-souvenirs" - keepsake words - thus caption the images, which are objective in their form. This landscape without borders is, even so, connected to one of the most powerful elements of territory: language. This balance between ideal form and word grants *Borderless* an unlimited power of suggestion. In concrete terms, the works are presented unframed, creating an aura, a halo, an atmosphere.

In Sara Badr Schmidt's work, this aesthetic reflects a sense of the utopian. The artist has spent considerable time in the air, flying among France, Lebanon and Sweden. The sky, ex-

perienced as a space where exchanges take place, is not an immense far-offness but, rather, a force with a presence. It is no longer flat and monochrome; instead, it drinks in the horizon like a camera closing in on its subject, like a traveler gazing out through a porthole. The artist has captioned one of its windows, "nowhere everywhere," a declaration in white letters that recalls Samuel Butler's utopian novel, *Erewhon*. Published in 1872, the book took as its title the anagram of "nowhere" but also "now" and "here." This ambivalence, captured in the written word, confers a universality on Sara Badr Schmidt's work that is called into being in no place - nowhere - and, still, is called into being *hic et nunc*, here and now.

Alexis Jakubowicz, art critic and curator

Born, Stockholm, 1968.
Swedish and Lebanese,
living in Paris.

2018-2023 - Fiber works - in situ projects.

2017 - Borderless-Il était une fois un tout petit pois, solo installation, Agial Gallery, Beirut.

2016 - Borderless-NY, Florence Deniau Stephan Gallery, New York.

2016 - Borderless-Milano, solo installation, Nuova Galleria Morone, Milan.

2015 - Oltre La Cena, Expo 2015, T.ART, Institut Français, Milan, Fondazione Stelline, Milan.

2015 - La ruée vers l'art, Galerie Vanessa Suchar, Paris.

2013 - L'Echappée Belle, Borderless, Grand Palais, Paris.

2012 - Borderless-Beirut, solo

show, Agial Gallery, Beirut.

2010 - Art Paris, Galerie Vanessa Suchar, Paris.

2008 - Parcours Saint-Germain, Once upon a time, Paris.

2008 - Renaissance, solo show, Galerie Langlet, Paris.

2006 - Mickey dans tous ses états, Artcurial, Paris.

2002 - I Want, Strange Fruit space, in collaboration with the Galerie Agial, solo show, Beirut.

2001 - Zupa Inglese exhibit at Artishow in partnership with the British Cultural Center in Beirut. Designed and laid out the exhibit and contributed works.

1997-2002 - Artishow, collectible object gallery, Beirut. Concept and artistic direction of the gallery.

- Artiline, creation of a line of collectible objects.

1996 - Table Rase project and exhibit, assembling the work of a generation of contemporary Lebanese designers and creative artists at the Beirut French Cultural Center. Designed and laid out the exhibit and contributed works.

1999 - Circuit Invisible, solo show, French Cultural Center, Beirut.

1993-2003 - Founder and artistic director of One-Off, graphic design studio, Beirut.

1993 - Artistic director, Femme Magazine, Beirut.

1992 - Revue Noire, Assistant artistic director, Paris.

1986-1992 - School of Fine Arts, Beirut - E.F.E.T., Paris. Valedictorian.



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