

Selma Selman

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Selma Selman

(1991, Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina) is one of the youngest and most exciting flag-bearers of a long tradition of critical and political performance from the ex-Yugoslav area, who works with performance, video, photography, drawing and painting. Her practice both embraces and blasts the stereotypes about Roma people by referring to her personal experience, life situations and stories, but also focuses on her own specific condition as a young woman artist of Roma origins from Bosnia. In her artworks, the ultimate aim is to protect and enable female bodies and enact a cross-scalar approach to collective self-emancipation of oppressed women. Her search for functional, contemporary political resistance has also led her to found *Get the Heck to School* in 2017, a socially engaged organisation aiming to empower Roma girls worldwide who face poverty and social ostracisation.



Platinum, 2021, performance, National Gallery, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
Photo: Almin Zrno

Selma Selman earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2014 from Banja Luka University's Department of Painting. She studied sociology and anthropology at Central European University in Budapest before she graduated in 2018 at Syracuse University, New York with a Master of Fine Arts in Transmedia, Visual and Performing Arts. She currently lives and works between Bosnia, and the Netherlands, where she studies at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten.

Selman participated in 2022 at Documenta 15 (Kassel, Germany), and at the Manifesta 14 (Prishtina, Kosovo). In 2021 the National Gallery in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) launched a survey exhibition of her work. In the last few years Selman had several solo exhibitions, in 2022 at Kunstraum Innsbruck (Austria), in 2021 at Kasseler Kunstverein (Germany) and participated in several group shows, in 2022 at Shedhalle (Zürich, Switzerland), in 2021 at Art Encounters biennale (Timișoara, Romania), in 2020 at Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna, Austria) and notably at the Roma Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019 among others.



Viva la Vida, 2016, digital print mounted on dibond, 60,7 x 50 cm

Paintings on metal

Painting on metal

After being trained in painting, Selman chose metal waste as her artistic medium in order to question the perceived value and relations between metal waste, technology and art. Selma Selman's paintings on scrap metal are a personal visual diary composed of – sometimes symbolic – self-portraits, portraits of her family, depictions, notes and impressions of everyday life scenes in Bosnia, situations she was confronted to, as well as reference to characters or works from art history that have been determining for her. The scrap metal onto which she realizes these works is a reference to her family's struggling existence, her father collecting such metal pieces to sell them in order for his family to subsist. By using this material for her paintings, the artist transforms this seemingly useless surface into a conveyer of her message, her origins into a strong base to build on and to transcends misery, discrimination and stereotypes.

„I have always had a very personal relationship with metal as my family and I have been collecting and recycling it to sustain ourselves since my childhood. My latest paintings on scrap metal portray impressions of everyday life, references to art history and text collages. Humor, wordplay and my incessant probing of the boundaries of art fuse painting and sculpture into small intimate objects.”

– Selma Selman



Painting on metal, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 197 x 42 cm



Many of the works painted on metal resemble the tradition of concrete poetry: words are scattered across the surface in handwriting; others like the car pieces have a more painterly quality, with anthropomorphic imagery. For Selman, the appropriation of car hoods stands also as a critique of gender roles. Selman refers both to the re-appropriation feminist gestures and to the multilayered symbol that the car holds in her personal life and in minority cultures.

Painting on metal, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 136 x 143 x 27 cm



Painting on metal, 2023, acrylic on scrap metal, 200 x 100 cm

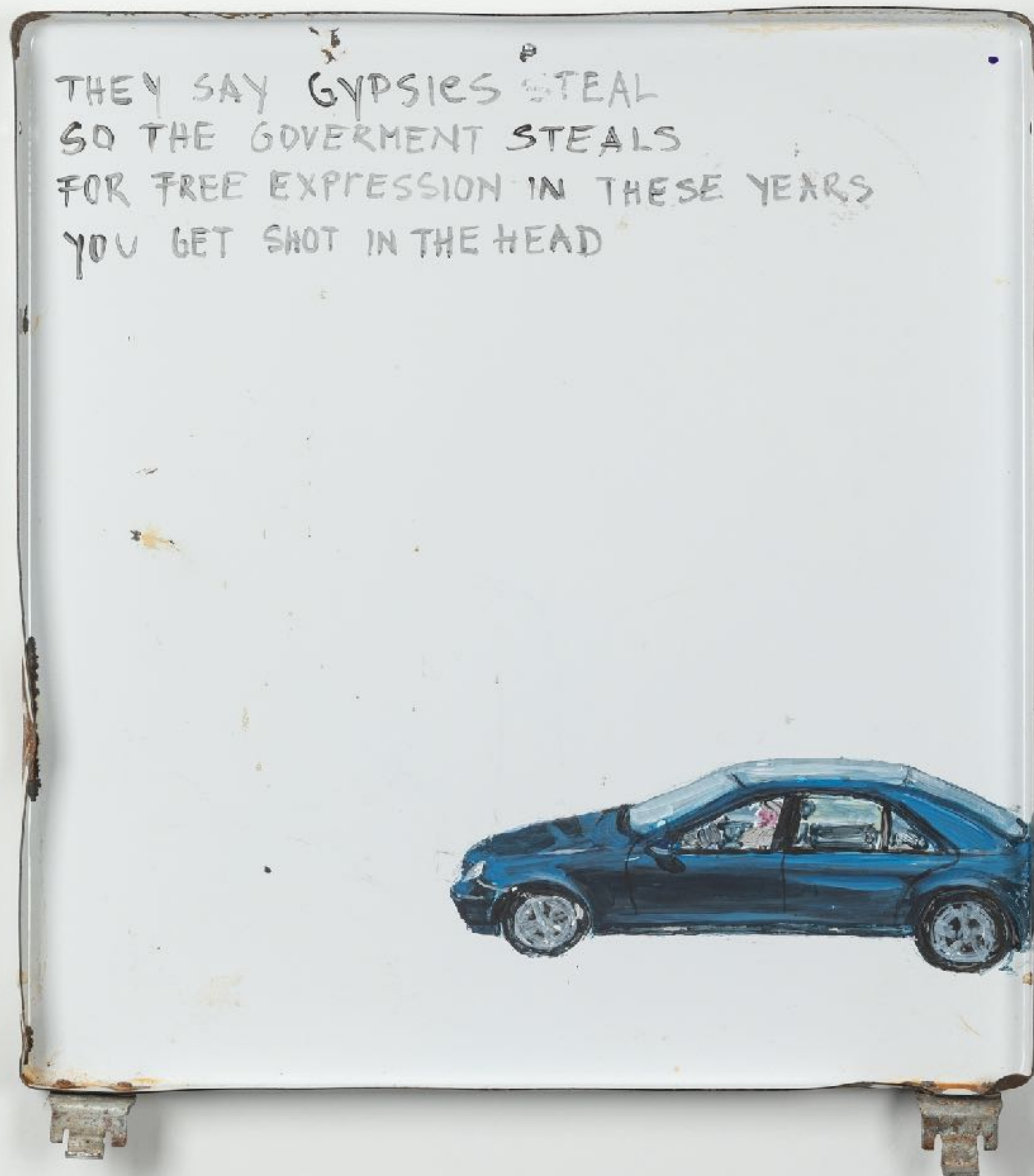


Left: *Painting on metal*, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 95 x 95 cm

Right: *Painting on metal*, 2021, acrylic on scrap metal, 92 x 92 cm



WHEN YOU GET USED
TO LIVING WITH
HAVING NOTHING THEN HAVING
EVERYTHING
THEN YOU ARE
NOT SCARED OF
ANYTHING



Painting on metal, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 58 x 50 x 6 cm each



Left: *Painting on metal*, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 40 x 40 x 12,7 cm

Right: *Painting on metal*, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 10 x 10 x 3 cm



Painting on metal, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 74 x 71 x 13 cm



Painting on metal, 2019-2020, acrylic on scrap metal, 57 x 57 x 2 cm



Painting on metal, 2022, acrylic on scrap metal, 43 x 32 x 32 cm

Mercedes Matrix

Mercedes Matrix



STATE OF THE ARTS

The Mercedes brand is a recurring presence in Selman's work. In the performance *Mercedes Matrix* (2019), accompanied by her Roma male family members, the artist dismantles a Mercedes Benz car. While she is appropriating the Mercedes, a symbol of male power and affluence and status across the Balkans, she is at the same time sharing and embracing the fragile narrative of labor within Roma communities and transforms their daily business into artistic labour, augmenting its symbolic value in the process. Questions of labour and economy are at the centre of this and other performative works by Selma Selman. The recycling of scrap metal in particular plays a pivotal role in her practice insofar as her family has supported itself in this way for generations. In several performances, she destroys metal goods, whether vacuum cleaners or washing machines, to harvest the valuable parts. In her video pieces Selman has been using her own body, voice and identity as a medium for political resistance, feminist empowerment and collective self-emancipation, but also questioning the relationship between art, labour and economy, all this with a sensitive, harsh and ironic approach.



Mercedes Matrix, 2019, video, 8'27", ed. 5+1 AP, installation view, Dom Omladine, Belgrade, Serbia, 2020



“Together with my family I performed *Mercedes Matrix* where I use art as a tool for transforming the value of an act of labor and art. In this work, art becomes a tool to question the labor of my family and my labor as an artist. The same acts of labor which are performed are simultaneously executed for my own survival as well as being executed by and for the survival of my family.”

– Selma Selman

Mercedes Matrix, 2019, video, 8'27", ed. 5+1 AP

Drawings



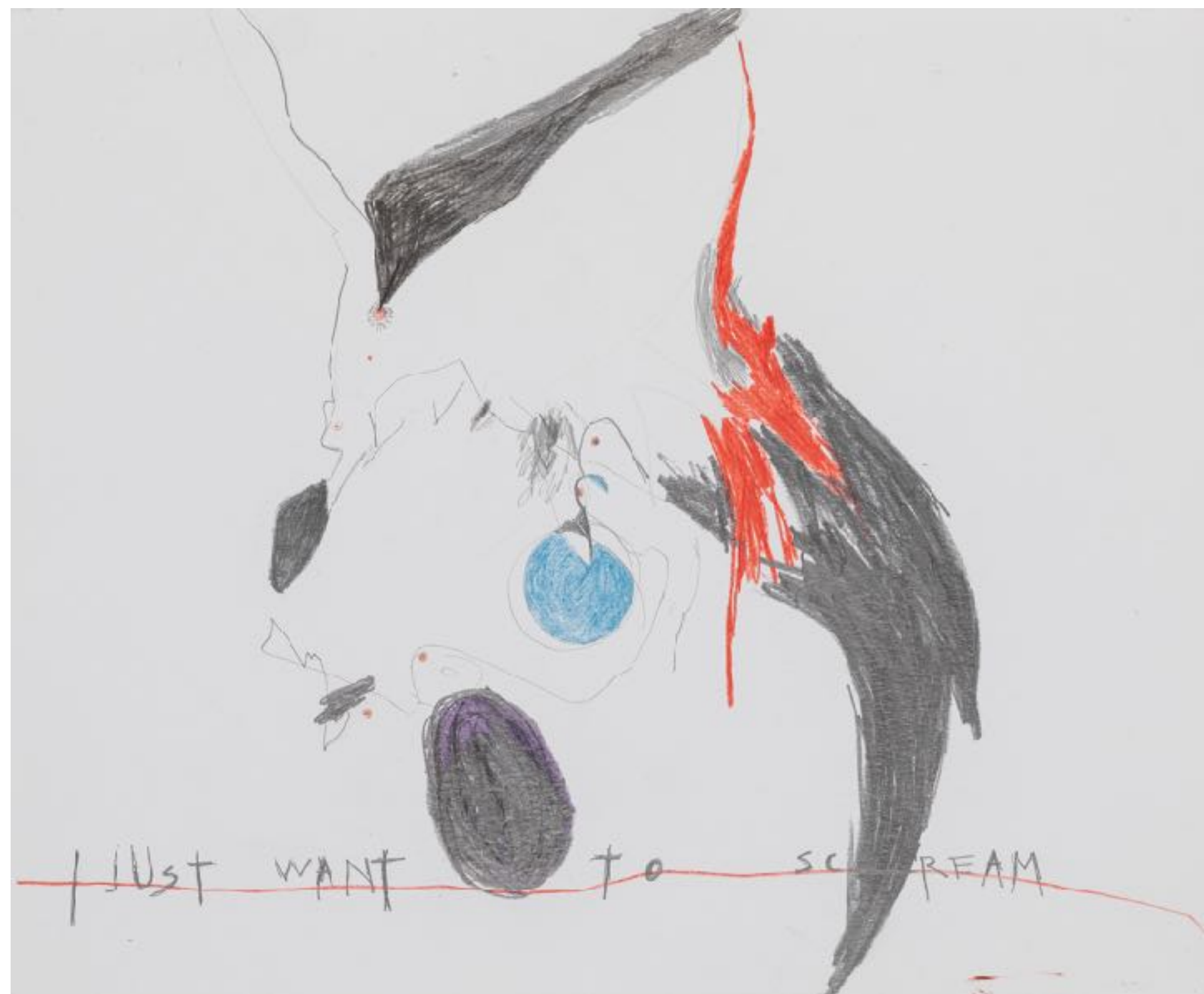
Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2020,
colour crayon and pencil on paper, 43 x 35,5 cm each



Selma Selman’s work *Superpositional Intersectionalism* is a series of drawings, some done with her right hand, some with her left hand. Selman says she was inspired by the phenomenon of quantum superposition in physics, or the ability of a single particle to occupy two places at once. “When I transposed that concept to the way I experience my body and identity, or identities in general, I started playing with the idea of intersectionality. I decided to create these hybrid creatures that showcase multiple identities, revealing the fluidity that’s embedded in them,” she explains. The drawings look surreal, dream-like; multiple body shapes melt into one another. They reveal a female character, which morphs from one entity into another, questioning notions of gender expression and internal personal identities. Escaping fixed definitions, the artist’s protagonists are presented with distorted faces, unimaginable bodies and animal-like features. In this set of drawings, Selman continuously allows herself to explore the divisions of our world and confronts the language of antagonism with her own imaginary narratives of bodily longing.



Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2020,
colour pencil on paper, 35,5 x 43 cm each



Superpositional Intersectionism, 2020, colour pencil on paper, 35,5 x 43 cm each



Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2018, colour pencil on paper, 35 x 43 cm

“Through my drawings I propose possible manifestations of *Superpositional Intersectionalism*. My drawings expose and neutralize perceived conceptual oppositions and contradictions - allowing audiences to see the fluidity and possibility built - in to all relations, spaces and times. My drawings visualize different ways of reorganizing identities, bodies and cultures.”

– Selma Selman



Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2020,
colour pencil on paper, 40 x 50 cm



Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2020,
graphite and colour pencil on paper, 35 x 43 cm

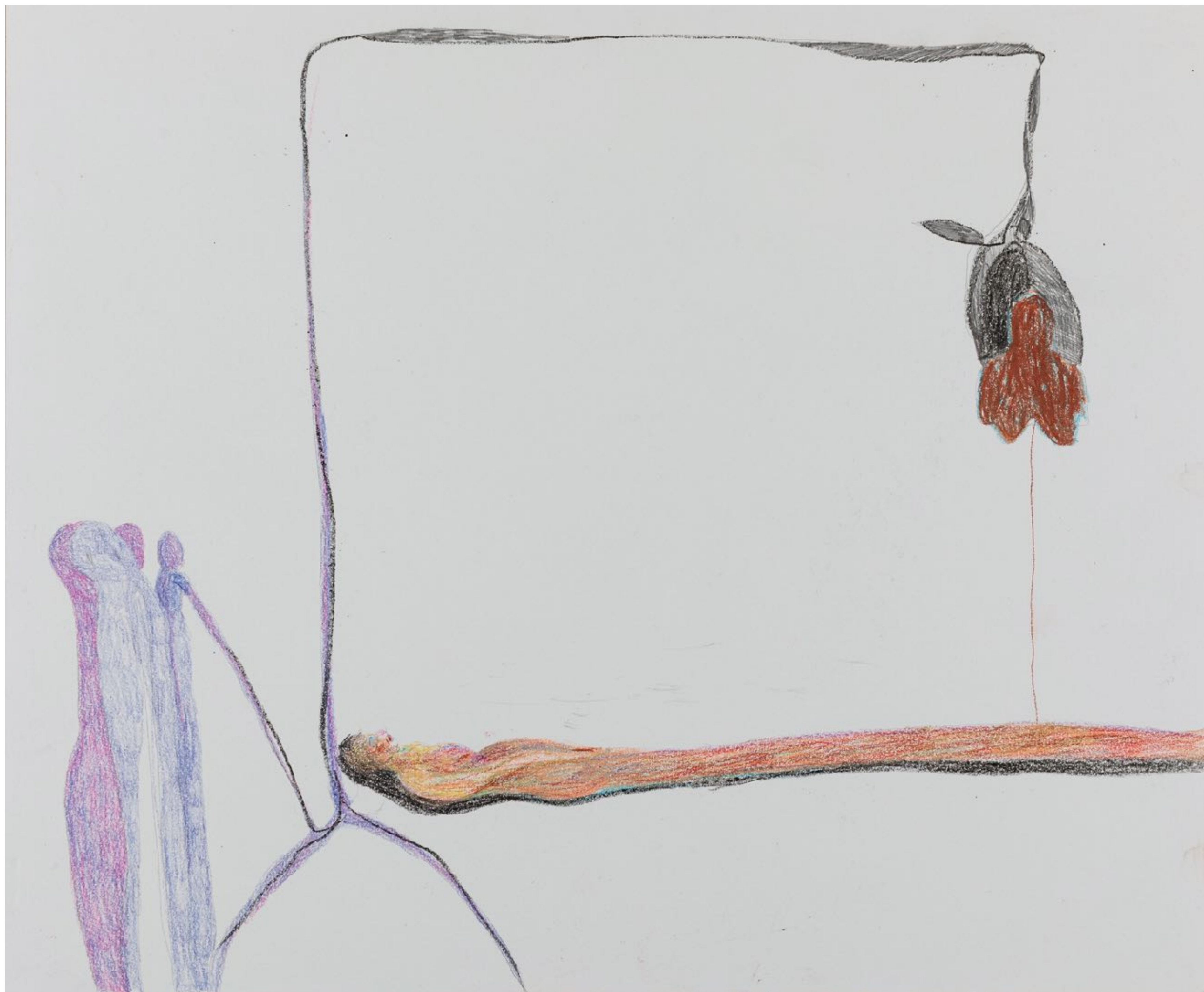


Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2021,
colour pencil on paper, 35 x 43 cm



Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2020,
colour crayon and pencil on paper, 40 x 50 cm each





Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2017, colour crayon and pencil on paper, 35 x 43 cm

Her series of drawings form an intimate body of works as they reflect the struggle, sufferance and discomfort she experiences with her own female body and the numerous gender-based expectations, roles and attributes that society and especially her own family are attaching to it. Selma Selman's transcendental work is indeed full of tensions, rips and tears as she continuously tries to mend the wounds, narrow the tremendous gap between her origins – and all burdens that they mean for her – and her autonomous existence as a contemporary artist.



Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2019,
colour crayon on paper, 43 x 35,5 cm



Superpositional Intersectionalism, 2017,
colour crayon on paper, 35 x 43 cm



Superpositional Intersectionism, 2017,
colour crayon on paper, 30,4 x 23 cm

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