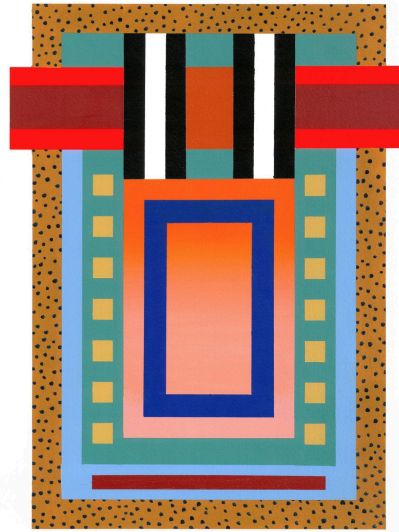


Dahlia Elsayed *Book of Going Forth*

September 4 – October 18, 2025

Opening Reception
Thursday, September 11, 6-8 pm



Morgan Lehman Gallery is pleased to present *Book of Going Forth*, a solo exhibition by Dahlia Elsayed. This new body of work includes 29 paintings and a hand-knotted wool rug, forming a visual narrative that follows a female traveler's passage through a fictional landscape. Informed by illuminated manuscripts and Islamic miniatures, Elsayed enfolds us in a world where mythical imagination intersects with the circularity of earthly time.

The exhibition's title references the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, a guide to navigating the afterlife. In Elsayed's version, the journey reflects both pilgrimage and displacement, combining external geography with internal transformation. Each painting measures 16 by 12 inches and is framed within a narrow rectangular border, evoking the scale and formal containment of manuscript pages. The number of paintings corresponds to the lunar cycle of 29.5 days, and their bold shapes, hazy gradients, and rhythmic patterns suggest individual, daily paths toward both inner and outer wayfinding.

The wool rug at the center of the exhibition mirrors the paintings' proportions at a larger scale. It was hand-knotted using the traditional Tibetan knot technique in 100-line density, with semi-worsted New Zealand machine-spun wool. Sections of the surface are embossed, or hand-carved, creating subtle shifts in the textile's soft terrain.

The rug serves as a metaphorical vehicle for our journey through Elsayed's landscape, referencing both the prayer mat and the flying carpet of folklore. It also connects to a vital part of the artist's personal lineage: a hand-dyed rug woven with floral and geometric motifs by her great-grandmother, carried from an Armenian village in the Ottoman Empire to Cairo, Egypt, and eventually to Queens, New York. That ancestral object lives on in Elsayed's imagination as both story and surface. It is a work of creative labor shaped by female hands, a map of cultural heritage and memory, and—all at once—an object of beauty offering unconditional visual pleasure.

After several years devoted to large-scale installation and public art, *Book of Going Forth* marks a return to painting and the quiet rigor of solitary studio practice. With this new body of work, Elsayed revisits the narrative book form that first shaped her artistic voice, while continuing to draw viewers into the layered, immersive worlds that define her broader practice.

Dahlia Elsayed is a multidisciplinary artist whose work combines narrative and landscape into visual compositions that explore personal geography. She makes paintings, installations, public art, prints and most recently textiles, in the form of hand woven rugs. Her work is exhibited widely, including at the Cairo Biennale, The Arab American National Museum, The New Jersey State Museum, Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York's Penn Station and the Ford Foundation Galleries. Elsayed has been awarded grants and residencies by the Joan Mitchell Foundation, The Edward Albee Foundation, the NJ State Council on the Arts, and Headlands Center for the Arts, among others. She is a MacDowell Fellow and Board Member, and is Professor of Humanities/Art at CUNY-LaGuardia Community College in New York.