

Sarah Ujmaia

Marmoreum

Gertrude Contemporary
Saturday 10 February – Sunday 7 April 2024

Marmoreum, from *marmoreal*, refers to that made of or compared to marble. In the process of marble metamorphosis, sedimentary shell is subjected to heat, pressure, and time, structurally changing to become a fixed and valued rock. Sarah Ujmaia's installation has been conceived to have the material possibility of a marble floor, achieved through her production of mineral calcite (commonly known as chalk) from shell grit. It is simultaneously informed by the cobble stone paved market squares in northern Iraq—taking a standard yet irregular paver and hand casting its facsimiles to produce this floor.

Ujmaia focuses specifically on the chalk stage of marble formation, connecting it to her broader interests, including the loss of written language, systems of learning, and a close querying of materials. Interrogating materials and connecting them to discounted human histories remains a fertile space for Ujmaia, as marginalised tongues remain increasingly de-prioritised and inaccessible to current and future diasporic populations.

Marble metamorphosis expresses the law of energy conservation: energy is neither created nor destroyed but is, instead, always reconfigured. In *Marmoreum*, the chalk floor invites the valuing of something that remains changing, locating us as active participants in the future of language. As Ocean Vuong says, “we are just one line of stratified rock when we die. This is our chance to activate a better linguistic and therefore bodily future for ourselves.”

Sarah Ujmaia (b.1995) is a first-generation Chaldean artist living and working on unceded Wurundjeri lands. Her practice is largely informed by the wide-reaching impacts of forced displacement and cultural re-writing related to the diasporic experience. Applying translational processes, she regenerates motifs, images and linguistic structures in her material-led approach to object making.

1. Sarah Ujmaia

*And thank you to my baba for
laying the timber floor, 2024*

3,848 pavers, each
approximately 15 x 15 x 4 cm
Calcite (from bisque eggshell
and shell grit), calcium
carbonate (from unfired shell
grit), and calcium sulphate
dihydrate (from gypsum)

Courtesy of the artist

