

agb

# RODA MEDHAT



THINGS I CAN FOLD,  
DEFLATE, AND BREAK



*Image credit: From Cloth to Code (installation detail), 2025. Textile Museum of Canada. Photo credit: Darren Rigo*

# RODA MEDHAT

01.17.26 – 04.26.26

## LIGHT, ANIMATION, AND THE REPETITION OF STORY

INTRODUCTION BY SUZANNE CARTE,  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & CURATOR, ART GALLERY OF BURLINGTON (AGB)

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**“When you find different materials,  
you want to tell different stories.”**

With this deceptively simple assertion, Markham-based, Kurdish-born artist Roda Medhat situates material not merely as a medium but a narrative engine. Roda’s work operates in the fertile space where craft, memory, and digital fabrication intersect, and where materials such as soft wool, buoyant inflatable vinyl, and glowing neon each carry their own cultural meanings. The Art Gallery of Burlington’s (AGB) winter 2026 season marks the artist’s first solo exhibition in a public institution, offering a sensory playground where textiles and sculptures act as storytellers.

As someone who lived between cultures, migrating at a young age, Roda's practice emerged from the intersections of generation and place. Roda is interested in how diasporic memory operates, how war and media spectacle shape collective memory, and how to reclaim erased or overlooked narratives by folding, deflating, and breaking them. Roda draws from a constellation of sources from archival texts to children's stories and vernacular architecture to the geometric language of West Asian and Kurdish textiles. In this way, his works become speculative archives, weaving forgotten or oversimplified histories into forms that are pliant, luminous, and resolutely alive.

*Things I Can Fold, Deflate, and Break* splits the gallery in thirds, diving into distant modes of light, sound and movement, resulting in a unified environment in which material and narrative coexist and merge through one another. Flickering lights, low hums from inflatable fans, and tactile shifts from wool to plastic produce a multisensory choreography that guides the viewer through Roda's world.

In the centre of the exhibition sits four inflatable 1981 Chevy Malibus, or colloquially, 'Iraqi Taxis'. Though originally mass commissioned by the 1980 Iraqi government, these Canadian-built vehicles were ultimately rejected and sold off cheaply back to Canadians, developing an unexpected cult following. Roda reimagines these vehicles intertwined with his own personal memory and the geopolitical history of the Saddam Hussein era. Kurdish textile patterns are printed over the buoyant skin of the cars linking regions, cultures, and the everyday aesthetics that shaped that period of the artist's life.

The cars slump, stack, and lean against each other like a scrapyard pile. Equal parts humorous and melancholic, their deflated posture evoking a duality of abandonment and endurance. Hugging the forms is *Ser-Atah* (2024), a 40-by-8-foot lamb's wool rug that stretches behind the cars, returning the exhibition to its material point of origin. This

vast textile anchors the space and reaffirms Roda's consistent return to craft as a medium and cultural marker.

The pulsing glow spilling through the cutouts surrounding *Iraqi Taxi* beckons viewers closer, inviting them to peer in and discover what unfolds beyond the wall. Suspended from the ceiling, the new installation piece, *A Rug Falls in Four Frames*, pushes Roda's LED works into kinetic animation as overlapping neon carpets create the illusion of a rug continuously falling. The piece underscores the fundamental principle that repetition is necessary in storytelling – rearticulated over and over to remain alive.

Nearby, the neon glow of *Hanging Kilim 2* slips through the gallery window as the rug bends and curves. On the opposite wall *Until the Dirt Is Gone* plays a moving image of a rug being struck. Draped within the cutouts of the wall, the screens mimic textile flexibility in contrast to the sculptural stiffness of the light. In both cases, Roda explores the material, perceptual, and conceptual boundaries of what a rug can be.

Peeking through the video cutout to the gallery's other hallway, you can see Roda's 3D-printed PETG sculpture of a sheep perched atop an oversized toy-like Chevrolet, drawing directly from François Balsan's *The Sheep and the Chevrolet: A Journey Through Kurdistan* (1947). The problematic ethnographic travelogue, which contrasted pastoral Kurdish life with Western modernity, is challenged by Roda's childhood aesthetics and a playful accessibility that turns Balsan's stereotype-laden narrative on its head. The piece is disarmingly playful, yet the simplified approach carries an intentional tension – Balsan's *The Sheep and the Chevrolet* reduces Kurdish culture to a one-dimensional caricature<sup>[1]</sup>. But here Roda uses the very strategy of oversimplification to expose and exceed Balsan's superficiality. The sheep proudly mounts the Chevrolet and sheds its quaint pastoral symbolism, deflating the universal power of American engineering and



*Roda Medhat, Ser-Atah, 2024, Wool carpet, 41x8ft. Photo credit: CIBC (panoramic view).*

reversing Balsan's presumed authority. Dark and somewhat uncanny, Medhat's sculpture is still able to remain inviting, allowing viewers to consider complex histories beneath the immediate image. Like in all his work, Roda maintains the ability to balance on a fine line between simplicity and incisiveness.

Roda often gravitates towards working with materials associated with softness and the home. This approach, however, seems not to be reinforcing their inherent domesticity but rather as an act of destabilizing assumptions around power and political form by removing the utility of the materials. His inflatables sag instead of standing erect, his rugs glow, and screens take on the pliancy of cloth. This fluidity aligns with the AGB's commitment to

artists who situate craft at the heart of contemporary artistic inquiry. Roda's work reminds us that textiles are not merely decorative surfaces but technologies, repositories of knowledge and vehicles for reimagining.

The exhibition title, simple and playful, serves as a reflection of how the space itself changed with Roda's work – folding, deflating / inflating, and bending materials – these gestures extend beyond physical manipulation as they mirror the ways he reshapes narrative itself. Through repositioning and replanting source material, teasing apart small elements and details, Roda allows stories to fold into one another (both materially and metaphorically), braiding their meanings back again into the larger plot.

[1] as articulated in Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978)



*Roda Medhat is a Markham-based artist whose work has been supported by the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. His recent solo exhibition Serdem was presented at CIBC Square, Toronto, in 2024–2025. In 2025, his work appeared widely across the Greater Toronto Area in exhibitions such as Fuzzy Thinking, CAFKA, The Shape I'm In, Impart (Centre[3]), REVIVE, Surfacing (Abbozzo Gallery), and From Electrical Fire Spirits May Be Kindled. His practice also extended into public-facing cultural programming through Hidden in Plain Sight, a rooftop inflatable sculpture commission for Ontario Culture Days. In addition to gallery-based projects, Roda's work featured in interdisciplinary settings including the Tall Pines Music & Arts Festival. Roda is the 2023 recipient of the 401 Richmond Career Launcher Prize and was awarded the CIBC C2 Art Prize in 2024. His temporary and permanent public artworks have been exhibited and installed in cities across Canada. He holds a BFA from OCAD University, studied film production at FAMU in Prague, and is currently completing his MFA at the University of Guelph.*





Image Credit: Roda Medhat, *Blue Totem on Red*, 2024, LED tube light. Photo credit: Tori Lambermont.

# Roda Medhat – Things I Can Fold, Deflate, and Break

BY JASON LUJAN

## Trust Roda to follow a line of research to a destination.

In his solo exhibition *Things I Can Fold, Deflate, and Break*, Roda Medhat presents a subtle but rigorous meditation on what it means to make, to archive, and to trace the movement of significant personal images and objects. His process reveals how conditions fragment, each becoming as significant as the final object. For this writer, the emphasis in Roda’s practice lies less in locating the meaning of each piece and more in the unfolding of process itself.

In his youth, Roda showed an aptitude for taking things apart, for understanding how objects were built and how their parts related. This curiosity for deconstruction underlies much of his later multi-

disciplinary approach. His practice is goal-oriented – an idea or observation leads to experiments; experiments lead to translations, and those lead to exhibitions or interventions. What remains most crucial throughout this are the circumstances surrounding the original idea. The detours and material re-visioning, which are privileged over the reductive question “What does it do?” Rather, we ask: What happened? What was translated? What slipped?

His approach engages in an expanded field in which particular textiles become scaffolds for spatial or conceptual structures, translating softness into framework. Returning often to works that engage

the body through movement and encounter, Roda’s pieces experiences together through proximity rather than detached observation or online images. In doing so, he collapses the space between viewer and artwork so that both inhabit the same field of inquiry and experience in time. The viewer is able to become part of the same process of discovery that the artist experienced while making the work. Both the artist and the viewer are engaged in the same search for understanding, happening at the same moment. Many contemporary artists aim to “collapse the distance” between viewer and artwork; it’s a core idea in installation art, relational aesthetics, and process-based practices. However, Roda’s version of this idea is specific to his materials, methods, and cultural framework. In other words, his expression of the “space of inquiry” is deeply tied to his own lineage, tools, and way of translating cultural and material histories into form. He turns cultural translation into shared experiences.

*In Things I Can Fold, Deflate, and Break*, Roda’s attention to material sensitivity and the choreography of making is foregrounded as he carefully pays attention to how materials feel, behave, and interact. The process of making as a dialogue: an exchange between materials and his observations, as well as the inherited gestures of Kurdish craft, where weaving, building, and storytelling operate as parallel languages for shaping and understanding the world.

Roda’s rugs that seem to breathe, patterns that appear to fold, and images and forms settle into the contours of the gallery. Through collage, scanning, and translation, layered forms seem to drift over one another so that the viewer sees not static objects but a process in motion. His works usually organize themselves around these acts of transformation: scan becomes mesh becomes light, etc.

His fascination with circumstances, what he calls “the folds behind the fold,” suggests how the architecture of the gallery itself becomes a participant. In a room of multiple works, the trace of one thought threads into the next. A repetition of motifs reappear at another scale or in another medium; a photographic fragment echoes within a neon lace; a 3D scan is intentionally unfinished, half-formed, awaiting continuation. What binds these gestures is not perfection but attentiveness.

Time itself seems folded into the works of *Things I Can Fold, Deflate, and Break*. Roda’s background in moving images and film surfaces through sequences that unfold gradually as his objects become timekeepers. They fold, inflate, sag, and break down, bearing witness to their own transformations.

Translation is never neutral: when a Kurdish rug pattern becomes neon, silicone, or steel, it carries both loss and renewal. The noise of that translation, the jitter, the irregular drape, is integral to its meaning. These irregularities are not failures to be corrected but events to be recognized, siblings to the final form. The work, in this sense, is alive to its own becoming.

Roda invites viewers to experience the work with patience. Letting their eyes linger and adjust as new relationships between form and surface come into focus. In this sense, looking becomes a kind of practice too, a sustained dialogue between viewer and material in which understanding is something felt as much as it is seen. Viewers are invited to take time to notice subtle boundaries, textures, and shifts within each piece. These are not just visual details; they are places where artistic intention surfaces and then slips away. The process feels akin to tuning an instrument, each adjustment bringing the work closer to resonance, but without a fixed state. In this way, Roda’s process isn’t aimed at reaching a tidy conclusion.

Instead, he's interested in maintaining an open dialogue where new insights and possibilities can continue to emerge.

In the end, Roda's practice sidesteps the confines of essentialist reading, engaging instead in a broad view of translation as connection. His practice moves fluidly through time, place, and material, tracing how forms shift as they cross cultural and historical thresholds. What emerges is not a fixed position, but an ongoing conversation.



Photo credit: Michael Klein

*Jason Lujan is an artist working in an expanded practice incorporating sculpture, installation, digital imaging, and painting, as well as curatorial projects. As an artist, he creates things that realize his lived environment, generating new meanings and connecting to larger global experiences.*

*He has exhibited at the Heard Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Denver Art Museum, New York City Center for Book Arts, Amon-Carter Museum, A-Space, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Western Front, and Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares in Mexico City, among others. His work and projects have been written about and reviewed in publications including Hyperallergic, Art in America, Applied Arts Magazine, The Paris Review, and NPR.*

*Jason Lujan is originally from Marfa, Texas, and lives in Toronto, ON. Lujan is an Assistant Professor at OCAD U, teaching Sculpture and Installation. He is represented by MKG127 in Toronto.*

Right Page Image credit: Roda Medhat, Kilim, 2023, Inflatable vinyl canvas, 24x8x24ft., Photo credit: Roda Medhat.





# PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

At the AGB, learning is in the making. Through hands-on workshops and courses, artists can build a greater personal connection to their craft and experience professional growth by learning new techniques, discovering other artists' practices, and understanding contemporary art in greater depth.

Go to [www.agb.life/learn](http://www.agb.life/learn) to read more about the programs and to register. Friends of the AGB enjoy discounted registration fees for course and workshops – visit [www.agb.life/support](http://www.agb.life/support) to learn more.



## COURSES

ALL COURSE FEES INCLUDE MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT; REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

### MAKING PATTERNS WITH NATURAL DYES AND RESISTS

With Akash Inbakumar

Thursdays, March 12 – 26, 2026

6:00 – 9:00 PM

\$150

This three-week course will explore the basic techniques of resist dyeing with ties, stitching and pleating, with the goal of providing an understanding of how to create natural dye vats and resist techniques. Supplied with sewing needles, thread, yarn, rubber bands and fabric, we will explore how to create surface designs and patterns on fabric during the dyeing process. Participants will create a series of medium sized samples that can be used for sewing projects, kitchen cloth, and other applications while exploring multiple colours and techniques.

Akash Inbakumar is a Tamil–Singalese Canadian artist based in Tkaronto. Their interdisciplinary practice incorporates installation, costume, and performance to explore world-building, mythology, and kinship. Working in partnership with a range of mediums, tools, and processes—understood as material kin—they imagine a world where crafted objects carry family lineage and act as storytellers, queering conventional ideas of how knowledge moves through multi-generational and multi-species networks. A recent graduate of OCAD University, Inbakumar has exhibited at ArtAddress (Oakville), The Robert McLaughlin Gallery (Oshawa), Artscape Gibraltar Point (Toronto), Patel Brown Gallery (Toronto), Xspace Cultural Centre (Toronto), and Riverdale Hub (Toronto).



# WORKSHOPS

ALL WORKSHOP FEES INCLUDE MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT; REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.



Image credit: Shaheer Zazai, *SForEtoE (detail)*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

## DIGITAL RUG MAKING

With Shaheer Zazai

Thursday, February 19, 2026

1:00 – 3:00 PM (online)

\$20 – Registration required

Digital Rug Making is an online workshop and artist talk with Shaheer Zazai exploring the creative intersection between digital images and traditional textiles. The session introduces participants to the visual vocabulary of colours, numbers, and patterns that operates within both digital and textile-based practices, offering insight into how these systems shape Shaheer's own work.

The workshop begins with an overview of the artist's practice, process, and thoughts on the relationship between textiles, computers, and digital image-making. Participants are then guided in designing their own patterns using accessible software such as Microsoft Word and Excel and Google Docs and Sheets, discovering

the unexpected creative potential within everyday digital tools. The session includes a collaborative group activity where participants create shared digital imagery to collectively experiment and play. This workshop welcomes participants of all skill levels to explore and expand their understanding of how digital and textile languages intertwine. For those without access to digital programs, blank or graph paper and coloured markers or highlighters serve as effective alternatives for hands-on exploration.

Shaheer Zazai is an Afghan-Canadian artist with a current studio practice both in painting and digital media. Zazai received a BFA from OCAD University in 2011 and was artist in residence at OCAD University as part of the Digital Painting Atelier in 2015. Zazai's practice focuses on exploring and attempting to investigate the development of cultural identity in the present geopolitical climate and diaspora. Zazai is a recipient of the TFVA (Toronto Friends of the Visual Arts) Visual Artist Award (2024) as well as recipient of Ontario Arts Council grants, and he was a finalist for EQ Bank's Emerging Digital Artist Award in 2018. Since graduating, Zazai has had several solo and group exhibitions such as those at the Capacity 3 Gallery, CAFKA Biennial 2019, Art Gallery of Mississauga, Glenhyrst Art Gallery of Brant, Double Happiness Projects and Patel Brown Gallery. His digital works have been covered by CBC Arts in 2018, Ajam Media Collective in 2019, and Globe and Mail in 2020. Some of his recent notable exhibitions include a solo exhibition at the Agha Khan Museum in Toronto, Patel Brown Gallery, and Owens Art Gallery. Shaheer Zazai is represented by Patel Brown Gallery.



Photo credit: Michael Valiquette

## NAVIGATING PROCESS AND PRACTICE

With Jude Abu Zaineh

Thursday, March 5, 2026

6:30 – 8:00 PM

Free – Registration required

AGB presents a professional development workshop with Jude Abu Zaineh, a Palestinian-Canadian interdisciplinary artist-curator working across art, food, science, and technology studies. Known for her counter-archive methods and decolonial, research-driven practice, Abu Zaineh will offer insight into sustaining a dynamic artistic career across disciplines and institutional settings.

Designed for artists at all career levels, this workshop explores the nuanced realities of contemporary practice through an artist talk, discussion, and Q&A. Drawing from her experience in academia, international residencies, and collaborations with fabrication and scientific partners, Abu Zaineh will share strategies for strengthening your professional trajectory.

Participants will gain perspective on:

- Navigating Academia: Balancing research, teaching, and studio work; understanding opportunities and expectations; using institutional resources to support your practice.
- Working with Fabricators and Specialists: Communicating creative goals, adapting to technical constraints, and integrating new materials or technologies.
- Process-Based Studio Approaches: Developing iterative, interdisciplinary research, and material exploration.
- Career Development: Approaching residencies, funding, exhibitions, and interdisciplinary opportunities with clarity and intention.

With international exhibition experience and work in major collections, Abu Zaineh provides a valuable framework for artists seeking to expand their practice, build meaningful collaborations, and consider new directions for their creative careers.

This program is in partnership with the University of Waterloo Art Gallery (UWAG) in conjunction with Jude Abu Zaineh's exhibition *i look to the skies* from January 8-March 7, 2026.



Image credit: Jude Abu Zaineh, *i look to the skies*, 2025. MSVU Art Gallery. Photo credit: Michael Valiquette



# EVENTS

## CONTEMPORARY ART BUS TOUR

Sunday, February 1, 2026  
12:00 – 5:00 PM  
\$20, includes transportation,  
admission, and light refreshments.

Hop aboard for a special winter art excursion beginning at the Textile Museum of Canada (55 Centre Ave) in Toronto and traveling to the Art Gallery of Mississauga with a final stop at the Art Gallery of Burlington before returning to Toronto. With curatorial tours of *Made By Many: 50 Years of the Textile Museum of Canada*, *Taking Shape: Recent Acquisitions*, and *From Cloth to Code: New Media Responses* at TMU, Shaheer Zazai at AGM, and Roda Medhat at AGB, this trip offers a unique opportunity to experience contemporary practices that bridge textiles, digital design, and innovative material approaches. Reserve your seat and enjoy an inspiring afternoon across three leading art institutions. both nationally and internationally.

## FAMILY OPEN STUDIOS

Sundays from 1 – 4:00 pm (drop-in)  
January 11 – March 8, March 29,  
April 12 – 26, 2026  
Free – No registration required

Celebrate heritage, imagination and the power of storytelling through art this winter! This season of free family-friendly programming is inspired by artist Roda Medhat’s immersive sculptural environment. With many references to the intricate patterns of traditional Kurdish textile designs, Roda uses light, sound, and movement to animate memories of home and create an imaginative archive of childhood stories, domestic interiors and cultural inheritance. By using LED lights and vinyl inflatables to translate history into the present, Roda encourages us to embrace softness, spectacle and fun through projects inspired by family, home, and migration.

Our knowledgeable artist-instructors will be present to offer guidance and support to develop new ideas, or you are welcome to explore independently and create in your own unique way. For full program details, please visit our website.



Roda Medhat, *Hanging Kilim* (right), *Blue Totem on Red* (left), 2025, Acrylic, LED neon, 8x1.5ft. Photo credit: Toni Hafkenscheid.

## FAMILY DAY

Monday February 16, 2026  
1:00 - 4:00 PM (drop-in)  
Free – No registration required

Celebrate Family Day with a vibrant, hands-on art experience! Inspired by the bold colours and dynamic energy of Roda Medhat’s LED light sculptures, this open studio invites families to explore their creativity together through Neon Drawing. Using pastels and paint markers on black paper, participants will create glowing artworks that come alive like a neon sign. This playful activity encourages experimentation with colour, movement, and abstract forms while bringing out the best of all ages and skill levels.

## GALLERY GUIDE TOURS

First Sundays at 1:00 PM  
Free – No registration required

Bring your curiosity and join the conversation on a free guided tour of Russna Kaur’s exhibition to learn more about the ideas and connections behind the artworks and get answers to any questions you may have.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**Curator:** Suzanne Carte

**Exhibition Coordination:** Hannah deJonge

**Learning Team:** Helen Liene Dreifelds, Heather Kuzyk,  
and Stephanie Vegh

**Copy Editor:** Emma Steen

**Designer:** Borealis Creative

**Preparatory Team:** Joseph Thomson, Rollin King, Breanna Shanahan,  
Dominic Pinney, Conner Drake, and Chris Blanchenot.

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*Things I Can Fold, Deflate, and Break* has been sponsored by the Partners In Art. The Art Gallery of Burlington is supported by the City of Burlington, Ontario Arts Council, and Ontario Trillium Foundation. The AGB's learning programming has been sponsored by The Burlington Foundation, The Joyce Family Foundation, and the incite Foundation for the Arts.

The AGB is grateful to the volunteer Gallery Guides for their exemplary dedication to bringing the exhibition to life and to our members for their ongoing support of all the AGB's programming.

# agb

The Art Gallery of Burlington is located on the ancestral territory of many Indigenous Nations including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Métis peoples. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibway, and other allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We acknowledge that the land upon which we gather, to create and learn, is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit.

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