



**JEMILA ISA**

***Dreams Lost Upon Waking***

**4 June – 25 July 2026**

**Opening: 4 June, 2 – 6pm**

**London Gallery Weekend hours:**

**Friday 5 to Sunday 7 June, 11am – 6pm**

**Studio M, Rochelle School, E2 7FA**

Maureen Paley is pleased to present *Dreams Lost Upon Waking*, the first solo exhibition of Jemila Isa at the gallery and held at our Studio M space. Working across painting and sculpture, she engages with themes of spirituality, faith, womanhood and the complexity of locating the self amidst inherited narratives.

“The show is inspired by a dream I had in 2015, which was so vivid and visually rich that I woke up and immediately wrote it down. This exact text appears on the surface of a work, *The Dream*, included in the exhibition. It begins:

*I dreamt that I was stood on a tall yellow hill, and beside me there was a one-legged swan. I blink twice, and the swan disappears, only then do I realise that there is an identical hill directly opposite mine. However, on this hill there is a white chapel, and in front of it stands a handsome man dressed in pink linen. No words are exchanged as we stare at each other from across our hills. But I intuitively know that the handsome man dressed in pink linen is there to be married – and that I am his bride.*

Shortly after the dream, I watched the 1959 film *Black Orpheus* and was struck by how visually similar it felt to what I had seen in my sleep. The vivid colours, yellow sand, pink textiles, tropical palm tree landscapes, and many hues of brown skin all echoed the atmosphere of the dream. This caused me to research Afro-Latin art, music, film, and artists more broadly. Through this research, I encountered the work of several Haitian artists, including Ernst Prophète, Philomé Obin, and Edgar Jean-Baptiste, among many others.

Much of Haitian art carries themes of spirituality, religion, and the occult, which resonated deeply with me, as these are also recurring concerns within my own practice. I also looked at 18th-century chapbook woodcuts in which figures like the devil often appear in an exaggerated, almost cartoonish form.

Just over a year after I first had the dream, in 2017, I got married. Three years later, in 2020, I was divorced. Emerging from that experience, I found myself re-examining my ideas around marriage: who it is really for, who it serves, and whether the routine often embedded within it is truly aspirational. In this context, the red devil who murders a young bride's groom on her wedding day becomes an ambiguous figure. Is he a force of cruelty and destruction, or does he instead emancipate the bride from a life that may eventually have demanded her diminishment?"

– Jemila Isa, 2026.

Jemila Isa (b. London, UK) lives and works in London. Held by invisible hands, a solo exhibition of work by Isa was presented at Stevenson, Cape Town, South Africa (2025). In her spirit, a two person exhibition with Ellen Itzel Mena, opened at Sadie Coles, The Shop at 62 Kingly Street W1, London, UK, in collaboration with Bolanle Contemporary (2025).

Selected group exhibitions include Things In Motion: Johannesburg, Stevenson (2026); When Works Meet Again, Stevenson, Cape Town, South Africa (2025); Unvisited Dreams: Memories in practice, Black Curatorial in collaboration with Lofty Spot, London, UK (2024); Catharsis, Chelsea Centre for Creative Industries, London, UK (2024); Works on Paper 6, Blue Shop Gallery, London, UK (2024).

She has undertaken residencies at both Black Blossoms Studio Residency, London (2025), and Developing Your Creative Practice, Arts Council England, London (2023).

image: Jemila Isa, *Rock and a Hard Place*, 2026, oil on wood panel, 59.4 x 84.01 cm – 23 3/8 x 33 1/8 in