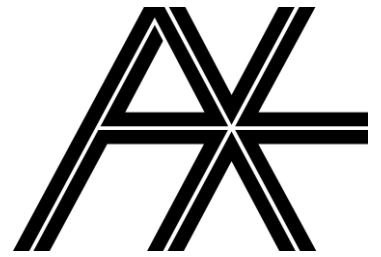


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Shamiran Istifan
Manor Art Prize 2026
12 June – 6 September 2026

Press Release
Aarau, April 2026

Shamiran Istifan (*1987) is the recipient of the Manor Art Prize Aarau 2026, which is awarded every two years to promote young Swiss artists. The award is accompanied by a solo exhibition and publication at the Aargauer Kunsthaus. In her work, the artist links memories of growing up in Aargau with broader questions about society and its structures. In her new works, she explores cultural memory, (in)visibility, and imaginary places. The exhibition unfolds as a spatial narrative in which personal history, formative influences, and imagined futures intersect.

In her installation-based works, Shamiran Istifan explores social systems. She works through media such as sculpture, textiles, and video. Aesthetically, she draws on pop culture, social media, suburban spaces, and the signs and symbols of everyday life. Visual language and stating itself becomes a formal device for shifting perception. New works are being created for the exhibition, with Aargau serving as a resonant space. Shamiran Istifan was born in Baden and is part of the Assyrian community – a minority from the Middle East with a significant presence in the canton of Aargau. Today, she lives and works in Zurich.

By returning to a place steeped in memories, Shamiran Istifan also presents the exhibition as an exploration of growing up more generally and of moving between worlds that coexist yet remain largely separate. The displayed works navigate the tension between the private and the public sphere, the visible and the invisible, the familiar and the concealed. An installation – comprising structures reminiscent of scaffolding and archaeological excavations, Gothic forms, and angel motifs embroidered onto black fabric – forms a kind of threshold between interior and exterior space. Rigid ordering systems and architectural structures are merged with softmaterials such as textiles, soap, and skin-like textures. Surfaces are central to the work – Shamiran Istifan deploys them as screens for projection and as signs of control and desire.

In several new works, domestic space reflects social issues. Istifan relocates letterboxes from a residential building to the museum. This quintessentially Swiss design object represents the

transition from public order to private, often untold stories. A standardised formal language encounters pop-cultural motifs from the artist's youth.

The exhibition culminates in an imaginary urban landscape: a transparent membrane envelops a building complex extending into the room. Drawing on old European towns and Gothic religious architecture, it evokes systems of order and representation.

In her art, Shamiran Istifan superimposes motifs and references from various contexts and eras, deliberately leaving room for different interpretations. In a manner that is both poetic and precise, she addresses collective memories in her work. She draws attention to the structures that shape perception and visibility, and erects contemporary monuments depicting the complexity of social coexistence in Switzerland.

Publication

To accompany the exhibition, Shamiran Istifan's first monograph will be published in the form of an artist's book. Serving as an archive, collection, and montage, it brings together personal fragments as well as images of works, and installation views. Alongside a text by Sarah Mühlebach, curator of the exhibition, the publication features an essay by the Afghan-German artist, curator, and author Moshtari Hilal, whose book *Hässlichkeit [Ugliness]* (2023) was widely acclaimed. The publication is bilingual (German/English).

Publisher: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, Vienna. Design: Dan Solbach, Berlin

A commitment to the young Swiss art scene

The Manor Art Prize, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022, is one of the most important prizes for the promotion of contemporary art in Switzerland. It was created in 1982 by Philippe Nordmann to provide a platform for young Swiss artists. It is awarded by a jury of experts annually and alternately in the cities of Aarau, Basel, Biel, Chur, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, Lugano, Schaffhausen, Sion, St. Gallen and Winterthur. A glance at the list of prize winners shows that the Manor Art Prize has paved the way to an international breakthrough for a whole series of artists. Manor sincerely congratulates the Manor Art Prize winners and wishes them every success in their artistic careers. www.manor.ch/de/u/kunstpreis

The award will be presented to Shamiran Istifan at the exhibition opening on Thursday, 11 June 2026.

Shamiran Istifan

Shamiran Istifan was born in Baden in 1987. She completed a Master's degree in Transdisciplinarity at Zurich University of the Arts in 2020. She currently lives and works as a visual artist in Zurich.

Solo exhibitions: Gnessienne Gallery (Frieze London) (October 2025); *Precious Pipeline*, Rose Easton, London (2022); *Law & Order*, Kulturfolger, Zurich (2021); *G by Destiny*, All Stars, Lausanne (2021); *Micro Entities*, Material, Zurich (2020).

Group exhibitions (selection): *Collection Dialogue Sylvie Fleury & Shamiran Istifan*, Migros Museum of Contemporary Art (2026); *Swiss Art Awards*, Art Basel (2025); *Malerbuch*, Kunsthaus Zürich (2024); *Don't Worry I Won't Forget You*, Forma Arts, London (2024); *Flugblatt Nummer Vier*, Tropez Humboldthain, Berlin (2024); *Zurich Biennale*, Kunsthalle Zürich (2023); *Gold Digger x Vista in the Sky*, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai (2023); *Between Two Rivers for In the Green Escape of My Palace*, Studio Chapple, London (2022); *Art Grants from the City of Zurich*, Helmhaus Zurich (2022); *Ex Amore Vita, After Hours*, Paris (2022); *As We Gaze Upon Her*, Warehouse 421, Abu Dhabi (2021); *Ex Amore Vita*, Independent Iraqi Film Festival, Baghdad (2021); *Werkschau*, Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2021); *Nour el Ain*, Karma Gallery International, Zurich (2021); *Mariam*, Bagno Popolare, Baden (2018).

Awards and Grants: *Werkschau* of the Canton of Zurich (2021); studio grant from the City of Zurich (2022); Swiss Art Award (2025).

Curator

Sarah Mühlebach

Curatorial Assistant

Renée Schwerzmann

Preview for the Press

Thursday, 11 June 2026, 11 am

Events

Vernissage

Thursday, 11 June 2026, 6 pm

Preview for members of the Kunstverein Art Association

Thursday, 11 June 2026, 5 pm

Guided Tour

with the artist Shamiran Istifan and the curator Sarah Mühlebach

So 21.6. 13 Uhr

Guided Tour

with the curator Sarah Mühlebach

Saturday, 26 July 2026, 11 am

Book Launch

Sunday, 6 September 2026, 2 pm

Public Guided Tours

Every Saturday at 3 pm, Sundays at 11 am, and on the last Thursday of the month at 6:30 pm

Additional Information

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