

Prince Claus Fund

FELLOWS Award

2024

Moving Narratives

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Moving Narratives

Contents

16

Introduction

23

Voices and Vision
Conversation | Documentary
Ethics



151

Abdeslam Ziou Ziou
Casablanca | Scholartist
/ فنحوث

129

Collectives in Crisis?
Conversation | Collective Praxis



37

Dian Suci
Yogyakarta | Visual Artist



59

Elyla
Chontales | Artist /
Researcher



141

Mark Teh
Kuala Lumpur |
Performance Maker
/ Curator



165

Alfred Tarazi
Beirut | Artist



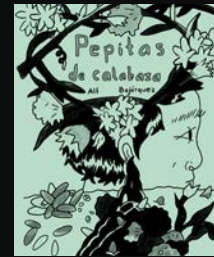
107

Keren Lasme
Abidjan | Artist /
Researcher



97

Abdul Halik Azeez
Colombo | Artist



175

Alf Bojórquez
México City | Writer



119

Mariano Pozzi
Buenos Aires | Film
Director / Curator



71

Ngoc Nau
Thai Nguyen |
Visual Artist



47

Devadeep Gupta
Guwahati | Artist / Researcher

83

Shared Pages
Conversation | Collective
Reading

196

Index of Gifts

198

Index of *Moving* (pieces
of) *Narratives*

200

Credits

Moving Narratives

The Fellows Award: *Moving Narratives* brings together 12 socially and politically engaged mid-career artists and cultural practitioners, working across diverse mediums and approaches, to critically examine historical legacies, challenge euro-centric discourses, amplify the voices of marginalised communities, and explore the connections between contemporary emancipatory movements and their historical foundations.

Supported by four mentors, participants collaborate, experiment, and develop artistic strategies to critique dominant narratives and address systemic inequalities. The programme fosters exchange and collaboration through three thematic chapters, each led by a mentor and focused on a specific issue. Activities include workshops, reading groups, guest talks, and peer-to-peer review sessions.

While most activities are conducted online, the cohort meets twice in person for six-day intensive Lab Weeks, providing opportunities for deeper engagement and mentorship. The programme concluded with this joint collective publication led by Besa Luci, showcasing the participants' shared reflections and work.

Below is an overview of *Moving Narratives* in 2024.

Chapter 1 – Insurgent Practices in Times of Total Wars | Mentor: Samia Henni

27 February to 11 April 2024

This chapter explored the emergence of insurgent practices as a response to the colonization and militarization of lands, technologies, and bodies, focusing on resisting and outmanoeuvring asymmetric and total wars. Through discussions, presentations, and collective inquiry, participants examined what defined an insurgent practice, how it evolved, and how to protect it from suppression while fostering connections with other insurgent movements.

Samia Henni is an architect, historian, and author from Algeria specializing in the relationship between architecture, colonialism, and environmental degradation. Her acclaimed books include *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria*, *Colonial Toxicity: The French Army in the Sahara*, *Deserts are not Empty*, and *War Zones*. She has curated influential exhibitions and taught at Princeton, Cornell, and ETH Zurich, where she also did her PhD. Samia currently teaches at McGill University, Montreal.

Lab Week 1, Amsterdam, in-person meeting

29 April to 5 May 2024

The week's programme was centred around three key pillars: aesthetic experimentation, critical discursive engagement, and modes of dissemination. These themes were explored through a variety of activities, beginning with mentor-led workshops by Rohit Goel, Besa Luci, Haig Aivazian, and Samia Henni. Participants also engaged in cultural visits, including de Appel's innovative approach to institutional archiving for precarious times and the Institute of Social History's politically engaged documentation of global struggles.

In addition, Amsterdam-based cultural practitioners led a series of interventions, such as architect René Boer's walking tours, a presentation by Femke Dekker, and a curatorial tour at W139. Other activities included artist interventions, the cohort's renowned *Anticolonial Karaoke*, and a public presentation at Perdu Amsterdam titled *On Crisis and Representation*.

Chapter 2 – The Art of Subtraction | Mentor: Rohit Goel

28 May to 11 July 2024

Chapter 2 of *Moving Narratives* proposed a series of analytic and creative interventions into art and its relation to subjectivity, representation, universality, and, ultimately, social and political transformation in a world of accelerating crises. The chapter included readings, discussions, and creative interventions, beginning with Abbas Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's House?* and Giorgio Agamben's essay "The Friend," which focused on themes of subtraction and true friendship.

Rohit Goel is the Director of the Bombay Institute for Critical Analysis and Research (BICAR). Rohit is the editor of *Future Perfect: Catastrophe and Redemption in the Contemporary* (Kaph 2023) and the co-editor of *Lacan contra Foucault: Subjectivity, Sex, Politics* (Bloomsbury 2019). He has taught courses in critical theory, historiography, art criticism, and politics at the University of Chicago, Sciences Po Paris, the American University of Beirut, and Jnana-pravaha Mumbai.

Chapter 3 – Given or Taken? (or I will not Plead to Humanity, I will not Convince of my Humanity, I will not ask for my Human Rights...) | Mentor: Haig Aivazian

30 July to 12 September 2024

Chapter 3 critically examined the limits of conventional art practices that expose, unearth, or render visible violence, questioning their efficacy in a world where hypervisibility often fuels further harm. It explored how these practices, once potentially emancipatory, have become entrenched in academic and artistic discourse as canonical imperatives, stunting imaginative potential. The chapter challenged participants to think beyond diagnosis, description, and critique, aiming to create impactful, rhetorically powerful work that stirs affect, mobilizes energy, and forms alliances. Drawing from Eve Sedgwick's ideas on paranoid reading and reparative practices, the chapter encouraged imagining work that assembles, sustains, and offers plenitude, rather than simply documenting violence, and invited the cohort to develop and present reparative practices as both interventions and proposals for future work.

Haig Aivazian is an artist working across a range of media and modes of address. His practice explores apparatuses of control and sovereignty in sports, museums, the office, music, and anywhere else they may be at work. He is a PhD candidate at Leiden University, The Netherlands, and a Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture alumnus, he has received an MFA from Northwestern University, Evanston, US, and a BFA from Concordia University, Montréal, Canada. From 2020 to 2022, Aivazian was Artistic Director of Beirut Art Center where he was founding editor of *thederivative.org*, among several other projects he initiated.

Chapter 4 – A Site for Conversation: Exploring the Fluid Life of Publications | Mentor: Besa Luci

1 October 2024 to 28 January 2025

This chapter explored the role of publications in arts and culture – from providing alternatives to mainstream media discourse, offering spaces for exchanges within artist-run collectives, and acting as exhibition spaces, all while facilitating the documentation and dissemination of artistic work. Based on this premise, the chapter was organized around hands-on sessions, leading to the production of this publication.

Besa Luci is a journalist, producer, and editor-in-chief of Kosovo 2.0, an independent print and multimedia magazine renowned for its in-depth storytelling and compelling visuals that capture the region's political and social transformations. As a documentary film writer, she is interested in themes of collective and personal memory. She has produced *Drums of Resistance* (2016) and *What Killed the Architect* (2021), both exploring legacies of war and the importance of nuanced memorialization that lie beyond grand, political narratives. From 2013 to 2019, she served as a Teaching Assistant in the Journalism Department at the University of Prishtina, where she taught discourse-based research methods, and media and cultural studies.

Lab Week 2, Manila in-person meeting

21 to 27 October 2024

The second Lab Week of *Moving Narratives* was designed with three key goals: to immerse the cohort in the cultural scene of the Philippines, foster engagement with local practitioners, and strengthen the ongoing exchange between participants and mentors, particularly around the development of a collective publication. The week began with a visit to Quezon City, where participants participated in a roundtable discussion on progressive spaces of freedom featuring initiatives like SAKA, RESBAK, and Gantala Press. Participants also engaged in local cultural activities, such as a visit to Spruce Gallery, a walking tour of Escolta's urban practices, and an Artist Gathering with local artists and cultural practitioners. The week culminated with a writing retreat focused on the publication and a performance of Haig's *World/AntiWorld: On Seeing Double*.

Introduction

We live in a time of pervasive violence, manifesting in wars, economic and environmental exploitation, and marginalization of vulnerable groups, to name a few. Divisive rhetorics, aiming to weaken existing or emerging solidarities, are just as pervasive. Arts and culture, too, face numerous risks, including being co-opted to support dominant narratives or discredited as irrelevant to urgent struggles. Yet, it is precisely within this landscape that they hold transformative potential – not only to resist but also to rearticulate and reimagine modes of engagement and response, whether in relation to narratives of the past or present.

Within *Moving Narratives*, as we engaged with narrative-driven practices – both as creative processes and critical discourse – one aspect that particularly resonated with me was the exploration of how place, voice, archives, and lived experiences shape and influence artistic interventions and responses. As mentor of the program's Publication Chapter, I was especially interested in exploring how publications serve as spaces to engage with such themes. Particularly, when considering that across disciplines, publications have often acted as sites where meanings of worth, truth, documentation, resistance, and complacency are contested, negotiated, and reimaged. This role remains pertinent today, amidst political, economic, and information ecosystems increasingly seeking to commodify narratives, limit their scope, render them irrelevant, or simply make us forget.

Moving Narratives has been envisioned to serve as one site of such inquiries. Over the past year, it brought together a group of artists and cultural practitioners to explore further, learn, and share how their practices counter dominant narratives. Many of the issues they investigate and engage with highlight the interplay of colonial legacies and ongoing erasures, particularly

in relation to suppressed histories, memories, identities, labour, and beyond. Through diverse mediums and modes of expression, the artists' research and interventions often converge on retrieving, recognizing or rewriting narratives – whether personal or collective.

So when we began discussing this publication, I invited the cohort to think about our joint publication's *life* – its versatility and potential for enduring presence. This led us to the question of *travel*: How can we ensure that the narratives and stories travel both as a tangible medium of paper and as a body of ideas?

This inquiry brought to mind Stuart Hall's concept of culture on "routes." As a cultural theorist, Hall, who offers critical insights into the intersection of culture, politics, identity, and power, challenged the notion of culture as a retreat to cultural homogeneity or "roots." Instead, he argues that "the past is being transformed before our eyes" and posits to understand culture as "the various routes by which people travel, culture travels, cultures moves, culture changes, cultures migrate"

This publication, as a cultural text in itself, draws inspiration from Hall's concept of routes. Its pages embrace movement in a way that the publication remains a record of open-ended processes, reflecting how narratives are made and remade, offering a space to destabilize and pose questions repeatedly. Echoing the program's broader aims, this publication seeks to highlight that reexamining histories of oppression, resistance, and transformation are processes evolving and never fully concluded. The publication's formats have been thought of with the hope that they embody the idea of narratives in flux while recognizing that knowledge is also produced within the intricacies of the everyday, as the fellows' practices themselves show.

That is why, the conversation format in this publication holds a distinctive place. The fellows spoke to one another about how questions tackled in the program's lectures tie into their practice-based experiences. The three theme-based conversations explore: (1) the ethics behind immersive storytelling, in particular when it comes to the representation of vulnerable or marginalized communities; (2) how to navigate from practices that seek merely to expose systematic and structural injustices to those that seek to heal; and (3) how can contemporary art move beyond depicting crisis to actively engaging with – and transforming – the systems that produce those crises.

Yet, like any other form of collective-based sharing, these conversations move beyond mere exchange. They locate the fellows' processes, offer a new space to understand their contexts, point to connections in and beyond fields and geographies, and capture the immediacy of thought and the relational dynamics between them. Ultimately, these conversations also speak to the new friendships and relatabilities that have emerged and formed within the program – relationships based on curiosity, care, and solidarity.

Such connections formed early on, and the *Moving* (pieces of) *Narratives*

is an example of this. Initiated during our first in-person meeting in Lab Week Amsterdam (April 2024), it began as an experimental, collaborative project among the fellows themselves, as they decided to mail each other fragments of their everyday lives and contexts – reading excerpts, postcards, works from other artists friends, and more. This travelling archive quickly faced logistical challenges, reconfirming how borders regulate not only human movement and material objects – but, with them, also attempt to control the flow of narratives and affect.

Yet, for the *Moving* (pieces of) *Narratives*, new routes were imagined and created: relying on friends and acquaintances or safeguarding pieces to share in-person at some later time. These reimaginings speak to more than mere adaptability in the face of constraint; they highlight the importance of resisting by reimagining and reinventing routes outside and beyond those ascribed as official means of exchange. As we've recorded images and stories of these pieces in a poster – as a "movable" format itself – we hope it continues to serve as a travelling archive amongst the fellows, with the pieces here opening up new routes and avenues of knowledge and exchange among others as well.

Similar perseverance of reimaginings resonates throughout the different practices of the fellows, fragments of which are laid out in their personal pages. Some have shared their practices as documentation, some as ongoing processes or projects, others as reflections on their personal or collective-based practices – each offering routes for us to immerse in their contexts and work.

Dispersed throughout the publication are also the fellows' gifts. These pages attempt to recreate some part of the experience of the cohort's first in-person meeting, where fellows shared aspects of their practices as gifts. In that meeting, they gifted to one another. In this publication, they gift fragments of their practices or snippets of their memories to the reader. They are removable, to allow for them to be repurposed by readers, along new routes. This, too, speaks to this publication's envisioned *life* – one based on its potential to lead to new sharings, new learnings, through continuous reuse and reinterpretations.

This brings me to our contemporary. This publication's premise was built around concepts of moving and shifting narratives, approaching knowledge and learning as produced through theory and practice, and applying such principles into the publication's life. These three themes – shifts, knowledge, life – cannot be detached from the ongoing oppression, killing, and erasure of Palestinian lives by the Israeli state.

Given this, the fellows have compiled a guide with links and references in solidarity with Gaza, one that not only highlights initiatives in support of Palestinian lives and voices, but also documents oppression, highlights collective responsibility of artists and cultural workers to contribute to resistance, and supports efforts for liberation through art, storytelling, and activism.

Your Impactful Gifts!

For “Insurgent Practices in Times of Total Wars”

Samia Henni

To address the colonization and militarization of lands, spaces, technologies, resources, bodies, and minds, various artistic insurgent practices have emerged in recent years. These practices disobey the premises and promises of today's ubiquitous total wars, also called asymmetric wars, counterrevolution, counterinsurgency, and modern warfare. Whereas an asymmetric war is an armed struggle among state or non-state powers, whose respective military resources are unequal, a total war mobilizes all civilian-associated means and ends.

As the tutor of the first chapter of *Moving Narratives*, I invited the fellows to explore and dig into the needs and processes of the possibility of “becoming insurgent” and

developing an insurgent practice. I offered them a stage to try to understand and search for a possible modus operandi of an insurgent practice. Through a series of presentations, discussions, proposals, and gifts, we debated and fostered both individual and collective understandings of how to conceivably inhabit an insurgent practice, while simultaneously protecting it to avoid its capture and eventual suppression.

I incited the fellows to think about the following questions: What makes an insurgent practice an insurgent practice? How does it become insurgent? How to recognize, or not, its features? How does the “becoming insurgent” keep existing in different forms to trick total wars? How to connect and communicate with other insurgent practices?

The conversations among the fellows and tutors centred around an “alibi” that the fellows were expected to select from their practice and discuss in relation to the proposed questions mentioned above. The “alibi” was to be understood as an archival record,

a map, an illustration, a text, a film, a sound, a research question, or an exhibition, which formed and informed the practice of the fellows. While the term “alibi” means a claim or piece of evidence that someone was elsewhere when an act, especially a criminal one, is alleged to have taken place, it was used in this chapter to expand the possibilities of choices and to avoid well-known terms, such as “subject” and “object.” The “alibi” was to be thought through and discussed in depth with the tutors and fellows to better understand the fellows' intentions.

To somewhat conclude the chapter and share reflections around “becoming insurgent” in times of total wars, the fellows were invited to think of a way to offer a form of gift to themselves and the program cohort during the first in-person meeting, which took place in April in Amsterdam. I discussed the possibility of the “gift” and the “gift” itself with the fellows who wanted to explore this idea a few weeks prior to the in-person meeting. The “gift” was a way to avoid the typical polished or unpolished

As they note: “It seemed an impossible thought for us to put out this publication without Gaza, without its lessons, without its defenders. Beyond a nod, an ode, a gesture, we thought to compile something more operative, a resource, a guide. So we put together a modest collection of diverse initiatives for those who might still not have found a way to be in solidarity with Gaza.”

Ultimately, I believe this is one way solidarity works – not always knowing a way is fine, but ensuring there are avenues to learn from is essential. That is why documentation is not merely a record but a form of solidarity itself. We hope our publication serves as one such site, moving narratives and opening new routes of engagement.

Voices and Vision Conversation | Documentary Ethics

**A Conversation with
Devadeep Gupta, Dian
Suci, Elyla, and
Ngoc Nau**

Led by Besa Luci

GIFT

presentation that learning or training programs predictably expect. It was a way to test something different and unique. Given the variety of the languages spoken by the fellows, tutors, and staff, the “gift” was to be interpreted in many (and any) ways. It was also meant to liberate the mind and body from the pressure and weight of conventional presentations, inviting us all to think about the otherwise, the unusual, and the unfamiliar.

The gift is usually an unsolicited surprise. It is often offered on the occasion of an event, but sometimes, it is not. The gift is not an exchange. It is bestowed voluntarily and without compensation. It is a deliberate act of giving. A gift is often received with a smile and an emotive reaction and affection. There is no expectation to respond to the content of the gift (even if sometimes people do). What counts is the intention and the act itself.

I invited the fellows to test this act and expect nothing from the audi-

ence. I invited them to offer, if they wanted, a moment or an experience to people they had never met in person. I asked them to forget about the presentation and to think about how to possibly share something about their practice, or themselves, or anything else. Anything they wanted, if they wanted. I also asked the mentors and the staff to play this monetary game and embrace this odd role of the receiver of a potential gift. Some did. Others could not resist overcoming their role and curiosity.

The gift was about attempting to welcome discomfort, intimacy, unexpectedness, unfamiliarity, open-endedness, and collectivity. It was not about presentation, production, and critique. It was about carving out a space and a time for the unknown, the otherwise, and perhaps, to explore a potential insurgent thought or act.

Receiving a gift from the fellows on the first day of the first in-person meeting was a special and unique

MOVING NARRATIVES

experience. It opened up a terrain for important unanswered questions. It allowed for possible speculation and guesses. The act itself was a sign of both trust and confidence. It was an action of collective uneasiness and powerful contentment. I am grateful to the fellows for their impactful gifts!

As part of this publication, the fellows have framed printed texts and images as gifts, scattered throughout the pages. Whereas the recipients of the gifts offered by the fellows during the first day of the in-person meeting were known, the receivers of these printed gifts are unknown. Therefore, I prefer to think of these printed gifts as presents even though gifts and presents are synonymous. Considering these gifts as presents marks the enduring presence of the offered contents, be it a text or an image. It is an impactful voice from the present and presence of the fellows.

Immersive storytelling is not only an artistic or cultural practice but also an ethical negotiation. As storytellers and cultural practitioners immerse themselves in communities to understand and capture their narratives, they bear the responsibility of addressing questions of consent, selection, representation, and dissemination. Additionally, they must navigate issues of agency, reciprocity, and justice. At times, such work challenges them to rethink their methods and frameworks. Throughout *Moving Narratives*, different fellows have shared questions, concerns and dilemmas related to these challenges.

This conversation offers reflections from four practitioners, representing diverse disciplines and regions, who have grappled with the nuances of power dynamics, the boundaries of consent, and the complexities of representation. They speak of the balance between their motivations and the need to foster trust.

Their issues and dilemmas centre on how to engage with, treat, and respond to the communities at the heart of their work – communities often from marginalized or oppressed spaces – in ways that not only acknowledge their realities and conditions

but also create new spaces for knowledge-sharing and practice development. Drawing on personal experiences, contexts, and approaches, they explore the responsibility of artists toward the people they document and discuss the complexities of collaborating with communities in ways that respect and uphold their narratives – ultimately, how ethical engagement in immersive practices is an ongoing process that requires continual self-reflection, adaptation, and sensitivity.

This conversation, conducted online and through follow-up written exchanges, has been edited for length and clarity.

Besa: The main idea here is to focus on some of the ethical dilemmas you have brought up during the program and that you face in your practices. Many of you have raised questions about the power dynamics at play when it comes to immersive, artistic storytelling. Some questions that have come up have been how to engage without exploiting the people whose stories you want to share; how to build meaningful relationships with subjects; how to handle your role and presence. I think these are at the core of our conversation today.



1 Such as:

In what way can indigenous spirituality and critical pedagogy be a means to subvert the power dynamics imposed by the post-democratic system?

How can art, in its research and performative function, act in favour of indigenous identity reconstruction in the face of colonial and post-democratic narratives?

How do “knowledge without truths” (outside of agreed-on truths) evolve today within the emerging non-confrontational activist discourses?

Elyla: This is something that I have dealt with for 15 years, working as both an artist and as an activist. The term “activist” is something that I’m confronted with, as I believe anyone born under a repressive state or whose expression is different from the norm is an activist. It’s like when they ask me “When did you become an artist/activist?” For me, it started when I began defending myself as a child.

So how do I talk about myself and how do I talk about others? I’m really interested in exploring the intersections of representation politics and identity politics through a decolonial lens. I have several projects that I think could be examples of how my ideas of what my work represents or with whom it stands for have changed throughout time

There are times when I look back and I realize, “Oh, I didn’t see clearly how this could affect others.”

I was so angry at what was happening in Nicaragua. But I didn’t consider the potential risks for my family, friends, or anyone related to me because of my actions.

This is one of the examples where, throughout my career, I’ve followed two different

paths: one as a grassroots, guerrilla-style street performance activist, and the other where I focus on personal reflections where the inclusion of others is cared for methodically through a political lens full of affect and complicity.

I’ve managed to weave a path between these two approaches of art making and engaging with social activism. For example, the project that I’m developing with the Prince Claus Fund for *Moving Narratives* directly responds to these questions.

I gathered a group of people in the Matagalpa mountains to reflect on what it means to be a collective, how we represent ourselves, what we aim to change and starting with indigenous and queer leaders to discuss our structure, how we perceive ourselves, how we want to move in the world. One of our first gatherings focused on creating a shared vision, imagining our future potential, and figuring out how to move within a dictatorial state. **Several reflections were born out of this¹**, including our first approach to investigating the ethics of representation.

Devadeep: This is a very interesting topic and something that I have been having an internal dialogue with

myself in the past years. When I started my art making, these questions were the first ones that were right at my face, when I had a camera and I was in the middle of a community in which I was very clearly the most privileged and in a position of power because of the camera.

If I want to make a documentary or experimental film with a community, there will always be me telling someone, “Okay, you have to do this, or do you want to do this?” This is non-negotiable, and nothing can be done about it.

For me, I figured that how this power dynamic can be at least diluted would be through gestures of care, gestures of friendship, and just being more humane.

Recently, I was working with the forest community, which is very close to my house, and we share the same language.²

I was developing this project under the Prince Claus Fund framework.

For the first time in my practice, I decided not to take the camera at all and just carry sound recording devices. It was very interesting to notice that these questions of consensual representation and dissemination also exist without the camera. The camera as a tool

was not so important anymore and I was thinking, do these questions arise because of the tool or do they exist because of my intentions? The inevitable intention of making art, creating something.

It was interesting just to observe this. I didn’t necessarily arrive at any sort of conclusion but I started developing an “understanding” of why those issues remained relevant with or without the camera. I think what I realized is that when I was writing my proposal, I didn’t ask the people in the village, “Are you okay when I’m writing this proposal and that I want to work with you.” I talked to them, “This is what I want to do and would you be willing to work with me?” and they were interested. They were like “Yes let’s do this; this is fun.” So here was this kind of soft content consent.

But I’m unsure if this is where consent is more mutual understanding or do we look at consent as this kind of very administrative lawyerish definition of the word. Because once the community members say “Okay this is very fun; let’s do this” it’s oral, it’s an understanding; it’s a spoken understanding. They would have to accept me as a person, that they feel good about this, for me to be able to go into their daily life and not just make a

superficial documentary and show, “Hey well look here is coal mining and here is suffering.”

Dian: I think when it comes to ethics and consent, in my case, as I work with home-based workers, I always need to be asking, “Is it okay to document this or that?” Before that, I need to be very clear about my vision for the project and my position within it. I need to clearly define what we can do about the issue of home-based workers and what we will actually do. After that, I find that people are very helpful – they want to share everything, often with almost no hesitation or censoring.

I also need to understand the distance between myself and the workers and understand that even though we have differences in our backgrounds, we also have some of the same background story. I was a home-based worker myself, starting in 2012, for a couple of years. I made wedding invitations and merchandise souvenirs for weddings, which in Indonesia are gifts the marrying couple gives to their guests. In that sense, I feel like we share the same backgrounds, even though now we have some kind of different background – I continue to work at home as an artist but no longer take orders for merchandise.

I think a good starting point is trying to understand one another and our shared experiences. In Indonesia, we have a culture of sharing, which makes it easier for me to get along with them, get closer, and engage with them. When working on my artwork about home-based workers, I try to live with the subjects, stay at the same house and everything. For example, **I did a work about homeworkers³**, which was inspired by the experiences of my neighbour, whom I often visited for casual conversations while helping her complete her orders.

Ngoc: Based on my experience, I mostly work with people I have close relationships with. For instance, people I know in my family. I know their stories, and from their relations with other friends, I become familiar with the stories of others. So I start with the people closest to me, and from them, I meet and connect with others.

Because I’m not a social person and a bit too shy to reach out to strangers or people that I don’t know, I tend to work with those closer to me. With them, I have more time to talk and engage. I know their lives, what’s happening, and I can see, understand, and feel their struggles and problems. Some of the issues and questions I discuss with

3 *Is it a Body: A Field Inside a House* (2019)



2 *Jet Black Hill* investigates the relationship between a rainforest, its surrounding village, and illegal resource-mining activities in the Dihing-Patkai Rainforest. Focusing on the village of Soraipung, the work examines community-led resilience and the interactions between human and non-human actors layered against the impact of illegal resource mining, including its historical ties to British colonialism.



them are about working conditions. For example, there is no more land to farm, as much of it is taken over by government projects. Or the weather is so hot that they prefer to work inside a factory with air conditioning, even though they know the factory treats them unfairly. They feel trapped, they can't quit their jobs as other factories may lack even clean toilets, which makes staying in their jobs the more bearable option.

It really inspires and encourages me to bring those topics into my work. For me, the most important thing is that we trust each other, which means we can easily share, talk, and do things together. That's how I start my process.

That's why, when I propose them my ideas and what I plan to do, they are willing to participate, they want to speak and share their stories with the public. I feel the urge inside them, wanting to show what struggles they face, which also makes me feel more comfortable and strengthens my work. This is how I work.

Besa: Do you show your work beforehand to the people or subjects you engage with in your projects? When building a relationship based on trust, all four of you have different experiences – some already have

an established level of trust, while for others, you're meeting people for the first time and must gradually build that trust. So how much do you involve your subjects in your process and the final result? Has it ever happened that someone resisted, disagreed, or asked you to remove something? How do you approach such situations?

Devadeep: To answer your first question, yes, this is also something that I learned through doing, that the best way to dilute the distance or positionality is to expose your art materials to the community. This is what I do – I share my entire database, all the shots, everything. So we would have screening sessions in which we are looking through everything that we shot every day. I also screen the end result or final draft, at the site, with the people that I work with, the families I work with and in the space itself, so it kind of becomes an open screening event.

And to answer the second question, yes, it happened in the past, in 2019, actually, in a work called *Absent River*.⁴ It was funny because once I asked to take a picture of a woman from the village, and she told me, "If you want to take this picture, it will stay for a long time. Then I cannot be seen wearing this dress. I have

to wear something nicer and be with my husband in my wedding dress, and you have to give me this picture as a gift." This was the only kind of disagreement, let's say, that I had. There are multiple instances where people outright say no to being photographed or even talked to. I mean, I agreed – it wasn't a disagreement, but more like "yeah."

Otherwise, the most usual response would be that whenever I made photos, I would print them out and give them to the people, or stick them on some of the walls in the houses in the village for them to see. The most common responses I'd get were people identifying each other, like, "Oh that's the father of some child that I haven't seen for two weeks" and "Oh this guy has a beard now," or "Oh she bought a new saari and it looks nice."

Besa: What did you do in the first case, with the dress? I'm curious.

Devadeep: I went back. I returned to this village, and we had a very nice photo shoot. The husband was very happy to join in. And actually, the next time, their kid, who was studying in a different state, had come home for the summer vacation, and they called me back. They said, "Can you come? Our

kid is here and we would like to have a picture with all three of us?" So I went back, and we had another photo shoot. It was great.

Elyla: Yeah, I can also say something about that. Most of the work that I do is within my community. It's in the neighbourhood or town that I grew up in; it's with queer people.

In 2014, I performed *Devenir Torovenado*⁵, inspired by a specific carnival called Torovenado, which takes place in Masaya, an indigenous Manque-Chorotega community where I've been living for the past five years. This carnival is in honour of Saint Jeronimus; it's only supposed to happen on a specific date and contains a lot of *travestismos* – cross-dressing – in its original form as a cultural manifestation. My intervention was intended to challenge the time when you're allowed to do it and its potentiality to become a space for true sexual dissident emancipation. So I carried it out on a different date from the official one to confront a catholic event.

During the final workshop to discuss the impact of the performance with the community, they will say, "I think this is great," or "I question why you do this. Do you do this for devotion or are you doing this just

⁵ The intervention questions the "right time" to perform non hetero-normative identities usually "accepted" within some cultural rituals in Nicaragua. It took place after the official season for the Torovenado's carnival in the indigenous neighbourhood Monimbo, Masaya, confronting a catholic festivity. The project concluded with a community workshop discussing the possibilities for performance art as a tool for social justice and activism.



⁴ *Absent River* (2019-present) examines the complex relationship between people, the river, and the land in Majuli, Assam – a river island notorious for annual floods and severe soil erosion. Focusing on Salmora, the research asks: If the floods are so destructive and life-threatening, why do communities continue to live and thrive here?



to call attention to you? Is this honest?” Like all types of comments. And I think this is something that also really interests me in my work – there has to be some sort of ethical relationship with the territory that I’m sticking to. This is the reason why I’m creating a lifelong project in the territory, with my community, because there’s no other way for me. And it’s interesting because, in a way, when I stay within the Mesoamerican region, working with something that I feel is closest to me and that is closest to my research process, then I could also be accused of not caring for others or of applying selective activism – that you’re not doing anything about other countries or other territories. Whenever you’re trying to navigate the ethics of representation and a transborder type of solidarity, you also care for the way the territory itself wants to be heard, represented, cared for, taken care of.

Ngoc: In my case, in Vietnam, it’s a little bit sensitive, especially if I want to show my work to the public. The cultural police often check the content of exhibitions or any public event. I bring a lot of images in my work, some from protests or landscapes destroyed. And the cultural police don’t like that, they don’t want me to show my works to the public. They visit the space, and if they do not

like or understand the work, they won’t let me show it to the public. So I have not had many chances to show my work in Vietnam. That’s why I need to find other ways to show my work. For example, I’m thinking of finding ways to go back to my community and organize events to show my work. But in order to organize a public event, I also need to prepare for potential censorship from the local authorities. It’s very tricky for me. But, as of now, I either keep my work to myself or show it outside of Vietnam.

This is one of the problems. I cannot, I don’t know how to fight this problem in my work since 2019. Normally, public events, including art exhibitions, have to ask for permission from the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in Vietnam. In 2019, I had a group show with other young Vietnamese artists in a contemporary art space in Vietnam. The art space has a legal team, so my work was censored by them. They required me to delete many parts of **myvideo**⁶ that they felt the cultural police might see as a sensitive subject, and without those changes, they wouldn’t let the exhibition happen.

Elyla: I want to comment on that because I face the same type of repression, with the police in Nicaragua. So usually,

I work in public space but now I’ve done more filming in secure spaces.

This means that the performances are a little bit more staged. I bring people to work with me, and that has changed the dynamic a bit because I have to work privately, in a way. Also, it is illegal to work without government permission in Nicaragua. So all the people working with me have to change their names. There’s a lot of opacity in the way one has to work when you face such repression. So I understand Ngoc in that sense of really moving on a thin line – being able to do the work without putting yourself and others at risk.

Ngoc: Dealing with this censorship, I try to navigate the visuals in a way that makes it look a bit funny, almost like a music video. Then, people think, “Ah, it’s just something for fun,” so they don’t take it too seriously. That’s what I try to do.

Dian: No, in my case, I think what you asked before, Besa, is that in the community of homeworkers, they didn’t resist or object to sharing their stories because our vision is the same – to give more visibility to what really happens behind this labour practice. So we’re on the same page, asking about our rights. But they didn’t want

to... speaking up in this way feels like a form of protest. They still need a job; they still need the energy and time to do the job; they don’t want to mess it up by protesting or striking or anything like that. So I think art is the bridge here to spread this issue.

Besa: How do you see your work, your practices, changing how people view the communities you document, and who are you trying to reach with it? And what systems do you seek to challenge or what reactions do you hope to spark?

Dian: I talk about home-based workers because they’re often overlooked or not noticed. They have to divide workspace from personal space, balance work hours with rest, or manage production costs with daily living expenses.

I remember the first time I showed a piece in 2019 that showed how home-based workers function. The public had different reactions. Some knew of such work... Many did not even know home-based workers existed. Some had heard something about them but didn’t really know or understand the realities behind their lives.

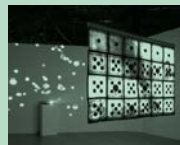
So that artwork started conversations. I feel it brought

⁶ *Ritual Objects 1* (2022)

Sculptural single-channel video installation.

This artwork draws elements from ceremonies with the intention of presenting the events that occurred following Samsung’s intervention, using light from technological devices and ritual objects.

That video was the initial version of the current work, *Ritual Object 1*. The images were censored, most of them depicting worker protests.



attention to home-based workers. But I hope it goes further, making policymakers and employers consider their welfare.

Since I was a home-based worker before becoming an artist, this helped me feel a connection when I entered spaces where home-based workers live and join their daily routines. So it feels familiar to me. While we might be glad to work from home, we need employers to pay attention and provide the facilities we deserve, just like factory workers.

But many home-based workers can't protest due to financial issues, so they need other ways to advocate. I think art can do that, to help bring these issues to the public's attention.

Devadeep: My work focuses on aspects of resilience in communities in Assam living around disaster-prone areas. Whether these disasters are environmental or industrial, I try to bring forward ideas that highlight the everyday practices of such communities, and how the act of just staying in such areas becomes an act of resistance. My work is research-oriented and the outcomes are episodic, almost like anthological narratives. To the public, I seek to present alternate vantage points of community-based perseverance as a

response to the climate crisis.

My audience is primarily the communities that I work with. In this sense, the "target in this regard" also becomes sort of an intimate, profound exchange between me and the people involved in my work. My research outcomes are mostly received by exhibition audiences, artists, and academics.

One of my research objectives is to present non-mainstream narratives that counter the popular, one-dimensional understandings of the region and its people. For example, aspects of development-induced displacement and cyclical climate disasters are sanitised to just statistics in popular media to fit the government's agenda. The mass perspectives victimise the communities in fringes or disaster-hit areas, looking at them through a superficial lens.

Talking about the regional population, I want my research outcomes to make people question popular beliefs on crisis situations that they consume from a detached position. One of my goals is to also generate a narrative of solidarity and care amidst sensation-driven journalistic reporting or analytical academic perspectives.

Besa: And do you see your work, or to what extent do you

see it, as helping document histories, narratives or experiences that might be at risk of being forgotten?

Devadeep: My personal artistic practice primarily focuses on crafting a regional counter-narrative that adds to institutional histories and archives. Moving beyond my personal practice, I work with a collective called Northeast Lightbox – a collaborative, inclusive platform designed to nurture a sustainable, local artistic ecosystem. Through the collective, we bring together artists, academics, and poets to foster research-driven conversations rooted in regional archival narratives. We focus on uncovering and activating stories from local social work groups, grassroots activism, and pressure movements, through creative collaborations and artistic interpretations. By challenging stereotypes and rethinking regional identities, we try to create a space for diverse voices and histories to thrive through workshops, exhibitions, and residencies.

Ngoc: In my work, I focus on being true to my feelings and sharing as much as I can of what I feel and see with the audience. I always remind myself to be mindful of not exploiting anyone and strive to ensure that everyone involved in my

work feels comfortable. Beyond that, I believe it's up to future generations to judge whether my work contributes to history and to the audience to determine how it resonates with their experiences.

“Implicit to hauntology is the notion of lost futures – of things which never happened but could have, of paths not taken.”

from page 142



If there is a flaw
It's human.

Being here,
doing all this,
existing.

Is there a part of your body
that is more real than the others

To support
To hold
To reach
To touch
To create
To hold

Many times we are human

Many times we are
machines

DIAN SUCI

GIFT

MOVING NARRATIVES

Dian Suci



I RECALL BEGINNING TO CREATE WORKS ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF HOME-BASED WORKERS BACK IN 2019. AT THAT TIME I WAS STILL TAKING ORDERS FOR WEDDING INVITATIONS AND SOUVENIRS, A PRACTICE I HAD BEEN ENGAGED IN SINCE 2012.

GOING FURTHER BACK TO EARLY 2010s, I FOUND MYSELF WITH CRAFTY HANDS, AND AFTER GETTING MARRIED, I WASN'T ALLOWED BY MY THEN-HUSBAND TO WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME.



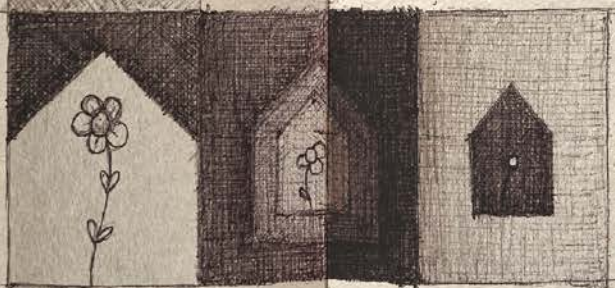
SO, IN MY DAILY LIFE AT HOME, I TAUGHT MYSELF TO PAINT, SEW, EMBROIDER, BIND BOOKS, AND CRAFT ANYTHING I WANTED. I LEARNED THESE SKILLS THROUGH THE INTERNET WHILE JUGGLING MY RESPONSIBILITY AS A MOTHER.



IS IT A BODY: A FIELD INSIDE A HOUSE (2019)



OVER TIME, I STARTED PRODUCING MERCHANDISE TO SELL AND EVENTUALLY BEGAN TAKING CUSTOM ORDERS.



MY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND IN ARCHITECTURE ALSO HELPED ME CREATE VARIOUS THINGS. OCCASIONALLY, I TOOK ON DESIGN AND INTERIOR PRODUCTION COMMISSIONS. AT THAT TIME, I WAS LIVING IN KALIMANTAN, FOLLOWING MY HUSBAND. FEELING OUT OF PLACE THERE, I KEPT MYSELF BUSY TO AVOID STAGNATION AT HOME.



SOCIAL MEDIA ALLOWED ME TO CONNECT WITH FRIENDS FROM DIFFERENT REGIONS. WHEN I DIVORCED AT THE END OF 2017, I RETURNED TO MY HOMETOWN, YOGYAKARTA. I MADE AN EFFORT TO CONTINUE EVERYTHING I HAD TAUGHT MYSELF AND WORKED TO RECONNECT WITH PEOPLE IN REAL LIFE. EVENTUALLY, I BEGAN PARTICIPATING IN ART EXHIBITIONS.

THE WORLD OF ART AND ITS COMMUNITY TAUGHT ME MANY THINGS I HAD NEVER IMAGINED BEFORE. I LEARNED TO BE MORE SENSITIVE, TO VIEW THINGS FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES, TO ADVOCATE FOR MARGINALIZED GROUPS, AND TO BE MORE COURAGEOUS IN EXERCISING MY RIGHT TO EXPRESS OPINIONS.



IN MY FAMILY, I WAS RAISED WITH STRICT RULES ABOUT HOW A WOMAN SHOULD BEHAVE. A GOOD WOMAN WAS ONE WHO COULD BE CONTROLLED. INDONESIA'S 'NEW ORDER' REGIME (1966-1998), UNDER PRESIDENT SOEHARTO, WAS A PERIOD OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE AND POLITICAL REPRESSION. DURING THIS TIME, THE DHARMA WANITA ORGANIZATION WAS ESTABLISHED, COMPOSED OF THE WIVES OF CIVIL SERVANTS. 'DHARMA WANITA' WAS CREATED TO DOMESTICATE WOMEN, BASED ON THE IDEOLOGY OF THE PANCA DHARMA WANITA (FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR WOMEN):

- (1) A WOMAN IS HER HUSBAND'S COMPANION;
- (2) A WOMAN IS A BEARER OF OFFSPRING;
- (3) A WOMAN IS A HOUSEHOLD MANAGER;
- (4) A WOMAN IS A SUPPLEMENTARY BREADWINNER;
- (5) A WOMAN IS A MEMBER OF SOCIETY.

MY FATHER WAS A CIVIL SERVANT AND MY MOTHER WAS A MEMBER OF 'DHARMA WANITA', WHICH SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED HOW THEY RAISED THEIR CHILDREN. GROWING UP DURING THE 'NEW ORDER' ERA WASN'T EASY.



READING DHARMA IN WOMEN (2017)

I CHANNLED THIS UNEASE INTO AN ARTWORK TITLED "READING DHARMA IN WOMEN." THE PIECE INVOLVED USING THREAD TO FORM LAYERS OF CURTAINS, WITH THE THREADS SPELLING OUT EXCERPTS FROM SOEHARTO'S SPEECHES TO 'DHARMA WANITA' ABOUT BEING A GOOD WIFE. VISITORS WERE INVITED TO PASS THROUGH THE CURTAINS, TEARING THEM APART IN THE PROCESS.

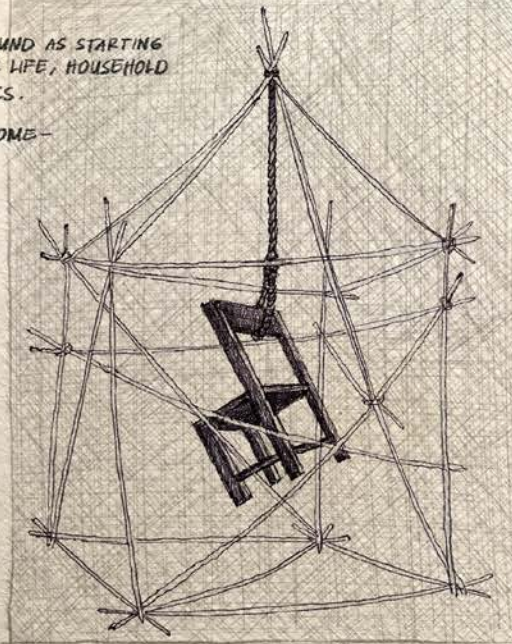
IN MY WORK, I OFTEN USE MY PERSONAL BACKGROUND AS STARTING POINT TO ADDRESS BROADER ISSUES — DOMESTIC LIFE, HOUSEHOLD MATTERS, WOMEN, CULTURE, HISTORY, AND POLITICS.

ONE OF THE TOPICS I CONTINUE TO EXPLORE IS HOME-BASED WORKERS.

HOME-BASED WORKERS ARE LABORERS WHO COMPLETE ORDERS FROM THEIR OWN HOMES. EMPLOYER SEND RAW MATERIALS TO THE WORKERS' HOMES AND COLLECT THE FINISHED PRODUCTS. MOST HOME-BASED WORKERS ARE WOMEN, OFTEN WIVES, POSITIONED AS SECONDARY EARNERS TO SUPPLEMENT THEIR HUSBANDS' INCOMES. THE EXPECTATION IS THAT THEY CAN EARN MONEY WHILE STILL MANAGING THE HOUSEHOLD AND CHILDREN.

HOME-BASED WORKERS DO NOT RECEIVE THE SAME BENEFITS AS FACTORY WORKERS. THEIR WAGES ARE LOW, WITH THE PROMISE OF FLEXIBLE HOURS THAT ALLOW THEM TO WORK FROM HOME WHILE CARING FOR THEIR FAMILIES. HOWEVER, THEY DO NOT RECEIVE HEALTHCARE BENEFITS, UTILITY COST REIMBURSEMENTS, OR OTHER PERKS USUALLY PROVIDED TO FACTORY WORKERS.

MEANWHILE, EMPLOYERS BENEFIT BY AVOIDING THE COSTS OF BUILDING FACTORIES OR PROVIDING WORKER FACILITIES.



CURRENTLY I'M CONTINUING TO EXPLORE THE ISSUE OF HOME-BASED WORKERS EMPLOYED BY FOREIGNERS, STARTING WITH BALI. AS A PRIME TOURIST DESTINATION, BALI IS HOME TO SKILLED ARTISANS. I'VE FOUND MANY FOREIGNERS USING THE LABOR OF HOME-BASED WORKERS IN BALI, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE END OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.



ETHICAL AND SUSTAINABLE



HANDMADE AND EXOTIC

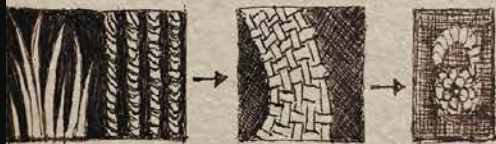
IN MANY CASES, I CAME ACROSS MARKETING JARGON FOR THESE PRODUCTS THAT PIQUED MY CURIOSITY — TERMS LIKE EMPOWERMENT, SUSTAINABILITY, COMMUNITY, LOCAL ARTISAN, ETHICAL, HANDMADE, HOMEMADE, COLLABORATION, AND EXOTIC.

I EXPRESSED MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PHENOMENON THROUGH AN ARTWORK AT THE END OF 2023.



IS IT A BODY: A FIELD INSIDE A HOUSE (2019)

DO YOU NOT FEEL A THRILL PASSING THROUGH THE AIR AS THE WORDS OF WISDOM FLOAT FROM THE FAKAWAY SHORE? (2023)



IN ITS ENTIRETY. FOR EXAMPLE, SOME PROCESSED RAW MATERIAL INTO WEAVING-READY FORMS, OTHERS WOVE THE BASKETS, SOME MADE THE HANDLES, AND MY NEIGHBOR ADDED THE ORNAMENTAL DECORATIONS.

IN 2019, I CREATED A PIECE ON HOME-BASED WORKERS INSPIRED BY MY NEIGHBOR. SHE TOOK ORDERS TO CREATE ORNAMENTS FOR WOVEN BASKETS. SHE TOLD ME HER BOSS EMPLOYED MANY HOME-BASED WORKERS FROM VARIOUS AREAS, EACH ASSIGNED A SPECIFIC TASK. THIS STRATEGY WAS DESIGNED TO PREVENT WORKERS FROM REPLICATING THE PRODUCT

I CREATED AN INSTALLATION FEATURING A VIDEO SIMULATION OF HOW HOME-BASED WORKERS OPERATE, SHOWCASING THE REPETITIVE TASKS AND RESULTS, WHERE THE PROCESS OF COMPLETING EACH PART SEEMS AS IF IT IS DONE BY DIFFERENT PEOPLE.

WITH SUPPORT FROM THE PRINCE CLAUDE FUND'S MOVING NARRATIVES PROGRAM, I CONTINUED MY RESEARCH IN BALI. THERE, I DISCOVERED A RESIDENTIAL COMPLEX HOUSING HOME-BASED WORKERS.

THE BUILDING CONSISTED OF 200 FLATS, ALL FULLY OCCUPIED. INTERESTINGLY, ALMOST ALL THE TENANTS WERE MIGRANTS FROM JAVA. MANY HAD LIVED THERE FOR OVER A DECADE, ONE OF THE RESIDENTS TELLING ME SHE HAD BEEN THERE SINCE HER CHILD WAS SMALL, AND NOW SHE HAS GRANDCHILDREN.



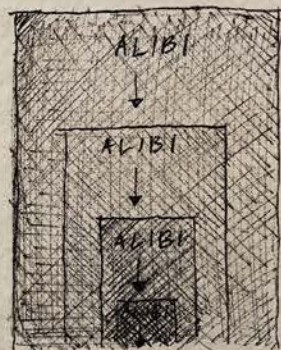
THE HOME-BASED WORKERS IN THIS BUILDING PERFORM VARIOUS ORDERS, MAKING BLANKETS, BIKINIS, CLOTHES, BAGS, AND LEATHER WALLETS. DUE TO THEIR LONG RESIDENCE, THE FAMILIES HAVE DEVELOPED CLOSE-KNIT RELATIONSHIPS, FORMING A LARGE, SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY.

SOME OF THESE WORKERS TAKE ORDERS FROM FOREIGNERS FOR LIFESTYLE BRANDS SOLD OVERSEAS. OFTEN, THEY ONLY COMPLETE ONE PART OF THE PRODUCT BEFORE PASSING IT TO ANOTHER WORKER. FOR INSTANCE, ONE WORKER MIGHT BE PAID IDR 2000 (APPROXIMATELY 1 USD FOR 8 ITEMS) TO SEW THE INNER LINING OF THE BRANDED BAG.



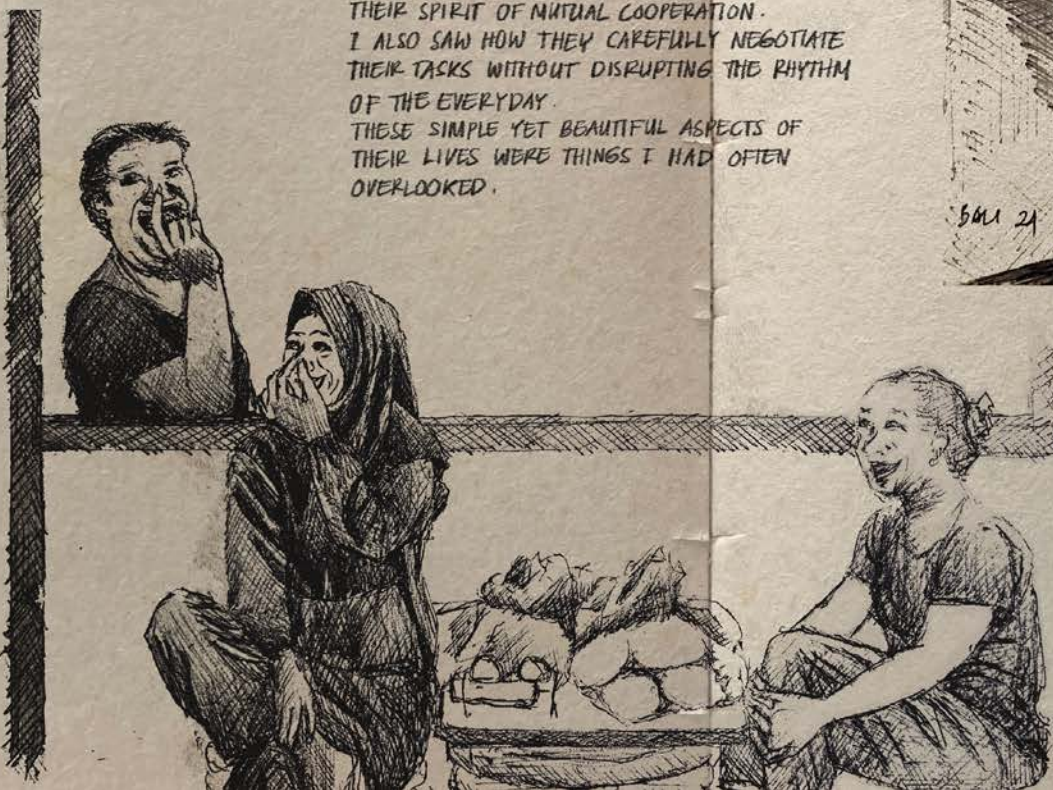
HOME-BASED WORKERS STRIVE TO BE CONTENT WITH HAVING A JOB AND A PLACE TO LIVE. TO THEM, THE DISPARITY BETWEEN THEIR WAGES AND THE PROFITS REaped BY EMPLOYERS FEELS BEYOND THEIR CONTROL. EVEN THOUGH THEY MIGHT THINK ABOUT DEMANDING HIGHER WAGES, THEY ARE RELUCTANT TO PROTEST.

DURING A WORKSHOP LED BY SAMIA HENNI WITHIN THE PROGRAM, I GAINED VALUABLE INSIGHTS INTO HOW AND TO WHOM THESE ISSUES COULD BE DISSEMINATED. SAMIA INTRODUCED THE CONCEPT OF ALIBI, WHICH LED ME TO IMAGINE HOW ALIBIS COULD BE USED TO ADDRESS SENSITIVE TOPICS — ISSUES THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT DIRECTLY. I CONTINUE TO REFLECT ON AND QUESTION WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER. IN THE BEGINNING, I FELT ANXIOUS ABOUT HOW TO POSITION MYSELF WHEN ENGAGING WITH HOME-BASED WORKERS — HOW TO GENUINELY CONNECT WITH THEM IN SPIRIT WHILE CONSIDERING ACTIVITIES WE COULD SHARE.



DURING HIS SESSIONS, HAIG AVAZIAN SHAPED AND DISCUSSED EVE SEDGWICK'S "PARANOID READING AND REPARATIVE READING." THIS TEXT HELPED ME SEE ANOTHER SIDE OF THE LIVES OF HOME-BASED WORKERS I AM OBSERVING. THE REPARATIVE APPROACH PROMPTED ME TO MOVE BEYOND ANXIETY AND SUSPICION ABOUT THE WAY THEY WORK AND ARE EMPLOYED, TOWARD A MORE OPEN PERSPECTIVE ON THE SURPRISES WITHIN OTHER ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES. THESE SURPRISES ALLOW FOR NEW UNDERSTANDING AND ALSO OPEN UP DEEPER HOPE AND APPRECIATION FOR THEIR LIVES.

I BEGAN TO NOTICE HOW THEY ENJOY THEIR DAILY LIVES, SEAMLESSLY BLENDING THEIR WORK WITH THEIR ROUTINES. I OBSERVED THE WARMTH OF THEIR FAMILY-LIKE BONDS AND THEIR SPIRIT OF MUTUAL COOPERATION. I ALSO SAW HOW THEY CAREFULLY NEGOTIATE THEIR TASKS WITHOUT DISRUPTING THE RHYTHM OF THE EVERYDAY. THESE SIMPLE YET BEAUTIFUL ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES WERE THINGS I HAD OFTEN OVERLOOKED.



SOMEDAY, WE WILL CREATE SOMETHING TOGETHER — SOMETHING WE CAN PRESENT TO A WIDER AUDIENCE, PERHAPS TO EMPLOYERS OR POLICYMAKERS. WE WANT TO SHOW THAT BEHIND THE PRODUCTS WE USE AND THE BEAUTIFUL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS, THERE ARE SKILLED BODIES OF HOME-BASED WORKERS WHO ARE RARELY SHOWN HONESTLY BY THEIR EMPLOYERS.

WE WANT TO SHARE THE LIGHTEARTED CONVERSATIONS AND HEARTFELT EXPRESSIONS THAT FILL THEIR DAYS — PROOF THAT THESE WORKERS ARE NOT JUST MACHINES WITH ON-AND-OFF SWITCH, READY TO OPERATE WHENEVER NEEDED.

THEY ARE HUMAN BEINGS WITH LIVES THAT DESERVE TO BE ILLUMINATED.

WE ALL HAVE OUR ALIBI
 WE CAN BE OTHER PEOPLE'S ALIBI
 OUR GOVERNMENTS MAY USE US AS AN ALIBI?

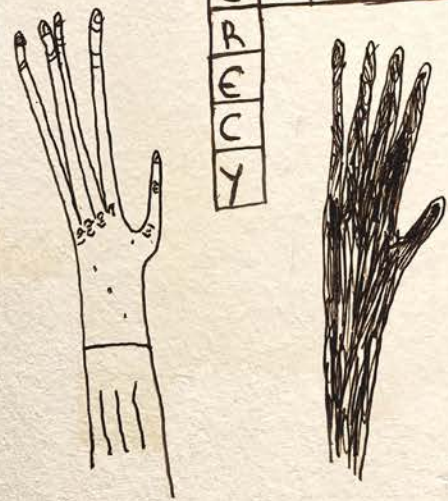


LOST IN MANILA

Journaling is intimacy
 Journaling is privacy
 Journaling can be text
 and can be drawings
 Journaling is not meant
 to be showed up,
 usually
 Journaling is moving
 in space and time
 thru a line, a pen,
 ink, to find or
 create sense, to
 sustain sense in
 a fucked up world

At Jojoquez

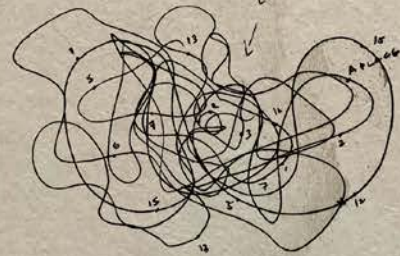
SE
 CAL
 B
 E
 C
 Y



YOUR SAFE SPACE
 doodle here!



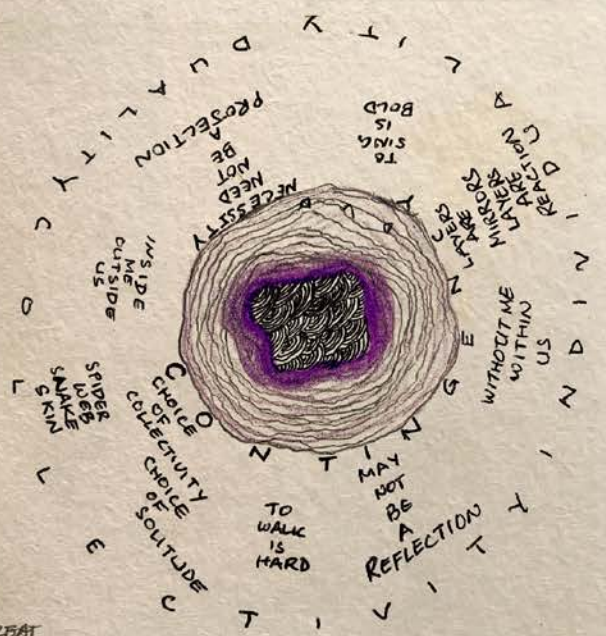
A FATASY MAP OUT OF A REAL PLACE



Manila's hand 2024



"HOW ARE WE TO TREAT OTHERS?"
 "THERE ARE NO OTHERS."



27/10/24
 19:42

Devadeep Gupta



“Through words, a heritage cornered and constantly captured by those who want to reduce it to individualism and spectacle can be conveyed.”

from page 176

Growing up in a tier-3 town in Assam, survival took precedence, until a rebellion against more conventional life plans during my architecture education. My curiosity took to vernacular architecture of riverine communities back home known for their adeptness in reconstructing their houses in the annual face of river-bank erosion. I was piqued by a question rooted in childhood inquisitiveness that I used to ask my grandfather in response to his earnest urges to not go close to the river during monsoons – “*If they know that their houses will be destroyed by the river, why do they still stay there?*.” In 2017, I had asked the same question to Mr Ramu Chowdhury, a fisherman who used to squat on the urban riverbanks of Guwahati with his family. While the Assam government was evicting temporary settlements along the Brahmaputra river bank, citing a “river-bank beautification project,” Ramu said, “We are the invisible people.” Our conversations resulted in my first artistic work, *Man of Boat*, a collective project that includes members of Ramu’s family and friends while provoking onlookers in urban riverbank spaces.

Since then, my research has explored the layered relationship between human and non-human actors, shaped by the dynamics of land and ecological crises. Grounded in circadian rituals and spatial narratives, my work critically examines the eco-socio-political ramifications of state-sponsored infrastructural initiatives. I am particularly drawn towards reparative ways of living that offer vital insights on resilience as a response to

environmental emergencies. A key focus in my work is interrogating colonial accountability in Assam, specifically the lasting impact of extractive processes on eco-cultural habitats.

Critical fabulation serves as a tool to challenge mainstream perspectives, with an intention to provoke reflection on contemporary realities. While integrating regional archives into my practice, I move beyond treating them as static historical evidence, instead engaging history in a dynamic dialogue with the contemporary. Inspired by orality, vernacular traditions, and archival history, my work looks upon the intersection of agrarian routines and industrial arbitration. I seek to create a relational space of exchange between the community, the audience, and the artist. Episodic explorations come together as anthological narratives to create a wider, generative discourse. Collaborations with local actors become the framework of my projects, illustrated through performative actions and audio-visual interventions.

Following *Man on Boat*, my research expanded to Baladmari, a riparian village in Goalpara facing acute flooding and soil erosion, where Ramu Chowdhury’s family belonged. Focusing on the community’s shared disdain for the government’s exclusive urban riverbank concretization plans that neglected precariously exposed Baladmari’s stretches, I explored the community’s dexterous use of a reed as building material that flourishes along the banks after the monsoons. Engaging the people’s craft with the reed as a material in a satiric collective action in response to the govern-

ment’s neglect – we decided to build an embankment using the reed. The site of wall-making became a point of gathering and discursive exchange and the wall itself extended as a symbolic statement in the socio-cultural context of Baladmari.

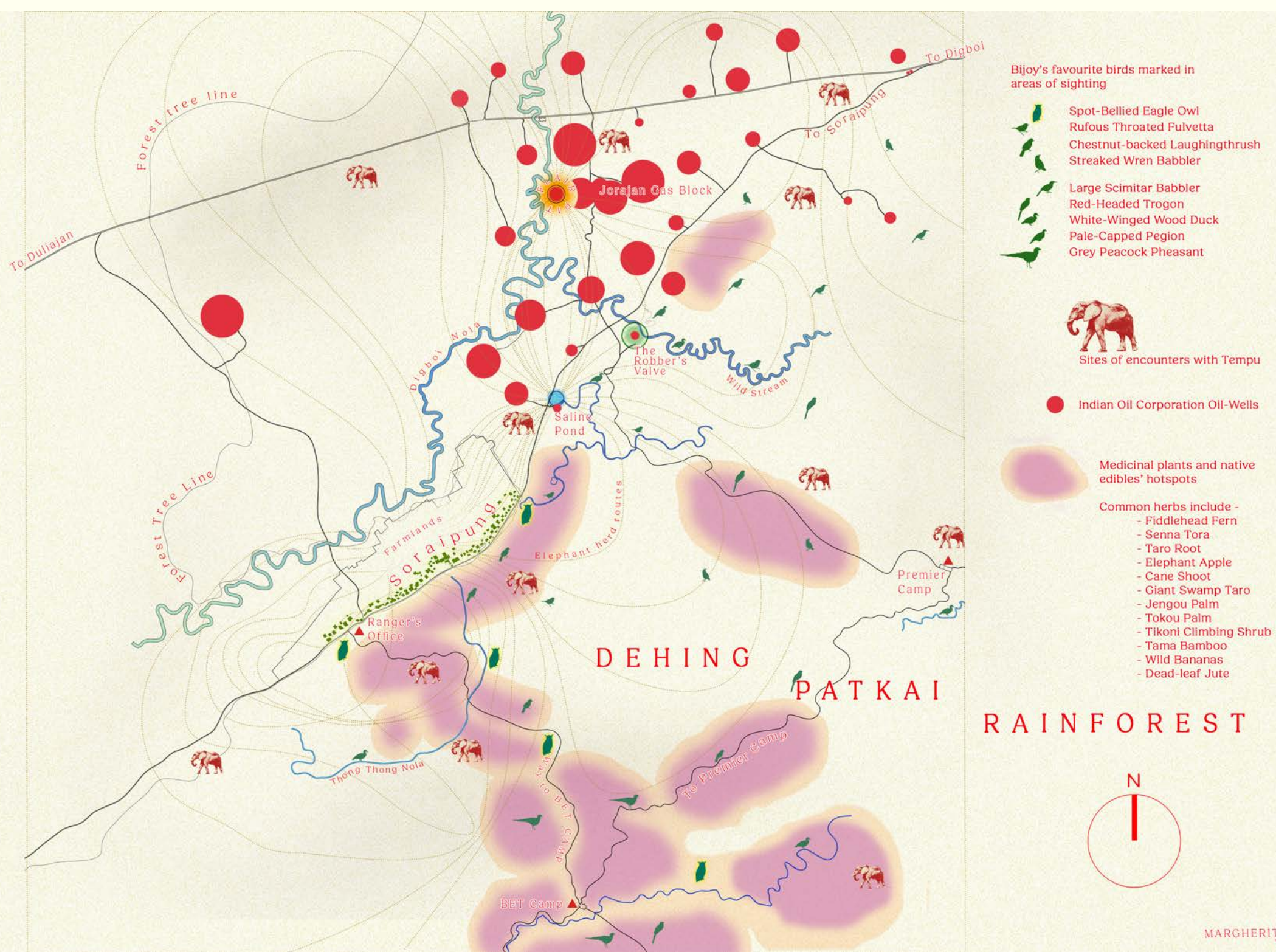
Absent River, the next chapter of my research, situated in Majuli, a cultural hotspot in Assam, developed as a reflective study of the relationship between the people and the river in a potters’ village. The underbelly of the river, exposed in the post-monsoon seasonal ebb, brings out clay that residents shape into pots – vessels that drive their livelihood and cultural identity. Intersecting the conceptual and documentary, an exchange with the people there formed over an unlikely question – *What happens when forces of nature clash against human determination?*

As my exploration evolved, I delved into deconstructing the academic construction of Assam that fit the dominant nation-state narrative. I turned my inquiries inwards with the event of Bagjan Oil Blowout, in June 2020, when an active oil well operated by Oil India Limited, located in an eco-cultural hotspot, caught fire, exploded, and continued to burn for six months. The event displaced an entire village into overcrowded relief camps at the height of the pandemic, causing significant, lasting damage to the local flora and fauna. *Normalisation of a Disaster* formed through me, an artist, trying to locate my position within the curiosities of those who flocked to the site of disaster as tourists.

Feeling the need to extend

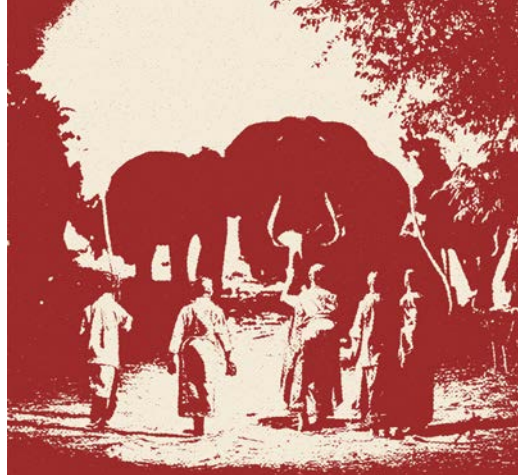
beyond my personal practice, I co-founded *Lightbox*, an inclusive, discourse-based platform aimed at incubating a collaborative, sustainable, artistic ecosystem. Bringing together practitioners, academics, and poets, *Lightbox* serves as a foster space for research-led conversations rooted in archival and regional discourses. The platform activates histories of local social work, grassroots activism, and social pressure groups, such as the *North East Network* and *Tezpur Mahila Samiti*, through collaborative actions and artistic translations. Interrogating popular understandings of regional identities, *Lightbox* collaborates with peers to build a sustainable artistic network that nurtures diverse voices and histories through workshops, residencies, and exhibitions.

Moving forward, my aim is to develop a research-led, collective body of work that shapes a relational discourse on instances of community-based resilience: a response to ecological crisis situations. Curious about experimental mediums and methods, I want to focus on sound, paper, and explore their role in documentary narratives. My motivation is to highlight the legacy of colonialism in Assam and trace how extractive processes have transformed the local ecology and cultural landscapes. My main goal is to treat the case of Assam as part of prevalent events across the world connected through resource exploitation and extractivism. I am interested in establishing a discourse with similar artistic counterparts in the world – a network of shared concerns, knowledge, and strength.



Nestled against the northwestern edge of the Dehing Patkai Rainforest, Soraipung village has long been a confluence of animals, nature, and humans. In the village's north, perched against the tree line, lies a curious pond. On moonlit nights, it's said that the rainforest's beasts and birds convene by the pool, drawn to an adjoining brine spring. Witnesses describe a striking sight – a transient pledge of peace amongst the beasts as they share the pond's savoury water. The British, too, were aware of these congregations. Moss-covered bricks and rusted metal pieces, alleged to be the remnants of a colonial observation deck, still litter the poolside slope.

For Soraipung's natives, the harvest season brings along an unlikely predicament. The herd of elephants, upon leaving the pond, head toward the village granaries, drawn by the scent of the gathered crop. The fragile architecture offers little resistance to the herd's might, leading to an un-



expected disregard for the fleeting truce in the area. The desire to deter destruction mobilizes a section of youth from the village. Equipped with flares and crackers, they gather swiftly around the granaries, forming a united front in their determined resolve as they prepare to thwart the mighty herd. Usually, these exchanges are without harm, as the loud bangs and torch flashes become unpleasant enough to prompt the herd's retreat back into the forest.

Although not all the elephants are so easily deterred. Estranged from the herd, a lonesome elephant wanders across the region. His darker skin and stockier build stand in stark contrast with the other herd members. It is known that Tempu, a creature of habit, named after a popular minivan, has claimed the lives of at least five people in the surrounding region. **“Beware of a dark, short, lonely elephant”** – the noticeboard outside the ranger's office displays a foreboding message.

“He's probably 30, but looks younger because of his smaller stature,” says Bijoy, a local guide, as he walks ahead of the group along a winding trail amidst dense foliage during my last visit in September. Halfway along our way to the Bet Camp, he stops and points to a clearing across the adjoining ridge. “Last month, I was exactly here with a pair of bird-watchers from New Zealand, when Tempu suddenly charged at us,” he claims. “I had to throw my crackers at him to scare him off. We managed to escape, but one of the tourists tripped and broke his camera in the chaos.”

Three of Tempu's unfortunate victims belonged to the Soraipung Range. “If he senses people around him, he completely freezes, hiding behind the foliage out of sight,” continues Bijoy as we walk along towards the Bet Camp. “He won't make a move till you, unsuspecting, are directly in front of him. Once you're within his reach, he charges wildly.” He told us that once one of Tempu's victims was found folded like the metal chair at the Ranger's office.



The locals in Soraipung speculate that when he was a kid, Tempu witnessed his herd being attacked by poachers, which likely caused his stunted growth and aggression. Curiously, some of the natives question if there is a connection between the poachers and Tempu's victims.



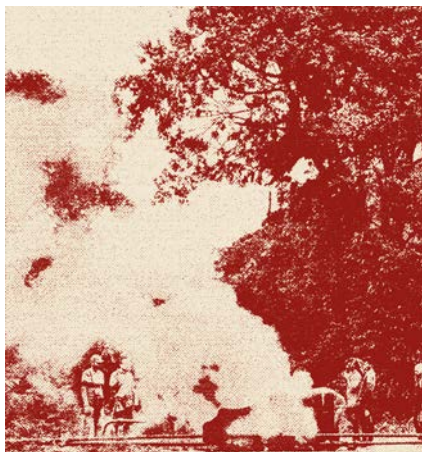


Tempu's temper continues to remain a looming threat to Soraipung. Bijoy, having encountered the lone elephant multiple times during his trips, still urges the villagers to leave the beast alone. Beyond his survival skills, he has cultivated a unique relationship with the jungle's avian inhabitants. Among Bijoy's favourite species is the spot-bellied eagle owl, its call making quite a haunting noise, similar to the rising creak of a heavy wooden door. He favours the bird because of its alerting tendencies, as he believes that the bird announces the presence of elephants around. The villagers trust the owl too, its scant nocturnal warnings, prompting the determined band of youth into protective action.

More than a decade ago, a young man in his 20s back then, Bijoy stumbled upon an opportunity to assist a legendary guide in the Dehing Patkai Range. Picking up his curiosity towards migratory birds, he started training in observing avian behaviour, often mimicking bird calls for fun. Bijoy discovered that he could coax responses out of some bird species, sometimes even drawing them closer

with this imitation. This skill earned him a reputation amongst bird-watchers, and even in the ranger's office, where he frequents, often to accompany ministers and officials on guided tours. Lately, he's been passing down his knowledge to his daughter, teaching her the intricacies of being an avian oracle.

Bijoy's cousin is part of a local gang of young men who raid oil wells operated by the Indian Oil Corporation. A band of 20, their swift and coordinated operations target exposed oil valves, siphoning off natural gas before vanishing into the dense forest. "We can find them at Valve no. 27. The group calls it the Robber's Valve," remarked Bijoy, as we made our way back from the BET Camp after spotting a surprisingly large grey peacock pheasant pecking on a fallen fruit. Defying the Corporation's grand Digboi refinery on the eastern reaches of the forest, they execute an elaborate modus operandi. The group is split into multiple smaller factions based on functional roles. The operators specialise in regulating the well's inlet valves, controlling the flow



of the natural gas, ensuring a safe loot while minimising leaks and spillage. Then there are the carriers, consisting of the bulk of the group members. They collect the looted oil in larger polycarbonate cylinders. It's also their job to carry these cylinders down forest trails, away from the main street, safely to storage. The spotters are the lookouts, older, experienced men, spread around the well at critical junctions, looking out for patrolling company guards. If the spotter spots security, he whistles sharply, mimicking a bird sound, picked up and echoed by other spotters, to let the others know of the incoming danger. It takes the entire group no more than a couple of minutes to disappear in the thick foliage, in seemingly random, but well-versed directions for their getaway. The gang usually reconvenes minutes after the patrol has left.

A critical tool lies at the heart of this operation – "the filter." This L-shaped metal cylinder, roughly the size of a standard ruler, is wrapped tightly in fabric until it resembles a large bee hive. "Sometimes we wrap it in our own heavy jackets. It's a matter of safety," one of them quips. A thick, chilling mist of pressurized gas surrounds the site as the filter is engaged to the outlet, and the gas is released. This gas, when passed through the fabric-wrapped pipe, condenses into a liquid form, which is

then collected and whisked away. It is sold in the region for INR 50 a litre, at half the price of the market rate. Local gas stations have also been known to buy this stolen gas from the robbers, apparently to dilute their fuel reserves for some easy profit.

The Corporation operates about fifty wells in the Soraipung region, with the newest being dug just a month ago, along the route from the highway to the village. These wells are controlled by the Jorajan Gas Block, a sprawling industrial complex tucked west of the forest. Behind the industrial compound lies a towering flair pit, used to burn away the excess gas and impurities, the flames from the pit soaring up to forty feet. In winter, the elephant herd huddles around the flair pit, drawn by its warmth. During the monsoons, birds, some of whose calls Bijoy might recognize, encircle the blaze to dry their wings in its heat.

Ten kilometres from the eastern edge of Dehing Patkai lie the great collieries of Margherita.



“Collectivity turns into a repository of knowledge and that repository of knowledge can become a living archive. It doesn't only matter what we're doing in the now, but also what kind of basis or what kind of traces are we leaving for the future and how the work kind of builds up.”

from page 131

1882
Vittorio Paganini
Via delle Indie, 8
00198 Roma

Caro Paolo,

In un arrivo particolare, con signori eleganti
in attesa di ricevuti e garçons in attesa
di trasportare i nostri bagagli verso l'ultima
tappa del nostro viaggio.

La natura polverosa
costata di questa impresa, l'assenza di ma-donna e ambascia locali, la ricerca
di colline offese e un carico di quindici tonnellate di apparecchiature
museistiche, imballaggi indispensabili e di materiali, caricati in un luogo
che da via considerata non fuori dai centri della civiltà cinese, l'esperto di
imballare, assolutamente tutto il necessario per la costruzione della linea degli
stretti di uscita del carbone (cette il lavoro per la costruzione, sono solo alcuni
tra i nuovi ostacoli e inconvenienti che ci impongono ad affrontare e che quelli
rimangono dei nostri bagagli. Cerchiamo di tutto sufficienti a sopravvivere anche qui
non perdendo alla nostra impresa.

I Naga sono famosi per la loro abilità nel
disboscare la giungla e procurare legname.
Sembra che il taglio del carbone sulla superficie
delle colline non li preoccupi, ma sono invece spaventati
dallo scavare tunnel e dall'attività estrattiva.

Immagino un ponte per collegare
le rive del Dehing, sul
quale si annovereranno
presso le nostre carrozze,
a Doko ricando.

Cari saluti a Francesca e a tua madre,
Roberto

Elyla



DEVADEEP GUPTA

Found in the archives of *Assam Railways and Trading Company Limited* (ARNT), a letter believed to be written by Chevalier Roberto Paganini, an Italian engineer, to his son. Paganini was invited by the British company officials in 1881 to design and construct railway lines and colliery infrastructure in the town Makum, Assam, India.

The letter sheds light on the intimate, personal aspect of a colonial extractive enterprise, which we often learn about primarily through statistics and infrastructural perspectives in postmodern times in the context of the Indian subcontinent.

AR&T, enabled by the British East India Company, was established in 1881 to oversee coal extraction and syndication from Assam under British Rule. The company operated in Makum from 1886 till the 1950s, before its departure following India's independence and subsequently transformed into what we know as *Coal India Limited* today.

GIFT

Somewhen in the late 1880s, the indigenous hamlet of Makum was renamed Margherita by Chevalier Roberto Paganini, upon completing his work, in honour of Queen Margherita Maria Teresa Giovanna of Italy (1851-1926).

Interestingly, a year prior to Paganini's arrival in Makum, Pizza Margherita was "invented" by a local chef in Napoli, using the colours of the Italian flag in its ingredients, unsurprisingly to honour Queen Margherita's visit to Napoli during her reign.

The excerpts of the letter are laid here in parts so that you can tear them off and use them as you see fit. It's an artistic attempt to establish a network of shared concerns. At the same time, it is to emphasise that colonial extractive systems, illustrating instances of ecological violence, aren't isolated examples. Such acts, specifically European colonial extraction systems, have been commonly rehearsed, repeated, and reenacted across the world, whether

MOVING NARRATIVES

in the exploitation of gold mines in Egypt, mineral extraction in Palestine and Jordan, or French extractive interventions in Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria.

The dissemination of these excerpts is an attempt to engage with a network of shared concerns, knowledge, and strength.

The QR Code will lead you to a complete digital scan of the letter, along with its English translation.



I'm Elyla, a **cochonx chontalli barro-mestiza**.

I was born in a small village called Villa Sandino in the Chontales department of Nicaragua.

I've been working in Nicaragua for the past 14 years in grassroots organizations and activism in my community.

My name **El-y-la** means **him-and-she** in Spanish. I'm interested in recognizing gender as an apparatus of modernity that permeates life beyond the politics of the self or the colonial gender binary.

In Nicaragua, **cochón** is a term used to refer to dissident sexualities, and I speak from that space to foster an epistemology rooted in Mesoamerican localities.

Chontalli is derived from the name of my birthplace, Chontales, the land of the indigenous Chontal people. It is a word of Nahuatl origin that can be translated as "foreigner, outsider."

Barro means mud and speaks to our relationship with land and nature, calling for a return to earth-honoring practices.

Mestizaje/mestizo is a political identity that represents an ethno-cultural syncretism resulting from colonial imposition.

Chochonx-chontalli-barromestiza is woven into my being and shapes the lenses through which I explore artmaking.

My art practice is multidisciplinary and often moves between video performances, installations, photo performances, experimental theater, performative sculpture, and site-specific performance art interventions.

My early work dealt with queering the memory of leftist Sandinista politics and in 2013 I co-created the collective Operacion Queer/Cochona, working from the limits of art, academia and activism to intervene in the Central American region.

Methodologically, I often research the colonial traces within cultural traditions, such as dances, rituals, and carnivals to find new ways of understanding history and create pathways to boldly embedded futures. I've previously worked with cultural practices from Nicaragua like La Gigantona, El Gueguense, Torovenado, Baile de Negras, Carrera de Patos and, more recently, on the cultural phenomenon of cockfighting with a trans-oceanic research based project between Mesoamerica and South East Asia.

I'm currently in the early stages of co-creating a lifelong project alongside indigenous and queer leaders – Community Research Center for the Decolonization of Knowledge and Mestizaje – which is currently supported by the Prince Claus Fund's *Moving Narratives* Fellowship Program (2024). I'm committed to researching how decolonial reflections can lead to a community-based anti-colonial praxis in Central America while staying in critical dialogue with international networks of solidarity.

RIGHT Chontalli aquí, chontalli allá
Peregrinación chontal para una amatoria del no-pertenececer, 2023, Videoperformance stills, Courtesy of the artist



Territory: Chontales, Nicaragua

Brothers
They utter that I am strange, bizarre,
out-of-place
By these mountains it is said that the
rivers
are made of milk and the stones of
cuajada
But I seek honey to place underneath
my tongue

Chontal sisters of Mesoamérica
Have you thy arms and paths open?
Tell me, brethren
From which memories are borne
those of us who, before and after the
colonial wound s,
were exonamed as strangers?
Tell me the stories of those who resist
behind the glister of our eyes

I miss... the blooming rage
I miss... the sacred cry
I miss... the spirits of the forest ,
I strange
They utter, those who have lost them-
selves in the reflection of their selves

You see, over here, wherein the rivers
are made of milk and the stones of
cuajada, in reality, the rivers have
always been made of water and the
stones have been the grand-mothers

Ergo, I commence this Chontal trek
towards an amatory of the non-be-
longing

Poem: Elyla

Translation: Ramses Kunts

Territorio: Chontales, Nicaragua

Hermanos
Dicen que soy extraño, raro, fuera de
lugar
Por estas montañas se cuenta que
los ríos son de leche y las piedras son
cuajadas
Pero yo busco miel para poner debajo
de mi lengua

Hermanos chontaleños de Oaxaca
¿Tendrán ustedes sus brazos y camin-
os abiertos?
Cuéntenme hermanos
¿De qué memorias/historias nacemos
las que antes y después de la herida
colonial (llegada españoles) nos nom-
braban como extraños?
Cuéntenme las memorias/historias
de los que resisten detrás del brillo de
nuestros ojos

Yo extraño...la sana rabia
Yo extraño.... el llanto sagrado
Yo extraño.... los espíritus del bosque
Yo, extraño
Dicen, los que se perdieron en el refle-
jo de ellos mismos

Y es que, por aquí, donde los ríos son
de leche y las piedras de cuajada, en
realidad, los ríos siempre han sido de
agua y las piedras siempre han sido
las abuelas.

Por eso inicio a esta peregrinación
chontal para una amatoria del no
pertenecer

Lenongumiya: Tsome, Nicaragua

Pimaye
Diwayi nin tsome, eyga-onspola
Ijlta-a Ilijualey diwayi lan paney gi-ik
lifujka wagash y lapik gishnan'e.
Ma'iya gabey el gujuá gaponomma al
onjk'a gey pajl.

Pimaye tsome Ilijualaj pala.
¿Dojlwejme imank buk'o gamane y
lane gashiya?
Lu-ijla pimaye
¿jale gojltsina li-iwalepa lajl manta
li-ipa y lo-iya lishk'eya gashtilano,
lagipon'ga ogona gishans?
Lu-ijla laluyeygopa petsi Ilijl-omek'
lishpula dundilo lajl u-u.

Iya gashbejmojle... al bueno gashtuya
Iya gashbejmojle...lajok'iya gipashniya
Iya gashbejmojle...loyepa gawa
gimuk'o
Iya gashbejmojle
Diwayi, lejak'epojltsi lawejma gijltuga.

Ila-a, petsi lan paney gi-ik lifujka
wagash y lapik gishnan'e, al jlinka, lan
paney lipajma gi-ik aja y lapik lipajma
gi-ik la nana.

Dojli'ya gapangojma ijlt-a gawale-
goya tsome gajanajya al a-i gajlejma-
ley.

Translation to Tsome (Chontal)

Cipriano Vázquez Zárate
Roselia Vázquez Zárate

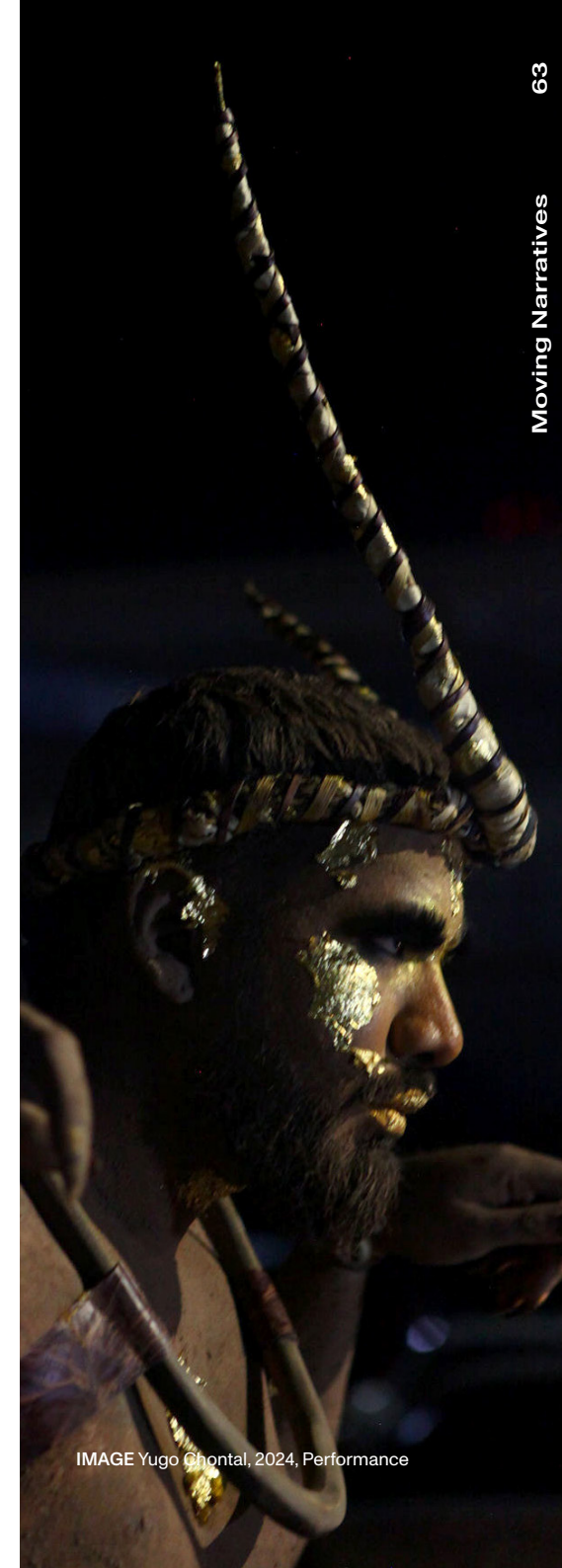


IMAGE Yugo Chontal, 2024, Performance

Research Center for De- colonization of Knowledge and Mestizaje

Nicaragua
ELYLA

For the last seven years, Nicaragua's socio-political system has been going through one of its most complex institutional crises. The resurgence of a series of internal colonialism narratives can be noticed in both the ruling party and its opposition. Both resort to the unambiguous concept of the nation-state and to nationalist pride as one-dimensional principles, negating the ethnic plurality and the cultural and identity diversity of the Nicaraguan grassroots.

As an artist, I recognize today the urgency of creating other ways of understanding our past, rethinking our present and forging new realities. I'm interested in opening up opportunities to do participatory research about how artistic methodologies and anticolonial pedagogies can hold by themselves the sensitivity required for a deep reflection: What does having and exercising human rights imply in the midst of a dictatorial regimen? How can we create a kind of activism that is more prudent and less confrontative? What would a silent yet with-hands-full activism look like today?

For that purpose, I invited some groups and individuals that I have identified as agents who are question-

ing the notions of *mestizaje* and who recognize the existence of gender and sexually diverse bodies beyond the right-left schema of the Nicaraguan political context to gather, sit around Grandfather Fire, and dream for a path forward with political care in our steps and truths in our hearts.

The idea is to be able to count on an initial initiative or project specially aimed at contesting the colonialist narratives through critical pedagogies, cultural practices and communal artistic methodologies. All of this with an interest in ethno racial issues, gender, sexual diversity, psychosocial diversity, and access to ancestral indigenous worldviews as a tool of resistance.

Participants of this process come from the diverse indigenous communities and territories in Nicaragua, including Matagalpas, Mayagna, Manque, Chontal indigenous people. To all of them, and to the ones who will join along the way, who are also us, we in this path, we honour.

"I'm a time weaver and a kinship weaver. There are more sessions/gatherings coming up. I'm simply facilitating connections in order to make way toward other realities. We are going to be thinking about shared territory based on care and containment, based on support and refuge, based on our diverse ancestries. I dream of a common space with more local people for us to listen to each other and to co-create" Elyla, *First Gathering* (February 2024).



Gatherings

Methodology reflections

Speaking from my experience

-excerpt-

As a methodologist who has accompanied this diverse group during two reflexive sessions in 2024, I find myself immersed in a profound methodological tension that challenges me to pause and reflect.

The group, comprised of sexual abuse and violence survivors, persons in processes of addiction and recovery, and indigenous peoples who defend their culture and worldviews, is faced with a reality that is marked by post-democratic dynamics.

The Central American post-democratic context, where political repression is a constant reality, requires that the activism that we are proposing be deeply reflexive. "With-hands-full activism", an activism proposal that is constructive, that steers away from direct confrontation but not from resistance, is essential at this moment. We cannot remain in empty denunciations, instead we must find ways to make proposals, to create, to transform, even in the midst of a hostile environment.

It is at this point that the dialogue between academia and the grassroots becomes particularly relevant. Academia offers valuable critical tools, but it is the grassroots that are able to resignify them based on their concrete experiences. At the same time, grassroots communities challenge academia to go beyond the theoretical

level, to become committed with putting it into practice and with the reality faced by those who are in the front lines of resistance.

This dialogue is essential for a critical pedagogy methodological process that is neither rigid nor elitist, but deeply connected with the struggles of the present.

e.d.m.

October 26 2024

Translation Reflections

-excerpt-

"the colonization of the Americas, Asia, and Africa could not have occurred without interpreters, both native and colonial, nor without the translations of effective texts, religious, legal, educational" (Venuti, 2002)

Among the reflexive moments that I have had around the translation process that I have been invited to do as a part of this initiative, I recently lived the following:

I remembered myself, translating as such, inhabited by my own history. But later, the people and the linguistic tasks that Venuti's quote alludes to began to make space for themselves in it, and I wondered:

In what ways am I inhabited in this process by the same acts of interpretation and translation that he mentions?

How is this an (in)direct product of those?

How can those, in the past, be (in) directly influenced by this one, from the present?

What does all of the above mean regarding the future?



objective not being to defy, but rather to respect. It is not about screaming through proposing a complex reading. It is about not silencing through striving for a smooth one.

That is what I understand by reparative translation (reading).

In addition to making explicit as much as possible the linguistic challenges and truths that I have mentioned, and to do it with the authors' consent, in what other ways can reparative translations be achieved I assume as a perpetual learning process.

What I am sure of, is that my own lived experiences, for which I consider myself a survivor, will continue to be central in guiding this process.

n.p.b.

October 28, 2024



For a moment, the vision turned into a sensation: I felt juxtaposition, overlap, simultaneity, synchronicity, atemporality; I felt something that gave me both the chills and drive, and I thought:

How could I represent that which these questions barely border on?

When it is necessary for them to make use of colonial languages, the oral and written texts that circulate outside the institutions and/or with transformative purposes, are in themselves a challenge to said languages.

In Latin America, these texts infuse the Spanish language with the linguistic characteristics of their realities and their proposals: created concepts and words; words, phrases and meanings that come from indigenous, afrodescendant and peasant communities, their languages and their linguistic particularities; words that have an autochthonous, diasporic, or local origin that have been integrated into Spanish and that a lot of the times are used, even daily, without there being an awareness around their origin, much less the specificities of said origin.

Thus, seeking to transmit the complexities of these texts through careful translations is essential in doing the texts themselves justice, but also in doing justice to the histories, to the pasts, to the presents, and to the futures.

The translation must seek to generate readings that reflect truths, even if they become uncomfortable due to this same reason. In other words, translating would imply going against eliminating complexities in favour of an easy and fast read. The central

ELYLA

GIFT

MOVING NARRATIVES

This is what it looks like when doves cry(O)w...

2024

Photo series

Image sizes: 11.7 in x 16.5 in

Courtesy of Galerie Barbara Thumm

Photo credit: Alejandro Belli

The series *This is what it looks like when doves cry(O)w...* is a visual journey of two white fighting roosters who, during their fight, seem to dance, fight, embrace, and care for each other. This match was a tie, and both survived. This photo-journey is meant to bring hope amid the difficulties we face as humans, navigating our rights to freedom among imposed political borders that push us into a ring to fight, instead of into a space that nurtures care and freedom for all.

Questions for reflections

1. In what way can ancestral cultural practices and empowerment with a trauma-sensitive focus contribute to the healing of pending historical matters in the communities of Central America?
2. How are the identities of indigenous people and of survivors of violence trauma articulated in a context where social representation is dominated by an internal and external colonial narrative?
3. What role does the possibility of a new proactive, adaptive and prudent activism (or artivism) play in the face of post-democratic dynamics that limit popular articulation?
4. How can the “shared territory” notion proposed in the reflexive sessions contribute to the revaluation of the indigenous and the violence survivor identities without falling into romanticized victimhood?
5. What are the main tensions between dissident identities (such as sexual diversity) and indigenous identities in the current cultural resistance context?
6. In what way can indigenous spirituality and critical pedagogy be a means to subvert the power dynamics imposed by the post-democratic system?
7. How can art, in its research and performative function, act in favour of indigenous identity reconstruction in the face of colonial and post-democratic narratives?
8. How do “knowledges without truths”

(outside of agreed-on truths)* evolve today within the emerging non-confrontational activist discourses?

Note

* The concept of “knowledge without truth” is used in qualitative social research to refer to all forms of subjective knowledge that oppose the aspiration to constitute a single universal truth. See: “Experiencias y metodología de la investigación participativa” (ECLAC, 2002) by John Durston and Francisca Miranda.

To read full texts of **Methodology reflections and Translation Reflections** with their original spanish version scan the following QR Code.



Ngoc Nau



I was born during a pivotal period in Vietnam's history when the country was emerging from years of war and colonization. I feel fortunate not to have faced the starvation, mass casualties, and constant threat of bombing that defined earlier generations. Yet, while armed conflict has ended, true peace remains elusive, overshadowed by the new economic wars reshaping our lives.

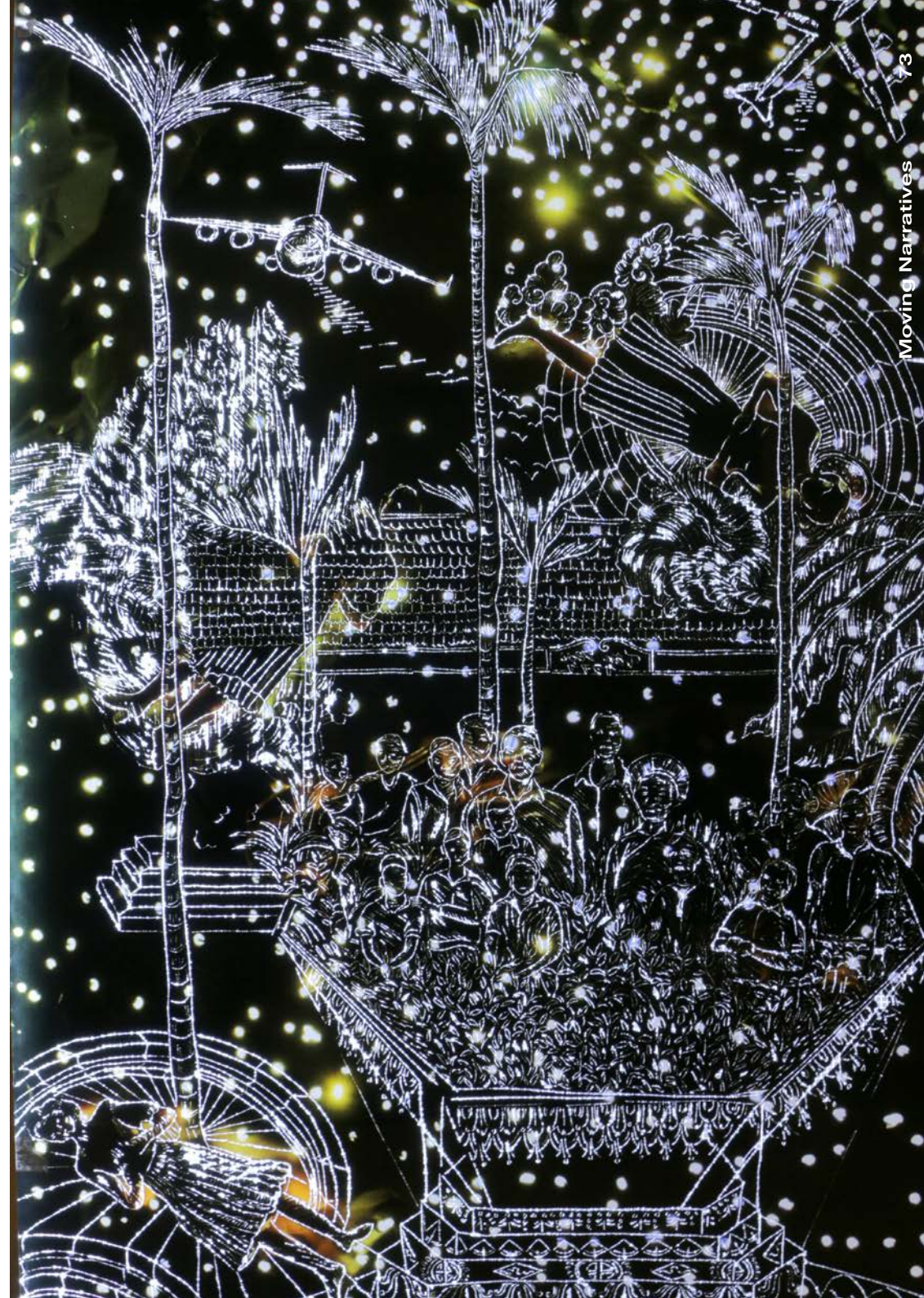
The challenges posed by industrialization have raised my concerns about the notion of "innovation" – a concept often dictated by powerful nations engaging in a race for global economic dominance. Though I come from a small province in northern Vietnam, my town relies heavily on mining resources to fuel high-tech factories abroad. I have witnessed firsthand how industrialization has reshaped the identity of my community, transforming our land and altering our way of life. This swift transition from a traditional lifestyle to a modern, technology-driven existence – propelled by capitalism – has deepened my curiosity about the contradictions within this shift.

Collaboration with my community is central to my work. In my locality, the harmonious coexistence of sacred temples and bustling factories has inspired me. It has prompted me to reflect on the evolving dynamics of relationships and interdependencies shaped by the community's changing context and emerging needs. My upbringing in a family steeped in the Mother Goddess ritual – a practice passed down through generations – has fueled my exploration of

social psychology and the shared consciousness within my community. Additionally, my experience working in a local high-tech factory has given me an insider's perspective on labour conditions and a visceral understanding of the challenges faced by my fellow workers. Building trust and understanding the struggles around me enriches my work, allowing me to authentically reflect the stories and experiences of those I encounter.

My artworks span a range of media, from photographic light boxes and video installations to augmented reality and holograms. I use movement, dynamic lighting, and rhythm to convey fragmented memories collected from diverse sources – the internet, ritual ceremonies, and personal connections with friends and family. Through these elements, I explore themes of the future, collective memory, and the human experience shaped by beliefs, desires, and political structures. My work invites audiences to question these narratives and engage in dialogue about the complexities of contemporary life.

RIGHT *Wednesday* is part of *The Silent Nights*, a series of seven lightbox artworks. Size: 85 × 60 × 2.8 cm. Photograph printed on acrylic sheet, ironwood. Year: 2021





This video was filmed during the Mother Goddess ritual ceremony. Before the ritual began, I asked the villagers to prepare in front of the green screen, which had been set up in a yard near the temple in my hometown.

Contingency

Paranoid

Reparative

Total War

Hegemony

Necessity

Subtraction

Curatorial Comment

Ngoc Nau's artistic practice is situated in layers of enduring violences that range from colonialism to exploitative labour and a land decimated by coal mining and commodified by mega tech corporations. Hers is a world in a state of ruination, gnawed away by technocapitalist extraction, but re-stitched and held together by rituals of spiritualism, sustenance, and love – rituals that persevere and shapeshift from their traditional forms, to take on strange hybrid appearances.

Though the subject matter of Ngoc Nau's work has quintessential global relevance, it is very much localized in her own family's history in Thai Nguyen in Việt Nam. It grapples with stories of adapting and surviving that her family and community have undergone across generations and the challenges they continue to face today. Though some of her work is invested in acts of excavating memories – like in the case of *Silent Night* (2021), a series of plexiglass light boxes where printed family photos are drawn over by scratching away at the surface to reveal the light and memories hidden underneath – mostly the artist's process is unapologetically additive: a weird palimpsest of seemingly irreconcilable elements forming a kind of animated magical world with no possibility of turning back.

The stuff of the artist's work hits close to home, often quite literally. In 2013, Samsung opened its reportedly largest plant in Southeast Asia right

alongside Thai Nguyen's rice fields and Ngoc Nau's family home. A year later, the workers were already protesting dismal labour conditions, but employment remained on the rise in the rural community as the plant brought on a whole new economic model and understanding of real estate. In 2021, Ngoc Nau embedded herself as an employee of the plant as a way to better understand working conditions as well as widespread fears of AI replacing human labour. She speaks of her colleagues at the plant, as she does of her family and larger community, as collaborators in her practice.

It makes sense then, that from her studio – set in the carcass of the now abandoned accommodations of Samsung factory workers in Thai Nguyen – the artist constructs her work in layers. She blends green screen and drone imagery, which she stages and shoots herself, with various kinds of CGI backdrops, lights, and floral overlays as well as with found material from documentaries, promotional videos, and advertisements. In her spatial arrangements, she often pairs a central film with other techniques and technologies old and new, each loaded with social and historical significance. From projection screens made of papier-mâché techniques used in traditional mask-making to fabrics embedded with mirrors used in religious ceremonies, from selfie light rings framing a series of videos played from devices propped on tripods to nifty augmented reality headsets where CGI rebels throw projectiles

alongside live-action footage of factory workers facing off with riot police.

This kind of embedded artistic research has historical precedence, for sure, but the resulting work does not read like your typical social practices in the arts. There is no elucidation about the specificities of the events at hand, nor is the artist's proximity to the various human or digital protagonists in her work clarified beyond a general sense of profound intimacy, love, and proximity. Despite the heavy subject matter, the work remains delightfully playful. Smooth-bodied avatars dance jerkily to irresistibly catchy electronic beats, while women in saturated colourful traditional garb apply rouge on one another's cheeks in preparation to deck out altars with offerings to Goddesses. The playfulness feels dead serious, almost tactical. It must either be a kind of strategy to dodge state censorship, or it may be a survival mechanism to protect herself and her community from the heaviness of dire quotidian conditions.

Another dimension in Ngoc Nau's work lies in her connection to the spiritual practices of Đạo Mẫu. She comes from a lineage of matriarchs devoted to this religion, which centres on the worship of the three Mother Goddesses who embody the heavens, water, and forests and mountains. Among the proponents of this religion are workers of the nearby mine and the Samsung plant: the places largely responsible for the extraction of the very nature the believers worship.

The artist frames some of the sacrificial offerings of Đạo Mẫu as a kind

of atonement for the financial gains the workers accumulate through their ungodly work. But as viewers we barely get a sense of the uneasy ethical underpinnings of the scenes at hand. Instead we are witnesses to a layering of very different kinds of rituals, from routinized movements of robots and workers alike to ceremonial practices and prayer, to yogic salutations within a post-industrial excavated landscape. Through these juxtapositions, we move beyond a safe, moralizing distance and into the thick of a more complex set of political and cultural negotiations, in a decidedly animistic world where old dualities have long fallen. Reason and techne, tradition and innovation, local and global, sacred and profane, sublime and routine, nature and technology ... all meld into one dilapidated landscape where life, struggle and beauty subsist in one way or another and where communities somehow still find sustenance and the will to fight in the reparative spaces they make for one another in the midst of a ruined world.

Haig Aivazian

“Critical fabulation serves as a tool to challenge mainstream perspectives, with an intention to provoke reflection on contemporary realities.”

from page 48



Open ChatGpt

Use this prompt to generate an image.

“Smart community, bright future, high-technology factory, land transformation, designed for humans, urbanization, another promise, creative innovation.”

Shared Pages Conversation | Collective Reading

**A conversation with
Abdul Halik Azeez,
Keren Lasme, and
Mariano Pozzi
Led by Haig Aivazian**

NGOC NAU

This is an image of the landscape behind my grandfather's backyard that was taken around 2010, before high-tech factories were built on it. I remember when I was a kid, I often liked to go there to hang out with my cousins. The stream was where many generations, like my grandparents, my mom, and other villagers, would go to catch fish or bathe for buffalo when they went to the farm.

GIFT

I would like to invite you to use ChatGPT to generate an image and see how technology could transform a landscape.

MOVING NARRATIVES

When I used to swim there, I could see how the water conditions were changing over time. I remembered it being very clear at first, but gradually, foam and bubbles started floating on top. Not long after, I heard that some factories were built nearby, not far from where I live, and the foam was coming from their waste. Then, in 2014, the Samsung factory was built right on top of this water stream. The entire green landscape of rice fields and bamboo trees around my grandparents' house was completely gone, replaced by concrete, housing, and highways. The water is no longer used for farming but instead serves those factories.

This conversation builds on discussions that took place during the chapter I led for *Moving Narratives*, which was principally structured around a text by American queer theorist Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading, or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think this Essay is about You.”

Sedgwick argues that too much of critical, cultural and historiographic practices is predicated on “paranoid knowledge,” a form of producing knowledge by revealing infrastructures of violence. Paranoid reading has a habit of “disavowing its affective motive and force and masquerading as the very stuff of truth.” Rather than maintain the supremacy of paranoia, Sedgwick calls for “historically contingent ways that strong theoretical constructs interact with weak ones in the ecology of knowing.” Instead of a paranoid reading, Sedgwick writes that “there are other features in queer reading that can attune exquisitely to a heartbeat of contingency.” This is one of the characteristics of reparative practices, which, unlike the negative and humiliating affect of paranoid reading (documenting the very tools of our own disenfranchisement), seeks to “assemble and confer plenitude,” “extracting sustenance from the objects of a

culture...whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.”

Based on a close reading of Sedgwick’s text, the chapter was dedicated to imagining ways to conceive of artistic practices and dispositions able to move past a logic of diagnosis, description, critique; to put together images, objects, organizations, that are rhetorically nimble and able to stir affect and energy in real time. One thread of inquiry was about finding forms of organization to help seek meaning in our daily lives in the face of duress and systemic dispossession. Collective study was one such format discussed in the chapter and enacted and embodied by the participants with a self-initiated reading group.

In this conversation, we delve more specifically into collective practices of reading, writing, and making, with each conversant sharing their own approaches and experiences. We also discuss various forms of knowledge production and dissemination that move past the sometimes rigid and canonical approaches to the sanctity of books and their contents.

This conversation, conducted online and through follow-up written exchanges, has been edited for length and clarity.

¹ Sedgwick builds on Silvan Tomkins’ affect theories and calls for an ecology of strong and weak theories. Strong theories are elegant concepts that can account for and encompass a large variety of phenomena, while weak theories are operative on a much smaller scale, much closer to the phenomenon they describe. A strong theory remains effective so long as the phenomena it describes are not changed, whereas a weak theory tends to call one to action to address the phenomenon. In this way, a weak theory is effective because it has the ability to change the phenomenon it addresses.

Haig: Maybe I can start us off with some very general thoughts. For me, what’s interesting about collective reading is that it is a form of study. It is one of many collective activities that people could opt to do. What happens when people study together, what kind of social space is that? What are ways in which we can come together and study in a kind of expanded sense and not fall prey to capitalism, basically? It’s not study at the university, with a professor and this kind of hierarchy, it’s not grading... It’s a very different kind of approach. Maybe this is one thread that I can bring into the conversation.

Halik: Listening to what you just said, I wonder if you can expand on this notion of what it means to read collectively. We are not simply talking about reading a text collectively because that could be a very localized event. Are we talking about a reading group? Or are we talking about a different formation or space? Reading not in the literal sense because, otherwise, it seems quite narrow. Right? I mean, that’s still interesting to think through what happens when you read a complex text, like Sedgwick’s, and how we can understand the politics and poetics, together. Just a question for us to think together.

Haig: I think it is about reading, like literally reading together and what that may open onto. Sedgwick alludes to close reading as a place of privilege for what she via others calls a kind of **weak theory.**¹

It also depends on what you’re reading. I think a lot of these seminal texts, people don’t sit and read alone. There’s this kind of idea that these texts were actually made to be read collectively because they’re made to mobilize people, to bring people together and think together around certain kinds of principles, ideas, ideologies. So, yes, I agree with you that it’s quite specific or punctual, but there’s also the possibility of an opening, perhaps a radical opening, that these seemingly simple formats might provide.

And it can be reading, it can be writing, it can be producing, it can be discussing. So I think I say this last bit just to say that I think it can be quite easily expanded to your practices.

Mariano: Keren, it was your proposal for the group to collectively read in preparation for Haig’s chapter, wasn’t it?

Keren: Right.

Mariano: And why did you propose that?

Keren: Because we were all meant to read the text. So I was thinking that it would be interesting for all of us just to read together and exchange ideas. You know, some of the concepts or the ideas were difficult to understand and we would just have a conversation and try to digest it better or, just bounce off of each other and not just read it on our own. So that was my main intention and also making the work less work-like. Just having fun, reading different parts, and bringing our ideas together.

Mariano: Yeah. Also to organize, not just to explain, to help each other understand more. The texts might be complex in some ways but also just to do it, to figure it out together. It's a way to organise our agendas as well because we are all doing different things. We all have our individual practices and maybe sometimes we will not find time to read something. So just finding one another, finding the time for collective interactions and just reading together was good. **What we do in those spaces sort of feels like a contention net, like a way to support each other. It's a way to go through content and not be alone.**² So that also applies to, I don't know, times of crises or political events. Like, it's a way not to be alone and to be together in something that can

be either challenging or demanding or stressful.

Haig: I think there's a couple of levels to that same idea for me. Like, so exactly what you're saying. Like some kind of like, uh uh, what did you call it? Like a...

Mariano: Contention net... Am I making this term up?

Haig: You may be translating from Spanish but I think the idea is quite clear.

Mariano: Hm.

Haig: Yeah. So there's, like, let's do something together. Life is fucked up. Let's be together and have some kind of focal point. After big upheavals, what happens with all of that energy, the losses, the gains, the euphoria, the depression, the horrible violence, etc.? What collective formats can we find just to find meaning in what we are already doing in our lives and to do so with other people?

And the other layer is that whatever struggles we are engaged in have histories. Other people have felt these thoughts, other people have fought these fights, other people have failed these failures.

Halik: Yeah, and that's I think what's also really

³ American poet and scholar engaged in critical theory, black studies, and performance studies

⁴ American activist and scholar engaged in Black studies, Culture studies, and art theory

⁵ The Packet came together as a way to offer mutual support in a stratified landscape in which many of us felt hemmed in, within it we explore new ways of producing work that refuse the categories imposed on us as artists from the Global South. Collectively held understandings of certain texts such as Moten and Harney's *The Undercommons* and Julietta Singh's *No Archive Will Restore You* have formed a powerful basis for ideas that give meaning to our collective practice.



⁶ *Read the Reading Room* is a series of workshops in which The Packet – a group of art workers from Sri Lanka – invites participants to “read” constellations of text (such as libraries, archives or collections of art books) together, in the process producing zines, which become composites of encountered textual and visual elements, mutual conversations, and personal archives.

² The *Moving Narratives* cohort in Manila, working on this publication while discussing initial designs and ideas for the *Moving (Pieces of) Narratives* poster.



interesting to me about what **Fred Moten³** and **Stefano Harney⁴** say when it comes to study. Defining study as “what we do with other people” and as what happens *outside the classroom* when the professor leaves.

With this **collective that I'm a part of⁵**, at some point, we read Moten together and the way we read is we don't really sit around and read a text together per se. Someone might share an idea from a book they read and relate it to a conversation we are having. And then I would start reading it, and so on. There have been several texts that have virally come into our collective through one person reading it and other people jumping on to it.

When we got to Moten, for example, we were living together in **this apartment⁶** in Colombo and, even before we read the text, we really wanted to create a space where we could just come together, cook dinner, and spend time with each other. When we began working as a collective, this became a “methodology” for us. We weren't necessarily articulating the actual purpose and then we started reading Moten and it retroactively gave us language for what we'd all already been doing and we were able to assign concepts to these things.

Haig: This is how texts find us. So we only find the text we need. Study is an inherently social space. It's a space that surpasses the kind of duress of things also; a space that looks to build things even in parts, a place for pleasure, even in hardships. I guess I'm going back to Sedgwick's reparative question, though Moten would never use the word repair I think. But it would be a reparative space in this way. A space that is not concerned with *them*, right? It's not about being concerned with who is after us or who's out to get us but it's about how we come together and are not consumed by the questions that are imposed on us by them. We pose our own questions and build our own social fabric.

Keren: And I think when you mentioned this idea that we read the books that find us, it made me think about bibliomancy. This is something that I've been thinking about a lot for the past couple of months and how to utilize that and bring the spiritual aspect of reading together or being together collectively. Like bibliotherapy as well. I went to this independent bookstore in Joao Pessoa, Brazil and found this book, *Bibliotherapy: The Healing Power of Reading*. So I was expecting to get, I don't know, something that has to do

with therapy but through books, through reading. But then I've been reading it and it has a lot on the Torah and how rabbis use the Torah and other sacred books to help the congregation understand things collectively. It's a lot about Hebrew etymology too. I was expecting to learn more about the healing power of reading in general but the focus is on religious texts. I guess I shouldn't be surprised since "biblio" in Greek means book and is also linked to the Bible and sacred texts. So I'm kind of pushing myself to read the book because I feel like there might be something that I would get out of it yet I'm reading it without much expectation. So these two words bibliomancy and bibliotherapy have been at the back of my mind for a few months now and how I can implement them inside my practice. I don't know what you think about that.

Halik: This thing of books finding us or some version of bibliomancy; It's again what I was saying about the difference between reading together, collectively bringing expertise related or unrelated to an act of understanding as opposed to a lecture and finding books or books finding us as opposed to what's the canon, what are the things that must be read, that we must know, this kind of vast knowledge. It's much more

organic: you acquire the knowledge that you need as opposed to the knowledge that you are supposed to know.

It's almost spiritual this idea of books finding you. It's an encounter. I'm thinking of books that have really stuck with me. Like *The Queer Art of Failure*⁷, which is one of those books that really changed my life about five or six years ago. It really related to these personal struggles that I was going through at the time, struggling to figure out if I was a success or failure because of the direction I chose in life.

And I don't really retain a lot of impressions from that book. There is this pressure that I need to remember these concepts and ideas but it's very difficult because, one, you're reading a lot but, two, you really want to sometimes just to enjoy a book, you're swimming in it and it passes through you and changes you or you hope it changes you. And then sometimes that's all that's left.

Keren: I think about this sometimes, what you mentioned about the fact that we don't have to remember everything or concepts but then we absorb them through our minds, our bodies. And sometimes, in a certain situation, something

7 A book of queer theory by Jack Halberstam



8 Reading as a practice and how to be in conversation with a book: Bits and pieces of a book after my study group and I practised *arpentage* and added our own interventions within the pages of the book.



triggers that information, which then reemerges into our consciousness when it's needed. It could be like a year from now or two or five years or one month. But that information is still there because we spend some time with the book, with the ideas and we might not remember it consciously but it's still there.

Haig: I'm trying to think of parallels between artists and readers: whether you read alone in a focused, quiet space like a library or if you are an artist, your studio is this closed space where you make work or whether you do it with people, with noise around, with kids around, in the street this, this and that. And I guess the third component would be the writers. Do you write in your quiet office, writing to yourself? Writers are also writing to people, no? They're writing with people because they also have taken information from others or referencing others or, you know, thought with others. Which means that books are written for people. So I think that we write to each other when we write, even if we don't know who that other is. We write to build a community, it's another kind of collective labour, even through time or through space. We are custodians of a certain knowledge. So we hold it momentarily, contribute to it, and share it.

Keren, can you tell me again the term in French of physically separating and distributing parts of a book to read it together?... *arpentage*, right?

Keren: Yes! I can actually show you guys **what the reading group I created this year in Abidjan did with Tiburce Koffi's essay, *Le mal-être spirituel des noirs***.⁸ So we tore every part of the book and ended up with multiple sections, mainly organized by chapter and then we read the book and at some point re-read some of the things that we hadn't understood, looked them up, and then we added other pages, quotes, references, and images. Someone added a picture from a film, you know? And so if, for example, someone else came to read it, there are all these references to go back to. So we were literally rethinking reading as a practice, right? And what can we do with a book in itself, like the material aspect of the book and how we can study together. So that was the *arpentage* experiment. You get together and you literally rip the book apart. Each person gets a section and then they sort of read it on their own, intervene in the text and then come back and share with the group. The sharing happens in different parts at different moments. The first thing that happens is that we just tear the book, share

the loose pages among ourselves, then break out and read our part and then come back together, form smaller groups, and share the chapter that we read and, finally, we come back together as the whole group to share and compile.

And then we meet another time to go into the details, piecing things together, writing questions, bouncing off ideas, thinking about to what degree can collective reading enhance our ability to apply this idea from the text to our own political context? How can those ideas be put into practice?

We ended up producing a zine in response to us reading this essay and each member of the reading group got a copy.

To continue our exploration, I organised a talk, “for a poetic of spiritual revolutions,” for which I managed to have the author, **Tiburce Koffi**⁹, join us for a conversation. He also received a copy of the zine. We wanted to show him how we engaged with his words and with the materiality of the book. We also wanted to extend the conversation to other people who were not part of the study group.

Halik: I love the breaking of the authority of the book, you know, because the book form has so much and it can be

intimidating when reading this book with all its notes, its type-set. Maybe it's not intentional but it has a certain authority and I love you starting with just tearing it apart and you're inviting people to sort of just fuck with it, right?

And you're writing into the book and making it your own, essentially. I think you could also argue that you're just incorporating the book into your own writing in a way. We do something similar, we call it “**Read the Reading Room**” with **The Packet**, my collective¹⁰. We have this library of art books and zines and work with other libraries, which we invite to make a zine out of the things they see in our reading room. So we spend four hours, sometimes more, sometimes less and then we encourage people to just go and photocopy stuff so we don't destroy books but we extract from books, we combine different books, we encourage people to use their own archives, their own images. Some people even use things like leaves and other kinds of photo material and then magazines that have weird shit in them. It ends up being something that's impossible to reproduce. We're not necessarily unpacking a single book in such and such detail and really paying homage to what the book is talking about. We generally think of libraries

¹⁰ Read the Reading Room is a series of workshops in which *The Packet* – a group of art workers from Sri Lanka – invites participants to “read” constellations of text (such as libraries, archives or collections of art books) together, in the process producing zines, which become composites of encountered textual and visual elements, mutual conversations, and personal archives.



⁹ KOKOBA study group members discussing with prominent Ivorian writer Tiburce Koffi.



as agglomerations of different texts and how they speak to us as a whole.

Haig: Mariano, I'm thinking about stories as being this way also. Like when you're telling people's stories, you clearly take them and you retell them in your own way, in a way that fits your own interest. You probably pick details that you find more resonant, significant with whatever it is that you're searching for. But they're also not your stories. They are these things that pass through you. And they affect you and you affect them, they don't stay the same. I'm just trying to think through these different forms of intervening in whatever literature and stories, whatever you want to call that body of content.

Mariano: In terms of storytelling, I'm picking up pieces of stories from around me, from sociopolitical and historical contexts in Argentina mainly. But also when you were talking a moment ago about writers in terms of books or literature because, in my case, in my own practice, I don't precisely write literature but we do write things that are meant for a different device, a screen. Or maybe if you write for plays, which are meant to be featured on stage. I was thinking about this when you were asking, when do you write? Do you write alone or do

you write with people around? And I think literature is a more lonely means of writing, like book writers often write alone and it's very different when you write a script or a play where it's a more collective writing practice, for me at least.

So I was trying to figure out forms of collective writing. Also Keren, when you were showing the pieces of written books because you were also collectively writing or rewriting or commenting on them, I was thinking of other formats of writing that can be done collaboratively that are not just like books or literature or narrative or academic writing.

So to map ways or possibilities to do things or write things/read things collectively. I barely write alone in my case but I mostly read alone.

Keren: And how does that work? collective writing...writing together.

Mariano: I mean, in the same way we were talking before about how collective reading can be a safety net. That's what I found in collective writing. I think that's the motivation. One of Besa's questions to us was, “How does collective reading function as an opportunity to come together, share knowledge, and discuss our

learning in a communal setting?” Collective writing works like that for me, especially when we write characters. It’s a way to have another point of view, which is biased with different contexts, political views, etc. So in the same way we can codify a text by coming together, we can expand the way we write when we write together.

Keren: But concretely, how does it work? You write and then you share the ideas?

Mariano: There are lots of formats. **When we do it in a professional setting, for example, we sit together on a table and we write and we doodle and we just brainstorm and then we write it down**¹¹,

exchange sheets, and we write over another person and we correct one another’s contributions and so on. Maybe it is not so different than the physical interventions that you were talking about, Keren, in describing the *arpentage* workshops or you Halik with your reading room activities with your collective.

Keren: Collective writing as obvious as it could seem is something that I never heard of or thought about until now. Thank you for bringing that into my consciousness, Mariano. It definitely goes hand in hand with collective reading and

I also find it interesting that collective writing is for you a methodology, an aspect of your creative process that leads to a specific artwork and I am drawn to say the same for me in the sense that collective reading becomes a tool, an excuse for coming together and creating.

¹¹ Beat system for the 'May the Last Day Be for Us' series, collaboratively developed during the project's initial stages. This later became the foundation for the series script.





That's just a dirty word they use to describe people who aren't insane.²

“... surprises allow for new understanding and also open up deeper hope and appreciation... Someday, we will create something together...”

from page 43

Abdul Halik Azeez



ABDUL HALIK AZEEZ

GIFT

MOVING NARRATIVES

That's just a dirty word they use to describe people who aren't insane.

1. On a mural in the catacombs of a Buddhist temple in Matara, south Sri Lanka, the Buddha is warding off a demon.

2. Fallout, S01E07 (*The Radio*), 11:05, Amazon Prime, 2024. Lee Moldaver: "I'm not a communist, Mr. Howard, that's just a dirty word they use to describe people who aren't insane"

An artist statement / *confession/speculative fiction* / [many] self-witnessing attempted *constructed* along a suggested framework by Rohit Goel, who posits a way of writing an “artist statement” that considers five “movements.”

Movement 1 – Existential/eternal time. The subjective/objective experience. Why are you an artist and not a philosopher/plumber?

Years of desk jobs had punctured my soul, my spiritual essence was leaking out. In one of my unsupervised corporate jobs in a large, inefficient phone company, I began to write a blog. Emerging from years in the corporate, media, development, and academic spheres, my forays into journalism and academia had stunted my imagination. I felt like I was always either exhausted by constantly speaking back to power, adding to the news cycle, or engaging in bureaucratic forms of knowledge production: my art practice articulates approaches to knowing and existing that embrace “unreason” favouring the spiritual, affective, and ephemeral over the rationalist and empirical. This involves heightened sensitivity to historical processes, particularly those obscured by popularist and state-sponsored narratives. In order to channel my anger and disillusionment about the world in a productive way, I naively wanted to “make a difference,” or just find catharsis in the process. I look for evidence in the ephemeral and the marginal such as popular culture, oral histories, photographs, and discarded objects.

Movement 2 – Contemporary time. The present. What am I currently working on? Movement 2 is a “pivot,” it “charges.”

With time I set about “polluting” my previous notions of what constituted rigorous research with elements borrowed from child play; mixing and matching, playing with building blocks to make fantastic, seemingly nonsensical structures. My work is a space to speculate and daydream in public through play, archival excavations, and conversation. And I found myself thinking, wow, wouldn’t it be very cool if there was a way I could mess around like this for a living, or at least most of the time with meaning? My projects think through institutional practices of knowledge production and their repercussion on processes of history-making, memory, and identity. I am interested in nostalgia as a driving force for both constructions of the past and desires for the future. Only much later did I realize that there was a name for this sort of thing, it was called an “art practice.” I work across multiple mediums such as film, publication, photographs and installation, and modalities of speculative fiction, critical fabulation, and faux/documentary interventions.

In Sri Lanka’s charged post-war climate, after the decimation of the Tamil separatist struggle, Muslims were targeted as a new enemy. *Desert Dreaming*, for instance, documents output from an alternative universe, Despite their centuries’ long presence on the island, they were suddenly regarded as “alien,” perceived

to have become “Arabized,” in which Sri Lankan Muslims have landed on an alien planet called New Serandip (derived from “Serandip,” an ancient name for Sri Lanka given to it by Arab West Asian and North African traders). As I resisted these forms of racism, I simultaneously began to experience a sense of deep discomfort with abuses of power within my own community. As they confront a sense of otherness within alien landscapes and peoples, they negotiate differences, adapting their bodies, cultures, and faith in ways that commingle, transform, and are transformed by their environments.

I like to think that 9/11 ended up radicalizing me after all but not in the way I feared. It introduced me to a new category of Muslim, born in the USA and exported to Sri Lanka. The work draws parallels between hyperlocal and personal experiences of Muslimness, vis-à-vis its tensions with the desire for global group feeling. He (it was always a he) wanted my Muslimness to man up. “Which side will you choose?” I was either with him or against him. I centre my explorations around an interest in masculinity, notions of religious purity, heritage, and ideas of progress. Maybe it is my refusal of both alternatives that has helped bring me here today; both a practicing artist, and a practicing Muslim. I navigate the duality, or lack thereof, between what is global and what is local by finding intricate pathways of using stories, myths, popular culture, and ephemera.

Movement 3 – Teleological/historical time. What you have done in the past that has prepared you to

do what you are doing now. After the war Sri Lanka wanted to catch up to all the economic capital it had lost and set about trying to make its largest metropolis a “world class city.” In my exploration of urbanization in Colombo, for instance, This resulted in a swathe of militarized violence being levelled against low income communities I’ve analyzed the repercussions of erasing an “ugly” pre-modern facade in favour of a more “modern” and “beautiful” city by taking a cue from Umberto Eco’s notion of “semi-ological guerilla warfare.” I thought I could make an impact by archiving a disappearing visual culture of the past embedded in commercial billboards, packaging, and consumer goods.

In you are enough for someone to love, it’s true, I speculatively connect trance possession, traditional rituals of healing, social media, and mental health. “Madness” is any state that is non-normative, that undermines the status quo: Can trance states (in Sri Lankan tradition a vehicle for the expression of repressed emotions in marginal groups) be reproduced on social media platforms such as TikTok? In traditional healing ceremonies, the love of one’s community is as much a part of the healing as the rituals meant to ward off demonic possession. Maybe you find the modern conception of work intolerable, or you are compelled to take up arms against an oppressive state. Today we seek community healing through the logic of competition for likes and shares, dependent on the benevolence of the algorithm.

It was partly the aching need for

community that made me embrace collaboration. Collaboration and thinking together with others form a core part of my broader practice. In 2019 I co-founded *The Packet*, we came together out of a sense of frustration of not being able to truly express ourselves within a stratified art world dominated by a neo-colonial gaze aiming to cultivate spaces for independent discourse and practice for emerging Sri Lankan artists. Since then, our efforts have persisted in creating an environment of care and collaboration. But as our practice emerged into an art world which was ready and waiting to uphold decolonial community as a new product, Together we resist hegemonic notions of how artists it seemed to preemptively co-opt our “resistance: from the Global South must produce work for an overarching, often Western-centric art world, and instead foster a voice that stays true to the hyperlocal. We like to joke about how in late capitalism, community has become art.

Movement 4 – Speculative Future. I need to do (Movement 2) so I can do THIS. I need to finish this work (Movement 2) in order to do something else. [“Self-witnessing as opposed to confession” – Mark Teh].

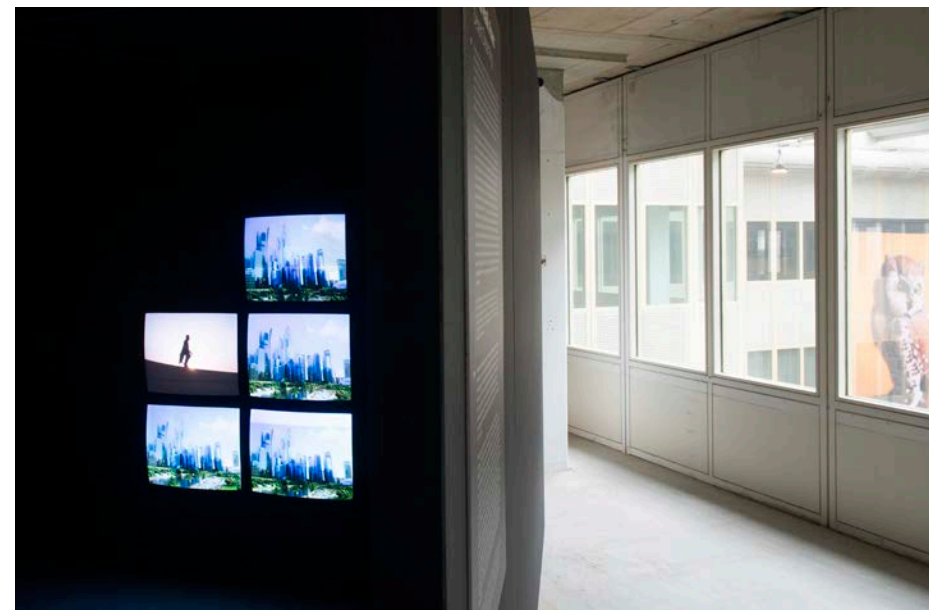
The future fills me with unnameable dread. The future fills me with uplifting trust in the Divine. All I want from the future is to continue to continue. All I want from the future is to find the apotheosis of arriving within myself, the singularity... farming my own veg-

etables...prolific artistic output...living alone in the wilderness...sleek expansive studios...a learned asceticism...hundreds of assistants...medi/levitating in a cave...exponentially growing market value...growing old nurturing wild goats...millions of

N/A

Movement 5 (optional) – this is why I work with these mediums (!) or a recapitulation of the preceding arguments.

Pass



ABOVE *Stranger in a Strange Land* (2023), five channel video using five stacked CRT screens (duration 26:12), from the series *Desert Dreaming* (2019-ongoing), installation view, Breda Photo, 2024. PHOTO COURTESY Breda Photo and Ron Magielse



ABOVE *Great World Atlas* (2024), Photographs and digital collage, various dimensions, from the series *Desert Dreaming* (2019-ongoing), installation view, Asia Pacific Triennial, 2024. PHOTO COURTESY Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art and Joe Ruckli

Intersecting Experiences Across Time and Space

A reflection on
“Stranger in a Strange Land”

Besa Luci

For our first gathering in Amsterdam, fellows shared parts of their work and practices as gifts to one another. The day turned into more than just an introduction; it became a space for deepening our understanding of each other as practitioners and for exploring how our practices might intersect or connect.

This is what I began reflecting on when Halik invited me to prepare a reflection on his work “Stranger in a Strange Land.” The text below is what I shared with the cohort that day.

In her chapter, “*Insurgent Practices in Times of Total Wars*,” Samia invited us to explore our practices as potential “insurgent practices”; to identify their features; and think whether they connect and communicate with other insurgent practices elsewhere.

I would like to talk of Halik’s gift within this framework, specifically considering how it might be construed as an insurgent practice.

As a multimedia artist from Sri Lanka, Halik’s upbringing within and as a member of an ethnic minority shaped

his perspective and artistic expression. His work often delves into contemporary issues surrounding Muslim identity and politics, particularly within the context of Sri Lanka where the Muslim community is frequently marginalized and misrepresented.

He seeks to deconstruct monolithic perceptions of Islam and challenge both external prejudices and internal conservative tendencies within the community.

In Halik’s own words, “*in the complex intersection of xenophobia and conservatism lies a multi-layered narrative*.” It is within this intersection that I posit Halik’s practice as an “insurgent practice,” wherein the complexities of identity, faith, personal agency and societal expectations are explored. Meanwhile, I read one such multi-layered narrative in the gift that he shared with us today, which he has titled *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

I had the chance to talk to Halik about this particular work. I got to learn more about what he remembers about his teen years, a time when he would turn to heavy metal music. As he conveyed to me, it was a time of angst, frustration, and pressure to perform different roles — be it in relation to his faith or to when all of a sudden, he found himself removed from his extended family and expected to comply and deliver within the growing capitalist system in capital Colombo.

Metal music provided him a catharsis, as there he found solace, particularly by seeing it as a spiritual outlet, one that invites contemplations about the meaning of life. He had always wanted to do a Metallica video clip,

and the gift we witnessed today is a result of that desire.

Within such contexts, I read his work as a protest, a struggle, one that is internal first. A struggle to become, to preserve the self while entering spaces that are often, at least understood as strictly defined, pre-determined, stripped of nuance — unchangeable. He is a stranger finding his way and seeking to position himself, to find a place in a land that is also strange, unknown, perhaps unaccepting.

There is an instant clash in his video. The blasting sound of a metal song, which somehow imposes a sense of urgency, a sense of rush that starkly contrasts with the scenes where he is visiting, passing by. He wanders in ruins — perhaps to mark a loss or perhaps to point to a possibility.

The lyrics of the Metallica song *Eye of the Beholder* echo this struggle for freedom — a critique on norms, values, practices, relations that limit our choices and speech, creating a feeling of “conditioned liberty.” As the lyrics go:

“Independence limited

Freedom of choice is made for you,
my friend

Freedom of speech is words that
they will bend

Freedom no longer frees you.”

Yet for Halik, in the gift, he is probing with the multiplicities of uncertainty, in his personal relationship with faith and the world, and particularly as a result of the different spaces occupied and markers embraced.

As such, the subject, in this case Halik himself establishes himself as someone who is deeply curious to

learn, to explore the spaces he is in, open to understand them, but also as someone who does not merely accept those spaces as they are. Rather, he brings himself in them, he complicates these spaces and insists on preserving what makes him who he is. The video becomes one about belonging, but not assimilating. It is a call to view belonging as a process in which one is encouraged to nurture differences and not to erase them.

He is alone in spaces that are usually communal. He is the individual in spaces designed for the collective, expected to be inhabited by many. As such, he seeks to understand and find freedom, not as a notion defined by others — be it ancestors, those in power, or more immediate, closer collectives. He seeks freedom not by mimicking others.

And this journey, as rewarding as it can be in the end — is a difficult one, often characterized by solitude, exhaustion, disappointment. While it is one to be celebrated and recognized, it is not to be exoticized — and Halik manages to make this distinction clear, by depicting his journey as one that is both ugly and beautiful; light and difficult.

He struggles. He is walking backwards; he is turning on himself; he is exploring his relationship with the Sun, which in Islam represents various concepts, including guidance, enlightenment, and the passage of time; he attempts a journey to see God yet is fired by comets. Amidst the vast desert landscape, he grapples with identity and authenticity, navigating his path alone.



There are many more elements that speak to the uncertainties Halik is questioning.

Such uncertainties can be personal, yet they are also shared by millions of people who are or have been in similar positions to Halik, people who have to fight to belong; to express freely; to be who they are.

And joining back to how our practices can communicate with insurgent practices elsewhere.

Halik's gift made me think about the 1990s in Kosovo.

When Slobodan Milošević rose to power in Serbia in the late 1980s and initiated nationalist wars across

Yugoslavia, an apartheid-like system was imposed in Kosovo; this involved systemic discrimination against Albanians, marked by mass dismissals from public institutions, exclusion from education, suppression of cultural identity, and police brutality.

During this entire decade, metal music, and specifically Metallica, similarly provided catharsis to young people; it provided a platform for young Albanians to gather, express themselves, and voice their aspirations for freedom.

I remember in 1991, when schools in Albanian language were shut down. Together with my first-door neighbor, we replaced the classrooms we

could not attend with self-improvised "recording venues". Her bedroom became the space where we would make music videos, including those of us headbanging to Metallica and other heavy metal bands. I was replicating what my teen sisters at the time were doing. I have a vivid memory of the happiness I felt when at the age of 10 or 11, I went to my sister's birthday party and she encouraged me to show "my skills" – demonstrating my adeptness at headbanging. I proudly got to "perform" and as a kid I wanted to feel accepted to their "cool clique."

Only later, growing up, did I get to more fully understand why metal music and headbanging were so important for that generation. For a genera-

tion of the time, Metallica's music and lyrics provided a way to understand, question and confront topics of alienation and justice, and to rebel and defy just as well.

We were also positioning ourselves, finding a place for us to be who we are, despite the fact that the opportunities were shrinking, and our mere existence was rejected. Like Halik, we were also revolting by existing.

For many, myself included, it also led to exploring and establishing practices, not only to remember but also to reimagine. Today, together with Halik, we are connecting across experiences, time and space.

Keren Lasme



“Whenever you’re trying to navigate the ethics of representation and a transborder type of solidarity, you also care for the way the territory itself wants to be heard, represented, cared for, taken care of.”

from page 30

*i am telling stories of long lost forgotten histories
stored in the primal sound of our long-lost oral history
please sit around the fire
and let the children from here and elsewhere
sing the song of your soul
so that you can re-member why we do the things we do*

These opening sentences, incantations or spells if you wish, are like seeds from which grow the roots, the trees, the flowers and the fruits of my artistic and creative practices. They are about stories and storytelling, one of the oldest artefacts human beings conjured as a way to make sense of the world around them. There is something enchanting, sacred, regenerative and healing about them: the way they are woven, how they are delivered and the message they carry. Long ago, the stories I chose to become intimate with — those written, chanted, spoken, danced, and sung by great African minds — led me to re-member what I was made of and where I stand inside/with the world(s) around me and within me. I am an aesthete first and foremost, then a cultural worker practising inside the realms of knowledge transmission, engaged pedagogy, and worldbuilding. KOKOBA: Meeting Our Griots/À la Rencontre de Nos Griots, the vortex through which I harness the power of storytelling, is multimodal, ever-expanding/ever-evolving and is a sacred container for African literatures and literary arts.

An encounter with Rogo

At the peak of a Parisian winter in March 2022, I visited Togolese storyteller and scholar in African theatre Rogo Koffi Fiangor. He wholeheartedly opened his home in Fontenay-sous-Bois for KOKOBA's first encounter/*rencontre*. In a jovial and playful atmosphere, he took me on a fantastic journey into the realms of African folktales, songs, and storytelling. While doing so, he emphasised with great sensibility, the importance of community, forgiveness, reconciliation, respect, and the art of communicating when it comes to conflict resolution. Here, you will find fragments of our conversation presented in a non-linear way and woven with textured polaroid films, songs, childhood memories, humour, and esoteric wisdom, all of which were rooted in a call and response with words pertaining to storytelling.



Fragment 1

When I hear conte (tale), the first thing that comes to my mind is the radio shows I used to listen to with my family on Saturday evenings in Togo when I was a teenager. The whole family would gather around a battery-operated radio, so we had to make sure we had fresh batteries before the show began, which lasted a good hour or an hour and a half. It was done in Ewe, my mother tongue and mixed with Mina, the most popular language in southern Togo.

Fragment 2

The essence is what your mediator tells you. "It seems your cows went into my field and destroyed everything. I won't have a harvest. My family will be hungry by the end of the season. You have to compensate me." That's what is retained. Meanwhile, the person who made the accusation said, "I don't understand why an idiot of a herder, hired by this man who thinks he's the





Fragment 3

Ah, this formula — that's a secret! *Korobozi Koroboza*, which I use at the beginning, in the middle, and throughout all my performances, is a phrase that was given to me in a town in Côte d'Ivoire called Dabou. This formula is a play on language and I also play with it — *Korobozi! Koroboza!, Korobozi! Koroboza!, Robozi! Roboza! Ziza!* For me, it's a phrase that not only awakens but also brings a communion of spirit. *Korobozi* gathers everyone around the story. It's a concentration of spirits, and that's where the spiritual dimension comes in. Because storytelling is a world of convention, where animals speak, trees sing, and everything comes alive. To enter this world of convention, you have to open a door. The key to that door is *Korobozi*.

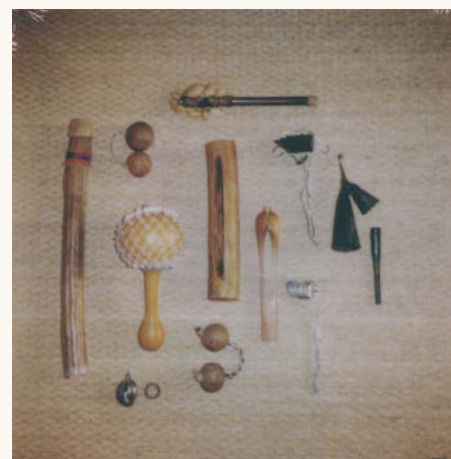


richest in the world, keeps expanding his herd. And all these idiots around him, bowing down to him, do not tell him that he needs to graze his cattle far from the fields, in areas where there are no crops. And they come and eat our crops as if we meant nothing to him. Does he think that because he's rich, he can fix everything with money?" That's what he said, and that's what everyone heard. But the mediator says, "It seems your cows went into the field and destroyed the crops." And that really seduced me, to know that there's this culture where words are inside stairs — you see, they go up, they come down. And there's a balancing act so that everything becomes levelled at the end of the process.

And I think that's something fundamental, which deserves to be studied, developed, and even fully established as a practice.

Fragment 4

So, I'll start with the gongon. It is one of the oldest traditional instruments, known since the time of African migrations from Egypt to their arrival on the West African coast, passing through the Kingdom of Ife, the Kingdom of Benin. Firstly, the gongon sanctifies the work of blacksmiths because it is made of iron, forged with anvil, hammer, and fire. Everyone recognized the strength and power of blacksmiths in all traditional cultures. Not only do they work with fire, but fire endows them with a special power — the power of the vodun Hevioso, the god of thunder and lightning. Blacksmiths create all the tools that farmers use in their various trades. This instrument holds such strong symbolic meaning for me that I use it at the beginning of most of my performances. The gongon is the instrument that announces the palaver; it is the instrument that allows the *gongonneur* (the one who plays the gongon) to summon people under the palaver tree.



Fragment 5

*I sowed a small field of tiger nuts.
Dzahidi (soaked by a light rain)
A pregnant woman passes by.
Dzahidi (under the light rain)
She asks me to offer her some of my
tiger nuts (under this light rain).
I gladly give her some of my tiger nuts
(under the rain).
Then, she calls for heavy rain to fall on
my field (to replace the light rain).
From this, the blessing comes to me
(with abundant rain).*

terro
ou
corps,
ts,
ples,
s,
ouffrance à
res qui est



a zine-dossier: for a poetics of spiritual revolutions

a selection of visual meditations
created by KOKOBA's study group
participants: Alloua Maëlys Ediaho,
Astride Yaoba, Lyra-M. Akissi Ouattara,
and Soapis. they were born out of a
collective reading of *Le Mal Être Spi-
rituel des Noirs* (*The Spiritual Malaise
of Black People*, 2011), an essay written
by Ivorian author Tiburce Koffi.



La souffrance,
La souffrance d'une terre
La souffrance de l'eau
La souffrance d'un corps,
La croyance,
La croyance des morts,
La croyance des peuples,
La croyance des êtres,
La puissance,
La puissance de la souffrance à la croyance,
c'est de dire aux autres qui est Dieu.

ALLOUA MAËLYS



Toute parole est parole; la parole est
facile et difficile.
Qui veut parler, doit parler clair et
vrai.



Si l'histoire que j'évoque est vraie, ils
ont dit vrai; si elle n'est pas vraie, je
n'ai pas menti, ils ont menti

LEFT Zine cover. TOP RIGHT États d'âme, Alloua Maëlys. MIDDLE To a Black dancer, Soapis.
BOTTOM LEFT as of dreaming about reclaiming our spiritual, remember the language of plants, Lyra-M. Akissi
Ouattara. BOTTOM RIGHT KASA BY A KASA, Astride Yaoba

Un chant-poème to speak of Keren's practice

*It would have
necessitated*

*A thousand moons
To open the doors
At least,
And a thousand
footsteps to get in the
waters.*

I first encountered Keren's work in 2022 during an exhibition centred around West African women photographers, curated by Aya Editions at La Case Bleue in the town of Grand-Bassam. It was a poetic piece of photography, part of a series titled *The mundane yet extraordinary life on the Coast of Ivory*, a collage juxtaposing two different images that had a sense of "presence." As both an artist and a curator, it spoke to me as an attempt to capture the immaterial. Reaching out to her to understand the work was the next step. She told me: "In my practice, I like to experiment with stitching worlds together."

I have been developing an essay around the omnipresence of symbols in West Africa's contemporary art production and aesthetics, specifically rooted in the cosmogonies, myths, folktales, and spirituality; Tiburce Koffi, an Ivorian scholar, agreed to call with me the manifestations of a "traditional West African surrealism."

Keren first comes to me as one of the Ivorian artists carrying that essence in her work, implementing a sense of surreal, of reverie, in her photography and video practices. She

suspends time in silence, with contemplation turning into trance.

Later, when I started participating in Kokoba's study group, I realized:

When suspended in the mists of reconnection, navigating through imagination and rêverie with texts and experiences related through books, one's capacity to re-approach the self is called out.

Thus, with projects on African literature, she's making space for people locally, continentally, and internationally to encounter part of their identity.

*When the seeds
will open*

*Bring along
Keys
past the flames
Flames*

*There's a tale long told in
certain areas of earth
Where years of rains have
transformed landscapes
and where land used to
Speak*

Providing

*As birds used to pass the
word*

As air was breathing

You could hear,

Couldn't you?

It was said

Said

This story was never to tell out loud

Never spoken

But still

Still ~~~~~

Known

You could

Hear

But across the paths,

You could not speak until

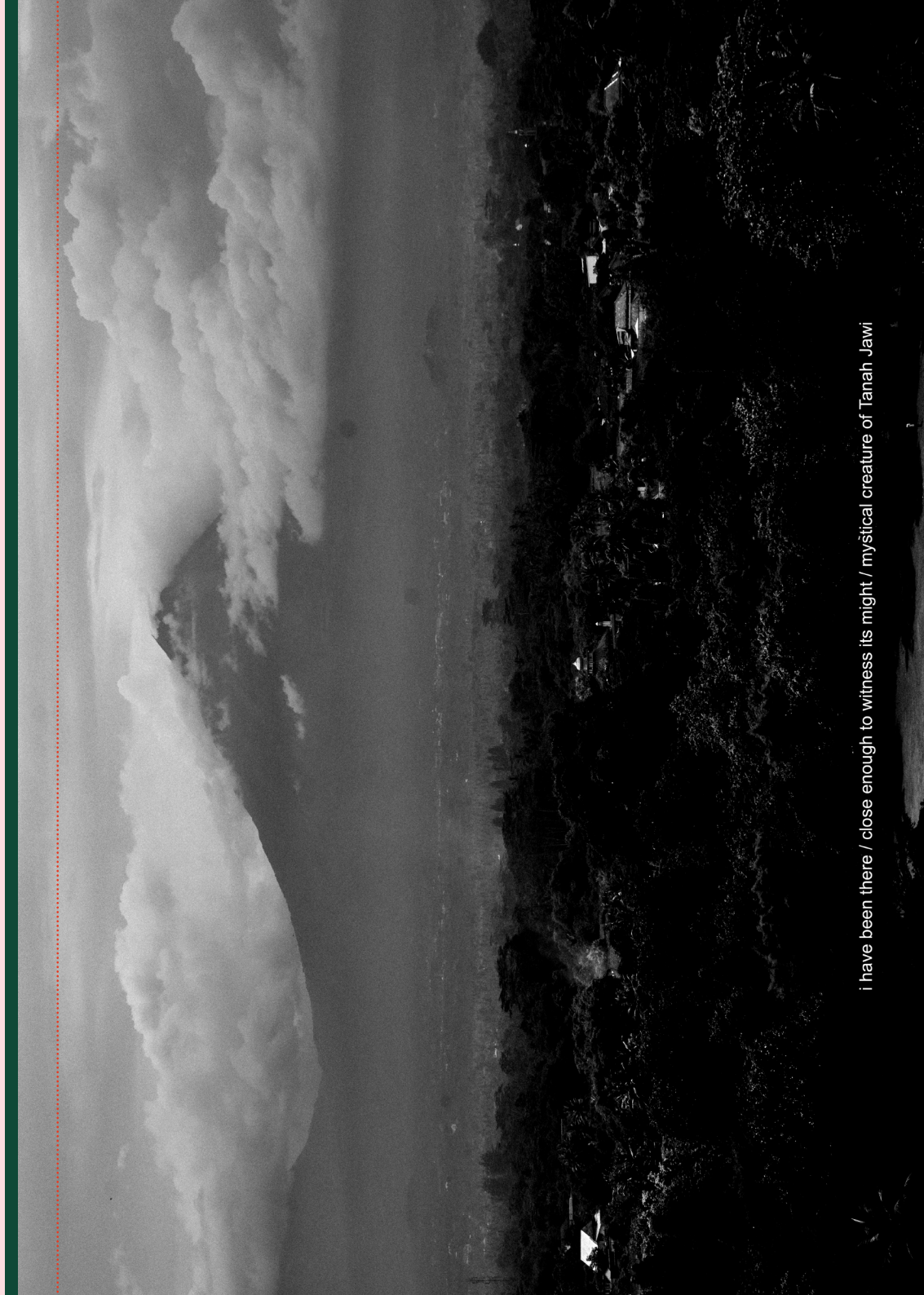


Sprouting seeds of spiritual revolutions

Text and illustration by Lindsay Lyra-May Akissi Ouattara. Lyra-May is a multi-medium sculptor and curator working with concepts of myth-making, spirituality and cultural identity.

“It’s up to future generations to judge whether my work contributes to history.”

from page 33



i have been there / close enough to witness its might / mystical creature of Tanah Jawi

Mariano Pozzi



KEREN LASME

a visual poem in honour of the cloudy Merapi volcano, which was slowly appearing before my eyes while i was ascending Borobudur temple in May 2023. Borobudur is the world's largest Buddhist sacred site, nestled in central Java, Indonesia. this poem landed on my heart after reading Isna Marifa's *Mountains More Ancient*: her novel is a historical fiction that unearths the stories of 18th century enslaved Javanese people in South Africa called the Cape Malays. for weeks, i time-travelled as a powerless witness to their heartbreaking intimate lives, becoming familiar with their small joys and the hopeless longing for a long-lost, faraway land that still lived on in their memories – through names, gestures, rituals... bodies.

GIFT

"This is the heart and soul of Tanah Jawi – the mountains that bring life and death to our people, prosperity and destruction in a cycle that defines the universe."

Isna Marifa, *Mountains More Ancient* (2022).

MOVING NARRATIVES

p.s.: you can frame this visual poem, gift it, make a collage out of Isna's quote, visit Borobudur and/or The Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, read *Mountains More Ancient*, make a drawing of Merapi – the possibilities are infinite...

i wish you a life filled with creativity and love.

Keren

Notes to move through Mariano's narratives and processes

My practice as a storyteller with a human rights and social approach is rooted in my belief that art can be a powerful tool for social change.

I'm involved in each project from the very first spark of an idea to the final stages of post-production. The projects range in size, involve teams of 10 to 35 people, and are always collaborative – none of what I do would be possible alone.

My process begins when a story or character resonates and continues with research alongside whomever is co-writing with me, as I rarely write alone. Co-researching and co-writing are the ways I've found to contrast ideas and experiences to my biases before fully exploring the life of a character. From there, it's a hectic tornado that involves writing, fundraising, drawing, planning, producing, directing crew and cast, editing, designing, translating, and subtitling.

For some parts, I do the best I can, which doesn't necessarily mean it's even good. As you'll see, drawing isn't my strongest talent. However, beyond developing ideas and directing, tasks like storyboarding or shoot-planning are essential and most of the time the budget goes to more pressing departments such as cast, equipment, or shooting crew.

The following pages portray stills and materials from different works, a way to navigate through the past years of my productions that provide an idea of the themes and aesthetics I work with. The featured works include: *Wanderers* (2018), *Migrant Stories* (2020), *Missing* (2024), and *May the last day be for us* (2025). The materials include storyboards, lighting diagrams, scripts, and finished stills.

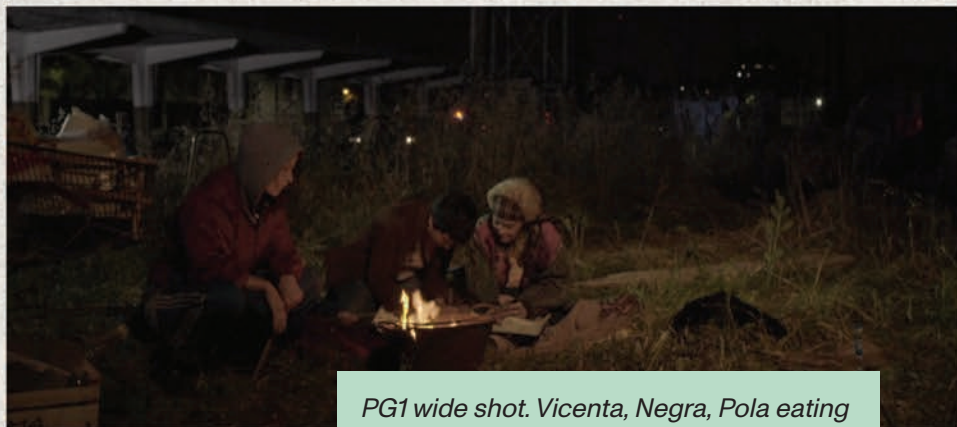
In my films, I centre the perspectives of marginalized communities, often focusing on the experiences of people who have been traditionally silenced or erased from history. With this approach, I strive to make space for a more accurate and inclusive understanding of both the past and the present.

I believe that it is important to establish connections between con-

temporary emancipatory movements and their historical roots. For this reason, I focus on characters such as migrants arriving in big cities searching for better opportunities; survivors of state-perpetuated genocides in the 1970s; as well as the daily lives of homeless people, queer activists, and soldiers from marginalized communities in past wars who have been made invisible in history books. These are some of the stories I collect and bring to life to reflect on the kind of society we aspire to build today.

You can scan the following QR codes to watch some of these projects, either before or after getting into the details of the pages.



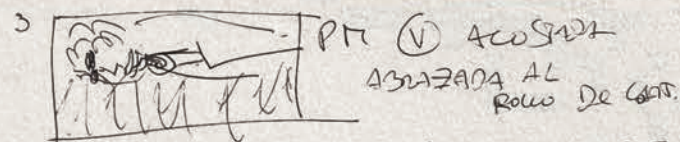


PG1 wide shot. Vicenta, Negra, Pola eating



*Si se puede, robar detalles y P.P.

*if possible, try to 'steal' detail shots and close up



*ORDENES 4

3 - medium shot, vicenta laying down, hugging cardboard



VICENTA

¿Do you think it's ok dirty Negra to come here, where the pigs are, the cops, the government, the plague, the traitors.

LA NEGRA

(interrupting)

Stop bothering me hag. Did you see the street? Don't start with your lists.

VICENTA

Look. Look around. Do you want to be like these people? Like these inhuman zombies stinking of mediocrity?

LA NEGRA
Concentrate bolu

VICENTA sigue tosiendo nie
agua cae al piso y un frag
techo se desploma sobre VI
NEGRA corre a ayudarla, le
costado. VICENTA tiene sol
levantarse. A lo lejos se v
patrullero policial que se
Ambas mujeres se miran y l
acerca, sobre sus caras se
de linternas.

CORTE

INT. REFUGIO. NOCHE

En un galpón amplio se extienden muchos colchones tirados en el suelo uno al lado del otro. En la mayoría hay ADULTOS y ADULTOS MAYORES durmiendo, algunos tomando sopa y otros recién llegados secándose. Varios lamparones iluminan tenuemente el espacio. VICENTA y LA NEGRA caminan entre los colchones abrazadas hacia un colchón vacío en el centro del galpón. LA NEGRA sostiene a VICENTA que reniega un poco y tose. VICENTA lleva bajo el brazo libre un pequeño bolso envuelto en nylon y LA NEGRA un bolsón grande con ropa. Junto al colchón vacío está POLA (27) en otro colchón. POLA es más joven que las otras dos, está abrigada y arreglada, lleva puesto un poco de maquillaje liviano. POLA sigue con la mirada a VICENTA y LA NEGRA que se sientan en el colchón de al lado. Todo el trayecto VICENTA reniega de estar ahí.

VICENTA

A vos te parece negra venir acá, dónde está la yuta, la cana, el gobierno, la peste, los traidores.

LA NEGRA

(Se pisan los diálogos)
Dejate de joder xiala ¿Viste como estaba la calle? Y no empieces con las listitas.

VICENTA

Mirá. Mirá alrededor. ¿Vos querés ser como esta gente? ¿Como estos zombies inhumanos hueyentes de mediocridad?

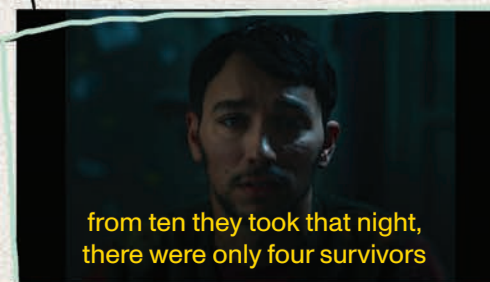
Pola 3:15-1:30

ESTO
SUCEDE
SE JUEGA

③



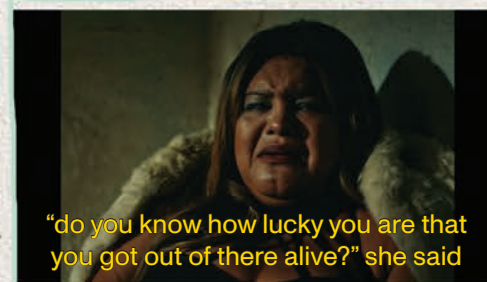
11978



from ten they took that night,
there were only four survivors

11978

11986



"do you know how lucky you are that
you got out of there alive?" she said



I lost my legs looking for them...

11995

2023



my sister and I... they made us
sleep under the dinner table...



Our missing grandchildren...
they are among us...

CONTINUED:

La CONTROLADORA va pidiendo
turno a LUCERO.

LUCERO
Señorita Lidia,
conmigo hoy, que

La CONTROLADORA se acerca a
TATIANA la mira confundida

¿Cómo?
CONTROLADORA

LUCERO
Eso... Qué me oí
en la casa...

La CONTROLADORA no la deja
arrinconada contra una pared
violentamente. Es una mujer
puede resistirse.

CONTROLADORA
¿Vos te pensás que
nosotros? ¿Dónde
estás? ¿Dónde lo tenés?

La CONTROLADORA encuentra
lo tira en la caja con el
hombre y la espesa hacia
de el documento a la CONTROLADORA
maquina de al lado de LUCERO

TATIANA
(Por lo bajo)
¿Estas loca?

LUCERO no le contesta y corre
Luego de unos instantes
hace.

TATIANA
¿Y ahora?

LUCERO la mira y le levanta los hombros.

TATIANA
Lucero no seas tonta, ponete a
coser.

La CONTROLADORA no tarda en darse cuenta que LUCERO dejó
de coser y se acerca a ella.

CONTROLADORA
¿Que pasó Lucero? ¿Estamos de
huelga?

LUCERO

They changed my name...

TATIANA

It was going to happen eventual-
ly...

LUCERO doesn't answer. Her breath
agitates.

TATIANA

Lu...

LUCERO

I want to go home.

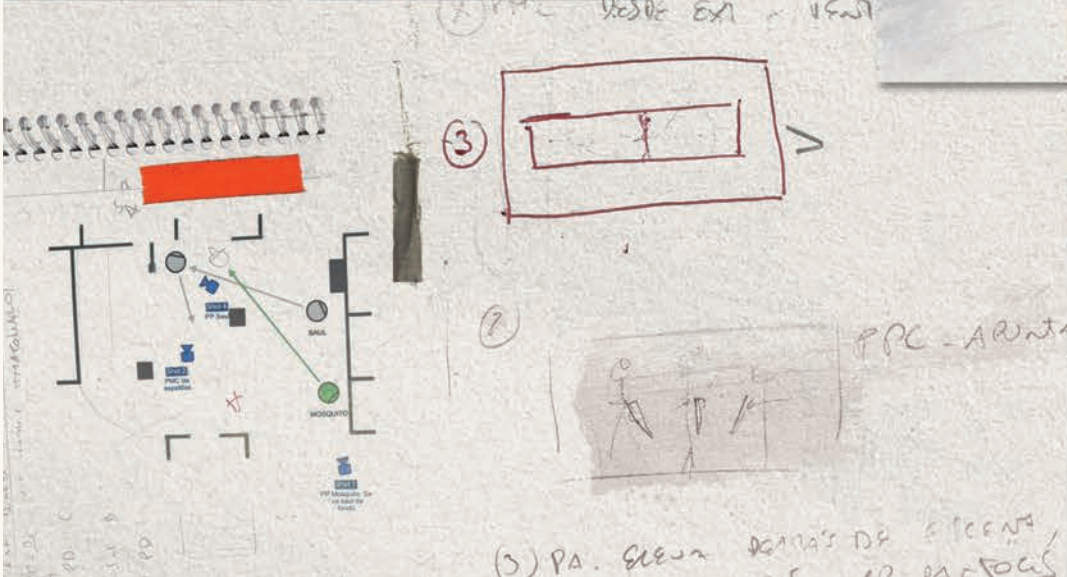
TATIANA

You know it doesn't work like that.

LUCERO

I'm going to pay this debt and go
home. I'll find a way.

(CONTINUED)



SAUL lo
lento y
irrumpe

SAÚL
¿Vos?
MOSQUITO
Me obligó mi viejo.
SAÚL
¿Pero mec no tomás decisiones?
MOSQUITO
Era esto o me dejaba en la calle.
SAÚL
¿Pero qué tiene que ver una cosa
con la otra?
MOSQUITO
Mi vieja murió cuando era chico. Me
crió él solo;
Se supone que le tenía que salir
bien machito.
Y bueno... la guerra vino como
anillo al dedo para que lo
demuestra. No le pude decir que no.
Nadie más hombre que uno que da la
vida por la Patria. Y acá estamos,
dando la vida por "La Patria". ¿Qué
hace la Patria por nosotros?
SAÚL
La patria hoy son los milicos
Mosquito. Siempre se acuerdan de
nosotros en Misiones o de gente
como el Indio cuando les conviene
nada más. Cagados de hambre estamos
allá; y ahora resulta que uno tiene
que dar su vida a cambio de nada.
MOSQUITO
Si volvemos me voy a mudar a
capital. Voy a hacer la mía. Que se
joda mi viejo.
SAÚL
Si volvemos...

3.

MOSQUITO

It was either this or the streets

SAÚL

How is that related to anything?

MOSQUITO

My mother died when I was a kid. He brought me up himself. I was supposed to be macho. And well... the war came in hand to prove that. I couldn't say no. No one more manly than a man that gives his life for the motherland. And here we are, dying for "The Motherland" What does the motherland do for us?

SAÚL

The motherland nowadays is the army Mosquito. They only think about us in Misiones or people like El Indio when they need us. We are starving up north; and now it happens we have to give our life in exchange for nothing.
They smoke



Thoughts on being an application machine – ¿A crisis for cultural practitioners?

So it happens I apply to around three open calls a month. That's about 36 a year. I started applying to things around 10 years ago and by now I have deadlines on the clock, on my calendars and on my head. My own statistics tell me I normally get 1 out of 8 or 10 of those.

It's exhausting: applying for funding as an unpaid job to do projects in which everyone gets paid basically nothing. To make a piece of art that's under-budgeted and for which the team needs to have other jobs to pay rent, gas, electricity, internet and, if there's anything left, an occasional beer. A project is not finished and I'm already thinking, "Could this be my next project? Can I get funding for it?"

The point is that working in the field of human rights and culture is supposed to be about *saying something that makes a difference*, but instead most of the time I end up thinking and writing long applications about HOW I'm going to say something that makes a difference.

As a Serial Applicator I've developed the following talents: (1) Read 35 pages of rules and regulations in two minutes that are annoyingly basically the same; (2) Send multiple applica-

tions at the same time (once I submitted two at 23.58 on a Tuesday night just before they closed) (3) Live on a deadline; and (4) Change hats and disciplines as often as underwear.

Day after day, this world gets more residencies, more grant opportunities, and more philanthropic organizations, but also more people competing for those, so we end up in the endless application machine because it's not enough to apply for only one or two a year.

But one of those applications turned out successful and there I was in Manila a couple of weeks ago, writing about how frustrating it is for an artist to spend more time writing applications than writing actual art. I guess I'm lucky right now to have this platform to express this frustration.

Could this text be art? I don't think so, and I'll leave it here because the deadline to deliver this text is tomorrow. I'll use the last lines to say:

Solidarity with all of us rejected ones: may the letdowns transform into lasting ideas and power of will.

Solidarity with struggling artists and friends: may all have successful applications with abundant funding.

Solidarity with struggling people: may all have the time and freedom to write applications and make art instead of barely survive.

Collectives in Crisis? Conversation | Collective Praxis

**A conversation with Alf
Bojórquez, Alfred Tarazi,
Abdeslam Ziou Ziou,
and Mark Teh**

Led by Rohit Goel

Moving Narratives was, in part, a critique of how art today is defensive, *representational* of crisis. Part of the program explored how contemporary art might challenge existing structures, facilitating contemporary pathways that disrupt to transform. We came up with a way to relate artistic representation and action by examining the role of shared experiences and friendship and collective practices.

Central to this discussion is the balance between individual and collective interests, particularly considering that the challenges and possibilities of collectives are complex. While collectives offer opportunities to share knowledge and methods of working, they also pose challenges, including power dynamics, conflict, and questions of sustainability.

In this conversation, we confront the contradictions inherent in collective work. While collectivity fosters solidarity and shared purpose, it could equally be marked by tensions, disagreements, and competing visions. Rather than viewing these challenges as obstacles, we approach them as essential aspects of collective practice. Through this lens, collectivity becomes not just a means of practice or resistance but a generative space where art,

politics, and life intersect in transformative ways.

This discussion, conducted online and through follow-up written exchanges, has been edited for length and clarity.

Alf: I've been wondering whether those of us artists who work with collectives do it out of need or out of desire. Do we collaborate because there's no other way or do we like it?

Abdeslam: On this Alf, I was actually asking myself if there's a contradiction between need and desire.

For example, from my own perspective, there is a desire not to work alone in a field, but there is also the need to pool together energies and resources, like material things. So it's not ... it's not like the need and desire to practice collectively could even enter into contradiction. And maybe if I, if we push it a little bit, saying that this is also a condition of post-independence authoritarian societies, it will lead to the idea that need or desire is not a choice ... it's not even something we can choose ..

Alf: Yeah, and I will add to what you're saying Abdeslam, the problem of consciousness. Like, even if it's a need or desire, are we conscious of it? Do we

know that we are "in need," like material need, to do work collectively, or are we just doing it and then we understand that it's out of need? How conscious can we be of this or not? Adding to this mix of need and desire, the path from the unconscious to the conscious, it's a pretty complex one. Sometimes, you work collectively without knowing that you need it at the beginning. Then when you have worked together for years, you say, "Oh, I did it out of need. Now that I have the funds, now that I have the infrastructure, I'm not exactly in need." Maybe it is here that need turns into desire.

Mark: I like this mongrelisation or the implication of the idea of need and desire. **Five Arts Centre**¹, the collective I belong to, is 40 this year. It's called Five Arts because there were five people in 1984 from different kinds of art practices – literature, theatre, dance, visual arts, and (an)other that they left open-ended. There are 13 of us currently, but we've also had many that left the collective at some point or other in our history. So those needs, contingencies, or desires expired for some people.

Within the performing arts, there's often a kind of default structure of having an artistic director – a charismatic figure

or person who decides what the seasons are, what performances to put on, what's the singular vision. But really early on, our collective decided that there would be multiple directions. It's pretty rare and somehow it's attracted a lot of "mutants," who kind of inhabit different artistic and activist spaces. Creating that space is interesting – on a more political level, Malaysia is a highly racialized society, our political parties are formed out of ethnic groups. That was the dominant political structure for 61 years. Those parties are still around.

We do have some other collectives in our context, but they're often made up of artists generally from one particular ethnic group. And I think in response, these trans-ethnic solidarities are something that we consciously perform. It gets a bit tiring that we still have to self-consciously perform: "We've got lots of different types of people in our collective, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

Alfred: What's interesting for me is how the collectivity turns into a repository of knowledge and that repository of knowledge can become a living archive. It doesn't only matter what we're doing in the now, but also what kind of basis or what kind of traces we are leaving for the future and how the work

¹ Founded in 1984, Five Arts Centre is a collective of Malaysian artists, activists, and producers based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia that is dedicated to generating alternative art forms and images in the contemporary arts landscape.



kind of builds up. For instance, if a collective ends, how do the ideas that animate it endure? What can these ideas produce if they are still relevant at all?

Of course, a multiplication of means invariably produces more resources and it invariably also produces the necessity of creating a more sustainable infrastructure.

It's an important discussion because it's at the heart of survival. There is no survival outside of this framework. There is little agency of change outside of that collectivity and of that framework. So really, that collectivity is the condition, the precondition for being able to affect change.

I think of collective practices as repositories of knowledge premised on transmission. So the only reason you are a collectivity is because you want to make certain ideas, material, and information accessible to others in an effort to transmit that knowledge. And that happens within that collective framework.

Abdeslam: Collectives necessitate a desire to transmit ... yeah, I think I tend to agree with that Alfred. But the fact is, if I speak from my own reality, in Morocco or maybe from the Maghreb at large, there was

this huge artistic collective. But it's people that come together but finitely, for three, five, six years. They work together. They do a lot of stuff together. And afterwards they split up due to a lot of reasons, and boom, bam, they disappear. So this idea even, that they are the repository of knowledge and that they create knowledge, is not necessarily for the sake of transmission.

It's about what Mark was saying, this very idea that their collective had from the beginning, deciding not to have a charismatic, singular artistic direction, instead having multiple directions that maybe allow a collective like Mark's to live for 40 years. If a collective is a knowledge repository, how do we transmit this knowledge? More crucially, how do we transmit this knowledge when collectives dissolve? What is left of this knowledge when they dissolve?

It's also something I'd link with the idea of energy ... I think that energy is the thing that is transmitted from generations or from decades ... It's this energy of coming together and doing things together and what keeps on is an idea of this energy and what we do is that we come together and shape this energy between us, make it circulate between us, and when we

finish, this energy is still there for other people to take ... it's not like material transmission but it's much more this energy of transmission that's there, and there is need and desire also in equilibrating energies ...

Alf: I do like friendship and collectivity but there's a shitty part of it. To be honest, I'm kind of sick of this rhetoric, like, we're all friends, we're all allies. I'm like, "I don't know." Instead of polyamory, sometimes we may be resentful, you know. Sometimes I miss that, those concepts, you know, when people were mad about pretty specific things: "this is a fucking shit, I can't stand this, I hate this." Sometimes I miss the negative energy against all this friendship, tenderness, and radical being together, which I like. Still, I think it's only honest with the other part, the negative part.

Mark: These things mentioned really resonate with me – Alfred's notion of a living archive or repository of embodied knowledges. In the performing arts, so much of what's transmitted is also bodily practices, trainings, and systems, which on some level also have to do with disciplining the body and disciplining knowledge. This thing Abdeslam mentioned about energy is interesting because I think

a lot about metabolism. In the 40-year-old collective I'm with, we have people in their 20s and people in their 70s. There are different identity formations at work, different notions of singularities and collectivities that are specific to generational shifts, and what may constitute knowledge production at a particular moment in time or what constitutes even this complicated thing like theater, of trying to find a shared vocabulary. But as Alf mentioned, friction and tension and argument are a big part of it.

So this intergenerational thing is something that I'm working through. I'm very interested in these 30-, 40-year-old art collectives that you can find in Southeast Asia. Something like **Ruangrupa**² I think is like 20 years old now. We were just in Manila – **Green Papaya**³ are 20-25 years old. I'm really curious about how the metabolisms shift as the generations shift. What can be regenerated and renewed? What should be completely thrown away? Some of this heritage is just bad and needs refreshing. I also remember a space that's based in Yogyakarta: **Cemeti**⁴. Their way of marking change over three decades was to modify their name a little bit. It started out as the Cemeti Gallery in 1988, before becoming Cemeti Art House. About seven or eight

² Founded in 2000, Ruangrupa is a contemporary art collective based in Jakarta, Indonesia. They co-directed documenta 15 (Kassel, Germany) in 2022.



³ Founded in 2000, Green Papaya Art Projects is an independent artist-run organisation in Manila, Philippines. While it had plans to officially close in 2020, Green Papaya continues to be active today.



⁴ Founded in Yogyakarta in 1988, Cemeti – Institute for Art and Society is Indonesia's oldest platform for contemporary art.



years ago, a new generation took over and they became the Cemeti Institute for Art and Society. These changes, maybe, mark the shifts in what they wanted to do with their positionality.

Abdeslam: We were having this discussion with you, Mark, in the Philippines and, uh, I don't know, I'm very um ... how do you say this in English? I'm envious of this idea because I don't know, I don't think, Alfred, that you can name a collective that lasted more than 20 years or 40 years. In Morocco or Algeria or Tunisia, in the Arab world, we don't have this kind of ...

And there is also this kind of idea that you said, Alf, and I'm very ... I very much agree with it because there is another layer of it that nowadays collectives are something that gets found, that you get funding through this idea of friendship, collective, being together, doing together. There is this idealization of the collective. There is this monetized need and desire of the collective.

So how do we give place to conflict, to fight within collectivity? Like, how to create possibilities for many worlds within one world? And what does it mean to be in one world together?

What is the thing that you make,

you do, you transmit from one generation to another? How do you make two different generations live together? What are the tools to not keep power in the hands of one person? How can we work to not reproduce the form of institutional power that we have in our country? For example, in Morocco, where I come from, you always have this master and disciple structure of collectivity. So there is this general power, this energy, that is reproduced in collectives but it's often harnessed to unjust ends.

So I prefer to say, OK, there is this badness to collectivity, but how can we create collectives that overcome this badness? Because if in the end we do collectives, it's because we like to be with people and to have problems and to fight and to cook together and drink together and to share moments.

Alf: How can a collective not reproduce what official or state-run institutions do? Because sometimes I feel, and this is the same for activism, it's double work. Collectives that claim to be indie or different or progressive, do the same work or even more work than what the official institutions should be doing or are trying to do. So it's like double. A lot of activists do this. They fill the gaps of what the nation state should be doing.

So how can we, as collectives, not reproduce the nation state and do their work so that we can be artists, I mean, creative? How are we different?

My questions for collectively run projects are: Okay we're gonna be friends, we're gonna do the collective, yes, but what is our difference? What makes this collective, this group, us, different from nation state and all mainstream institutions, I mean people that do have the funds, do have the infrastructure. Is it only material need that makes us different as collectives, that we don't have the resources that the nation state has? Is that the only thing that gathers us? Or is there something else?

I feel collectives sometimes, when they get the resources, and pass from need to desire, involuntarily, they duplicate mainstream institutions even though they claim to be independent or different. Sometimes they are not. It's just a small elite, a small group of friends, claiming a difference that is not in their practice.

Alfred: Alf, I have a remark. So at what point in this discussion can groups turn into some kind of a collective, solidaristic action?

Perhaps I have an answer. In the program, we shared two

trips, one in Amsterdam and another in Manila.

And for me, there was something transformative about both. If I have to sum it up, there was, in Amsterdam, an experience of forms within a certain urban environment and then there was Manila, which was fundamentally an urban monster. I'm wondering whether we can reflect on the Manila experience, this unhinged capitalism and urban development, unrepentant on this massive scale. I was deeply moved or shaken by it, and I wonder if there is something to take out of this. Throughout the year, across Lab Weeks, we lived together as artists in two very different contexts, both unfamiliar to all of us, but places that are common to all of us now.

Mark: Alfred I agree. It's been a tangentially wonderful year of learning about everyone's complicated contexts and practices while living together in parallel, less familiar spaces, with you all every three weeks, online and onsite in Amsterdam and Manila. Then there are wars and horrors that are unfolding – where you are Alfred, in Lebanon. And suddenly things just got a lot closer and smaller for me in terms of affective and emotional distances. I'm also thinking a lot about nodes and modes of infrastructure – all of

us, you, the 11 remaining fellows, the mentors, and Mo, Bakr, everyone. I also think of each one of us as a node and a mode of infrastructure at the same time. This is not the kind of shitty net-working that we all can't stand: "Let's mingle, right?"

Amsterdam for me was much more like a "first-time tourist" experience. Manila didn't feel so "monstrous" to me because I am Southeast Asian. But I felt like now I really sense and kind of know in a more embodied way the different practices and different ways of dealing, through your work. I'm also trying to think about how we think geopoetically – forms of collectivity that are not geographical. You know, "Global South," "Latin America," the Gulf bloc, the Southeast Asian bloc. Beyond geography and geopolitics, that's the next phase for me. Like, how do we think about monsoons? What connects these different things besides the kind of obvious geopolitical or empire stuff, or the experience of colonialism?

Alf: Two things. The first is a negative one and the second is a positive one. I kind of moved out from art groups since COVID. I was a translator and an editor in **Tumbalacasa**⁵, I was the bartender of the sound art festival **Umbra**⁶ for years, and lately, I've been living by myself

for the last four years. Writing is the opposite of organizing in groups. It's silent. It only depends on you, it's in your time, rhythm, and as deep or superficial as you want. So this program, with the two traveling Lab Weeks, has been hard for me. I'm just not used to working with people anymore. So I'm pretty neurotic and desperate and both at the same time to be honest. I think that's a bad part of living alone. I just live with a cat and all my work is on my desk in a little kitchen. So I've been struggling a little bit.

And this program, the negative part is that, for me, it's been super hard to go back to the collective track again: waiting for people, making time for everyone to know their desires and stuff like that. The patience of being with others is hard. That's why I'm talking about the negative part of collectivity because I moved away from others for years and now I'm just back. There's a cool part of this. I'm going to talk about it in a second, but it's been hard for me, I'm pretty neurotic. Living by myself makes me pretty neurotic. I'm like, fuck, like desperate. And the positive part, it's related to Mark.

This year I went to three different continents that I have never been to in my life. So now I know a lot of things that I don't

⁵ Tumbalacasa describes itself: "Editing as a process of co-production of meaning and contagions." I was part of the team when they edited *Lenguas del Diabolo*. We created together *Translucinações*, where we saw translation as a form of collective study, putting bell hooks, pieces from the English feminist Marxist magazine *Lies*, Joyful Militancy by Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery, and Denisse Ferreira Da Silva to Spanish and putting the translations inside movements or collectives who can think with them in the Latin American context.

 tumbalacasa

⁶ Umbral was a sound art festival run by Rolando Hernandez and Gudini Cortina. They made 50 shows in Mexico City with musicians, performers, and sound artists from around the globe.



⁷ CARCDAM is a research and art center created in 2023 by six Moroccan cultural practitioners, established to open a space for encounters between art and social science research.



⁸ Lblend is a Moroccanised version of "The Blend," which blends art, technology, and entrepreneurship to create a platform that drives social change.

⁹ fana7it is a word we came to by mixing the words artist (FANAne) with researcher (ba7IT) FANA+7IT = FANA7IT (scholartist or artsearcher in translation)

The image is an example of li9ae al fana7it with Alf and Aimée.



know. Some are geopolitical, like history, how the empire worked, the Cold War, the Arab world, blah, blah, blah. Yeah, that's one part. But there's a second part, too. You know, like the poetical part. For me, the poetical is the positive part. I feel like my perspective is way wider, like huge. I can see how Morocco – when I visited you, Abdeslam – is the same as Mexico. But, for me, Manila, I didn't feel the monstrosity. I live in a city exactly like Manila, with more than 20 million people fighting and spitting on the floor and being crazy. So Mexico is like Morocco and Manila.

Abdeslam: I just want to stress one thing, there is this idea of performing collectivity as a tool that could have various goals and objectives, like getting funding, like a ritual, etc., etc. There is a difference between performing collectivity as a tool and the other side of it, which is that the only work of the collective is to perform collectivity. When performing collectivity is your only tool, when it tends to be your work, that's when we can say that there's a problem.

And knowing that this is a risk is good. Because even if we fall into this contradiction or are part of the contradiction, knowing that this is a risk gives us the possibility to ask the

question: are we performing now or are we doing the work of collectives, which as Mark said are node and mode of infrastructure and as Alfred said repository of knowledge?

For example, in our collective **CARCDAM**⁷ in Morocco, we decided from the very beginning to work towards the idea of building a community and to take time to build the collective and the community. We draw our inspiration from another collective situated in Tiznit, in a little city south of Morocco, called **Lblend**⁸, that has this very good idea that they do not tend to reach an audience but to build a community and from the community to build an audience. So drawing on this idea, we searched to create a community focusing mainly on informal, co-friendly meetings, including a monthly dinner, an informal meeting where artists and researchers present their work – like with Alf when she came on a visit to Morocco. This is a deliberately closed event called **li9ae Al Fana7it**⁹ building friendship and informal network, as everyone that comes has to bring with him/her a person for the next meeting. This is for us a way to, little by little, enter into building a community to work with and for. Something organic that builds itself by itself with no major expectations and no

major desires than opening an informal space of sharing.

Mark: Yes Abdeslam, this idea of performance and collectivity which you raise, I love it because the question, also for me, is who's the audience of this performance of collectivity? Sometimes the audience is the funder and sponsors when we are doing proposals. But sometimes the performance is within the collective – for the collective members to work out tensions, frictions, shifts in power dynamics. So sometimes we're performing for ourselves is what I'm trying to say – it's not always exteriorized.

Alfred also made a really important intervention. We fellows, between Zoom, Amsterdam, Manila have become this emergent, amorphous group of bodies – if not quite a collectivity – that we are right now. It's this idea of being nodes, something radial and relational – like mandalas. Bringing it back to this experience that we've had across the year and not just within my own context or Abdeslam's or Alfred's or Rohit's or Alf's, one of the things that is very interesting for me is I keep on having to explain to people in Kuala Lumpur who the hell you guys are and what the hell I'm doing with all of you. And why I have to be online at nine o'clock at night! I mean, this is at

the level of everyday life. There are people like Alf who are waking up at seven AM in Mexico City to talk with me at nine PM in Kuala Lumpur – what the hell is this about? This is also part of the nodal and modal work that I'm learning with all of you.



la mariposa
cambia como el fuego
no es perfecta

**see poster for full story.*

the butterfly
changes as the fire does
it is not perfect

MARIANO POZZI

GIFT

MOVING NARRATIVES

Mark Teh



I make documentary performances about events and phenomena that haunt the Malaysian and Southeast Asian social landscape.

The word “haunt: in English contains the same letters which make up the Malay words *hantu* (ghost) and *tuhan* (god). “Haunt” also refers to a place that one revisits frequently.

Implicit to hauntology is the notion

of lost futures – of things which never happened but could have, of paths not taken.

The performances I make investigate the hysterical symptoms of our history and attempt to deal with their ongoing afterlives in a more human way.

I collaborate with activists, artists, filmmakers, historians, journalists,

BELOW - *The Breathing of Maps*, an exhibition on practices of geo-poetic imagination and counter-cartographies in Japan and Southeast Asia.



politicians, and sociologists. They appear onstage as social actors, playing versions of themselves, sharing their occupations, preoccupations, lived experiences.

In these performances, the people onstage friction the personal and familial against the national and official. The audience witnesses the performers sharing their own subjectivities while dissecting historical and autobiographical documents, images, footage, and other research materials. We leap across times and eras, zooming in and out of different scales of memory and history.

I often describe what we do as making visible an editing machine onstage.



ABOVE/BEHIND - *Baling*, created from declassified transcripts of the failed peace talks between nationalist and communist leaders in 1955, two years before Malayan independence.



ABOVE - *Gostan Forward*, an excavation of contemporary dancer Marion D'Cruz's choreographic history and its conjunctions with dance and national histories.



ABOVE - *Version 2020*, a performance on the Malaysian state's failed vision to be a “first world nation” by 2020, leaping between the personal and fictional, the documentary and speculative.



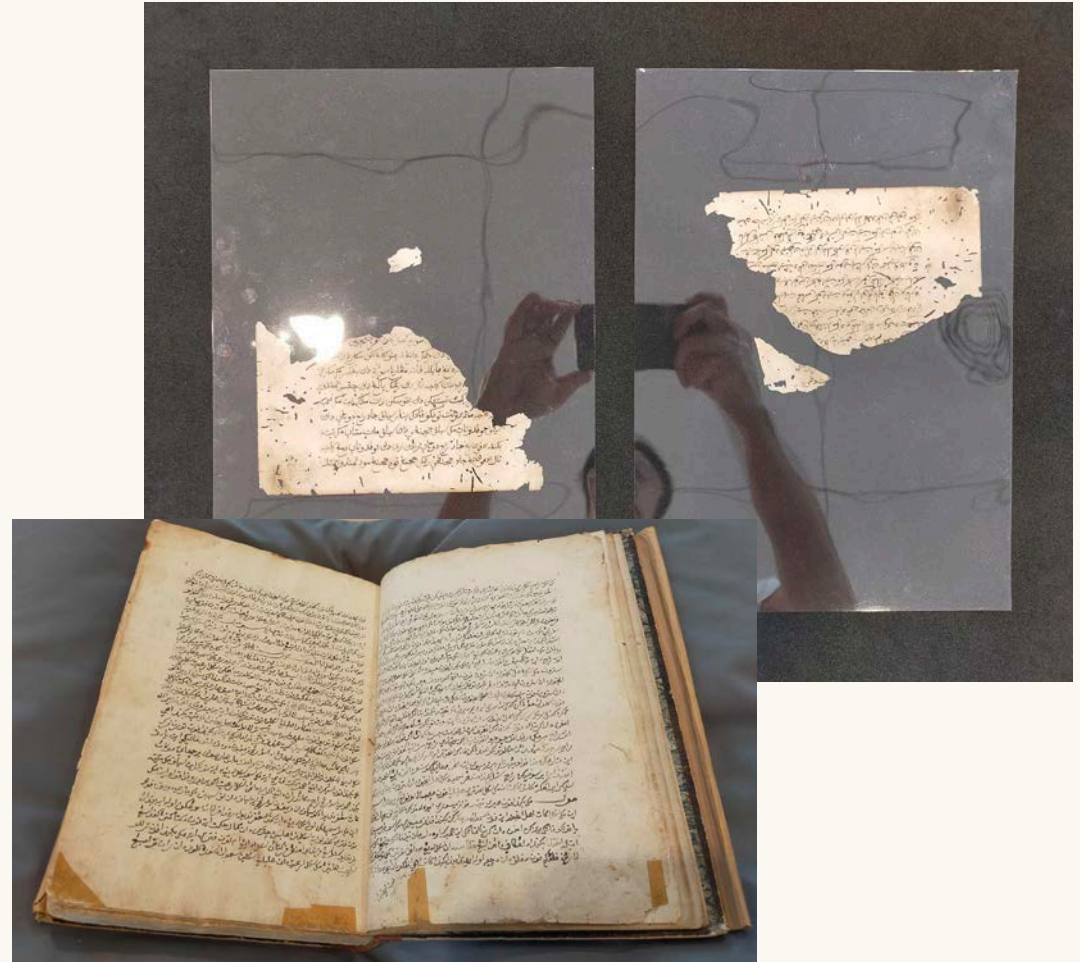
ABOVE - *A Notional History*, a documentary performance on the spectres of communism that haunt history textbooks in Malaysia.



I'm currently devising with my collaborators in Five Arts Centre a project that excavates narratives, objects and locations related to Hang Tuah – a mythical figure loved by right-wing nationalists in Malaysia.

Hang Tuah is a legendary warrior who may or may not have existed in the 15th century. Variations of his narrative are found in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah* as well as in the *Sejarah Melayu* and *Sulalatus Salatin*. These chronicles chart the rise and fall of the Malacca empire between 1400 to 1511, a strategic sea portal between China, India, the Arab world, and

Europe. The golden age of Malacca is geographically and politically conflated with the history and trajectory of modern Malaysia. A sultanate and a state, feudalism and federalism, Malacca and Malaysia. Avatars – 600 years apart.



The most famous episode in the *Hikayat* sees Hang Tuah take the life of his closest friend at the Sultan's order. It persists as the most exemplary act of loyalty to king, country, culture. In the past five years, fuelled by the pandemic, paranoia, and online conspiracies, attempts to definitively prove Hang Tuah's existence have intensified, culminating in a series of expensive, state-funded projects to entrench these claims: experts



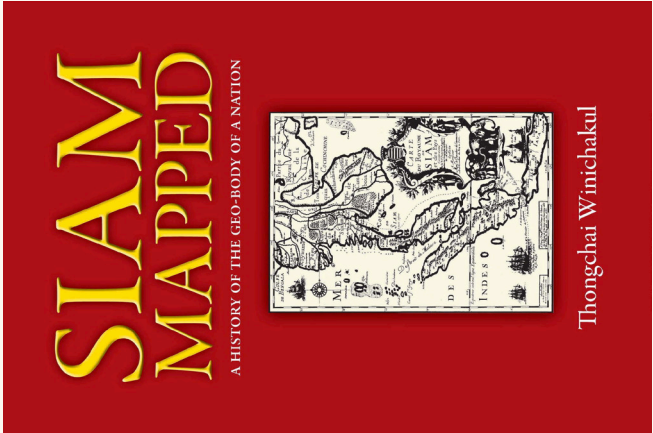
assigned to fact-finding missions in Europe to gather “new” artefacts about Hang Tuah, a Tuah Research Centre, a Hang Tuah exhibition, a Hang Tuah musical, etc.

Running in parallel, our project traces other faces, facets, and phases of Hang Tuah – looking at how this figure has mutated across different historical eras, landscapes, and forms. At some points we’ve felt like doubles, doppel-gangers, mirrors of the state-funded “experts” working on proving Hang Tuah’s existence.

In recent months I’ve travelled to Europe to look at various *Hikayat Hang Tuah* manuscripts across archives

in Leiden and London. We’ve visited places that bear his name in Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Bali, and Yogyakarta. We’re excavating other depths and dimensions of this complicated figure – looking into the ignored second half of the *Hikayat*, when Hang Tuah leaves the Malay world and journeys to India, Ceylon, China, Egypt, Mecca, Medina, and Constantinople.

This will culminate in a documentary performance that deconstructs hegemonic readings of Hang Tuah for a more complex, poly-perspective and reparative rendering of these phenomena.



Abdeslam Ziou Ziou



MARK TEH

Two books by Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul, written 26 years apart, have served as compasses for my work. I am sharing them with you.

One on maps. The other, a kind of memoir, on memory and massacre.

GIFT

"A map created a nation...its geobody is born in a map, and nowhere else..."

There are other knowledges of space, either residual or emerging, operating to contend with the geobody. The presence of the geo-body is always subject to challenge."

Siam Mapped: A History of the Geobody of the Nation (1994).

MOVING NARRATIVES

"Silence, this book argues, is not forgetting. Instead, it is a symptom of the inability to remember or forget, the inability to articulate memories in a comprehensible and meaningful fashion, or to depart from the past completely. I call this condition between remembering and forgetting the 'unforgetting.'"

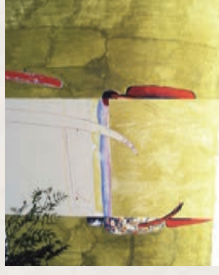
Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the October 6, 1976, Massacre in Bangkok (2020).



In the Moroccan collective imaginary, the psychiatric hospital of Berrechid explicitly evokes mental illness. To threateningly say "I'll send you to Berrechid!" (ghadi nssayfek l'Berrechid // غادي نسيطك لبرشيد) is to tell your interlocutor "you are insane." While the collective imaginary continues to carry the memory of the Berrechid hospital as a "sanctuary of madness," it was also the site of innovative experimentation— albeit short-lived— which brought art and psychiatry together. At the heart of this approach are my father Dr Abdellah Ziou Ziou, art historian Toni Maraini, and artist Mohamed Melehi.

During one week, between the 20th and 30th of May, 1981, painters, writers, poets, film-makers and intellectuals were invited to share in the patients' daily lives.

Murals were painted, concerts were organized, debates and other events took place, and the press covered the event.



Throughout 1981, various activities – gardening competitions to refurbish the hospital, film screenings, trance sessions, precluded that week-long action in May while integrating a series of elements from Moroccan popular culture into the asylum.

There was a collective effort to dismantle the violence inherent to asylums and understand madness as a facet of being – a profound suffering that requires spaces where it can be heard.

What's crucial is the healer's capacity to prioritize listening to the other and engaging in a therapeutic practice, which posits difference at its core.

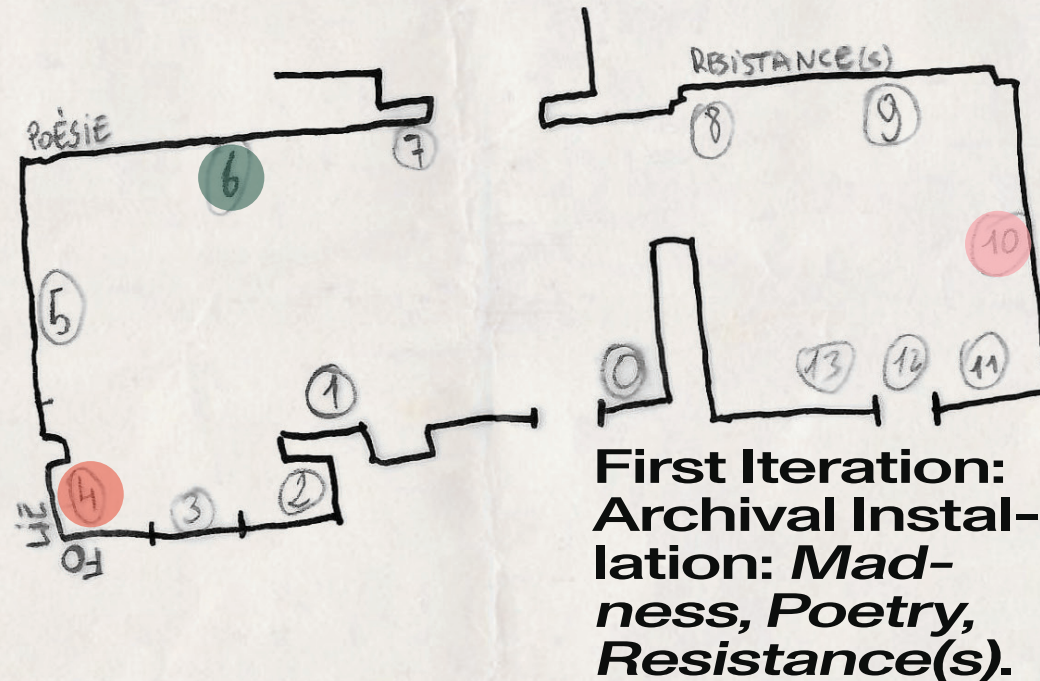


Ultimately, they brought life to the hospital.

"l'unique manière de recevoir une création et de la créer de nouveau et peut être de se recevoir avec elle" ROBERTO JIMENEZ



The **POETRY** section gathers archives on sensitive approaches to mental suffering, focusing on the presence of artists in the Berrechid Psychiatric Hospital. It highlights both the artistic creations of patients and documents the detailed presence of artists on-site, organized as a mural agenda. Through journalistic archives, notes, audio recordings, and images, I aimed to capture the hour-by-hour presence of artists, documenting the atmosphere of their involvement.



The **MADNESS** section explores archives on my father's approach to madness within a Moroccan context. His work, blends antipsychiatry and institutional psychotherapy, integrating popular mental health practices outside the psychiatric institution into hospital care. Central to this approach is recognizing the therapeutic value of the patient's voice.

The **RESISTANCE(S)** section will emerge as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the medical team's resistance against the violence of institutional confinement; on the other hand, the asylum's resistance to processes of humanization.



I feel it is important to speak of a dialectic of *Resistance(s)* so as to avoid overly idealizing such experiments, and instead to take full stock of the obstructed energy of this movement. For an array of political, social, and economic reasons, institutional psychotherapy and anti-psychiatry in their North African iterations have been defeated, and it does them no favour to consider them as ideal-type experiments tinged with nostalgia.



The *Berrechid Archives 1981* installation, shown at Think'art Contemporary Art Space (Casablanca, Morocco) as part of the Research School of Casablanca program, revolves around a triptych *Madness, Poetry, Resistance(s)*, inspired by an article my father wrote in 1988. The initial idea was to literally explode the article onto the walls of the exhibition space. This approach allows the inner workings of the research to be revealed while enabling me to craft a narrative around the Berrechid experience.

This phase allowed me to collect, classify, and digitize archives within an architecture structured around the triptych **MADNESS, POETRY, RESISTANCE(S)**.

"إن الكيفية الوحيدة لتلقي الإبداع هي أن تبده صا جديداً، وربما هي إعادة إبداع نفسك معه" روبرتو جواريز

Second Iteration: Berrechid 81. On the energy of an impeded movement.

The second phase of this research concluded in November 2023 with another set of exhibitions in Casablanca. These exhibitions had three main goals: to share the Berrechid experience and its archive with a broader audience, to contextualize this work within the history of transnational intellectual exchanges, and to anchor Berrechid's experience in the present through collaborations with five contemporary Moroccan artists.

Inviting the participating artists was rooted in an aspiration to transform archives into a space for creation and broaden the political and institutional imaginary. The essence of transmission lies in the artists' ability to take ownership of these archives, allowing them to articulate themselves in a dialogue that perpetuates the life force they encapsulate.

Grocco, also known as Trick54, seeks to create a mural, serving as a visual essay that interprets the history of Berrechid. He summons different characters, intertwining their stories and incorporating certain forms found in the 1981 creations of patients at the hospital. This mural aligns with Adil's aesthetic and conceptual exploration of the artistic expressions of individuals, sometimes themselves suffering

from mental illnesses, living on the streets of the town of Mohamadia.



On the other hand, **Fatine Arafati**, is crafting a compositional tableau that mobilizes various individuals and visual signs present throughout the exhibition. Her dialogue with the archive consists of choosing to highlight key figures in the experience, deeming their individual contributions as essential elements that must be emphasized in the archival work.



Sofiane Byari comes in from yet another angle, presenting the physical, visual, and sonic dimensions of the Berrechid experience by constructing a model of the hospital and publishing a poem by a patient named Rahal. The idea behind the model is to situate the Berrechid experience within a specific architectural space, cultural context, and geography. The murals created by the participating artists in May 1981 gain a materiality that finds meaning only within the

space of their creation.



Finally, **Sophia Attigui** engages the archive by composing and deconstructing an article written by my father, "*Folie Poésie Résistance*" (Madness, Poetry, Resistance). This article will be displayed on the wall, visually representing the archives it references, prompting the article to be read in multiple ways and senses. Sophia Attigui produced a publication based on the exhibition. This publication details the various sections of the exhibition and includes selected archival materials. It was printed using risography for the *School of Casablanca* exhibition at the ifa Gallery in Berlin.

In line with the idea of "socializing" archives, fanzine and screen printing workshops were organized throughout the exhibition. This presence and the production that resulted from those punctual activities in the midst of the exhibition enabled the creation of moments of exchange about and around the archive and allowed workshop participants to create publications and other sorts of printed matter based on the archives of Berrechid and the artworks these archives inspired.



Publication



Grocco



Fatine Arafati



Sofiane Byari



Sophia Attigui



School Of Casablanca

berrechid
81
on the
energy
of an
impeded
movement

Photos credit: Grocco-Trick54, Ayoub Bouinbaden, Ahmed Karmouni, Lamia Naji

Archive: Dr. Ziou Ziou Abdellah

Graphic design of Abdeslam pages: Youssef Zaoui, Malaz Usta

These two exhibitions were realised in the frame of the School of Casablanca program, initiated by KW Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin) and ThinkArt (Casablanca).

“You get together and you literally rip the book apart. Each person gets a section and then they sort of read it on their own, intervene in the text and then come back and share with the group.”

from page 89

“I love the breaking of the authority of the book.”

from page 90

“Solidarity with all of us rejected ones: may the letdowns transform into lasting ideas and power of will.”

from page 128



Alfred Tarazi



ABDESLAM ZIOU ZIOU

Hossein Sabzian.

This character from Abbas Kiarostami's (Iran, 1940-2016) film *Close Up* stayed with me long after watching it.

I wasn't familiar with the director's work, and it was through Rohit's chapter on *Moving Narratives* that I discovered Kiarostami's films. Incredible. Incredible the way he conveys emotions, tells the story, and enters into the intimacy of people's lives. It's also incredible how sharply aware he is of the cinematic *dispositif*, as Kiarostami knows he's making a film and doesn't hide that fact — not from himself nor from the audience. He almost makes the *dispositif* itself the very substance of his narrative. He imposes a framework onto reality and creates something from it.

Hossein Sabzian.

There is a sensitivity he exudes, but also a way of expressing himself that is so poetic and profound. He is

GIFT

the comman, the one who assumed someone else's identity in an almost accidental way. He played this role, and he found pleasure in it. And then there is this remarkable gesture from Kiarostami to film the trial and listen to Sabzian's voice. This moment, which encapsulates the essence of his images, for me, offers the best definition of what an artist is, what art is, and what the creative process entails. During the trial, the director asks him if he feels more like an actor than a director. Then, seeing Sabzian's lack of response, he asks, "Why are you acting now? What are you doing?" Sabzian's answer is crystal clear. It is the images shown on the front of this sheet.

Cultivating inner space. Giving it room and sharing it with an audience — this is what the artistic gesture truly is. This is the gesture I want to share with the publication's audience.

MOVING NARRATIVES

"Close-up *نمای نزدیک*" Abbas Kiarostami, 1'38" (Iran, 1990).

Image : 1:24:44 – 1:25:18



October 2024, once more, I get to live through Lebanon at war. In Beirut, my city of birth and residence, the air is punctured by explosions, the ground trembles as an arsenal of destruction decimates lives. Art is my only means of survival, the only way for me to resist that violence. In this land, it has a long lineage and a complex history. I was born in the course of the “Lebanese Civil War.” I am a child of that war and as such, its violence ingrained in me, etched in my memory, has been the source of all my questions. Over the years I had to reconcile my own narratives, those of my family, to this chaotic setting punctuated by bullets and bombs.

October 2024, as the air thickens with apprehension, I am working on a film with the ultimate horizon of the Israeli invasion of 1982. Between both catastrophes, a continuity of violence. There are also narratives of resistance. Art is my form of resistance. For others, there are weapons, armed resistance. Its history is long and can be traced to the uprooting of a million Palestinians from their land in 1948. In the 1960’s Lebanon’s plurality embraced the emergence of the Palestinian Revolution while another portion of the population feared it. Both, however, embraced arms. Civil war ensued, 15 years of fratricide for a small nation caught in inextricable contradictions.

The “Civil War” was and remains my point of departure, the space of all my questions and interrogations. Over the years I have gathered a vast archive of books, magazines, and newspapers documenting these years of madness. This is the material through which I

have built my practice only to realise as the years passed and violence recurred that the war never ended. Lebanon was and still is at war. But it also remains a unique laboratory of Arab modernity.

Beyond the historical value of my archive, the material gathered stood as the endangered remnants of this modern experience. Through cycles of violence and broken transmissions, publishing houses, production houses, recording studios...entire sonic and visual realms are relegated to oblivion for lack of preservation, interest, and means. I inadvertently became a collector, tracking garbage trucks, wastelands, and flea markets. In material gathered at the whim and hazard of time, I found answers to the questions I had and felt capable of articulating through a practice built on collage and assemblage. History became an intricate and endless puzzle to be reconfigured. In this dialogue between history and its modes of representation, an alternative art history emerged in which images asserted their agency. I have been expressing in the form of a video essay, a manifesto about land, body, and freedom.

As Western powers and their allies fabulate about a “New Middle East,” Beirut’s history resonates as singular songs of love and resistance. In my work, I am building a repository of these songs, for beauty to live and survive in this unrelenting world.





ويت في العدد الماضي

كيف حصل اللقاء

المهربة الحسنة امينة

تاجو التي دوخت رجال

الباحث في القاهرة

وبروت التي

جدت قصتها

ضجة كبرى في

مختلف الاوساط

قلت في تلك الحلقة

ان امينة تاجو وهي

امرأة تعيش الان في

بيروت .. تسهر في

الكاف دي روا .. وتقود

سيارة مادية

للون .. وترتدي

لفساتين الانيقة ..

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها

لها



TRAILER OF
A LOVER'S MANIFESTO



Alf Bojórquez



ALFRED TARAZI

GIFT

MOVING NARRATIVES

Dear Gina,

I doubt this letter will ever reach you. I am still saddened that we have not been able to see eye to eye. In our only encounter, you told me you would resort to justice and other means to prevent me from undertaking this project.

My film, exploring the history of the Palestinian Revolution and sexual liberation in Lebanon in the 70s, will happen no matter what. Perhaps what bothered you most was my interpretation of your career as a beauty queen – as an act of rebellion, a revolutionary stance on women's empowerment and sexual liberation. Perhaps that interpretation was flawed. A beauty queen is just a beauty queen.

As for this drawing, there are several points I need to clarify. It is the work of Palestinian artist Toufic Abdel Aal and was first published on the cover of *Al Hadaf*, the magazine of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to commemorate the

second anniversary of the assassination of Ghassan Kanafani. The artwork depicts a woman with child, carrying the banner of her deceased husband. When you saw it, you found the image to be in very bad taste, even perceiving it as a caricature of yourself. But it is not.

What also led to confusion was that I replaced the portrait of Ghassan Kanafani with that of your slain husband, Ali Hasan Salameh. This image matters deeply to me. Here, two revolutionary struggles collide: the call to free the occupied land of Palestine and the call to free the body. I hope that, in time, its beauty will reach you. Somehow, over the past 10 years, my destiny became intertwined with yours.

As I write this letter from Manila, Philippines, another story comes to mind. A few months ago, I was invited to Beirut for the farewell dinner of the Austrian ambassador. During a toast, the ambassador shared some of his memories, including an unlikely encounter with the Red Prince, the

nickname of your husband, Ali Hasan Salameh. The ambassador had grown up in Beirut during the civil war, at a time when his own father was serving there in the same function. At one point a domestic worker who her employers had abused, sought refuge in the household of the ambassador but her former employers tracked her down and kidnapped her. The ambassador turned to Salameh, who organised a PLO commando raid to rescue the worker. Hence, the Red Prince amidst all the intrigues and conspiracies of the Lebanese Civil War, leading up to his assassination in 1979, came to be seen as "the saviour of lost Filipinas."

Who could have imagined that Georgina Rizk, Miss Universe 1972, would become the pregnant widow of a slain freedom fighter? In this tale, there is no room for imagination. It is a conjunction of innumerable narratives that demand to be reclaimed – in the name of love, dignity, and a free Palestine.

I grew up in a place full of stories and few listeners. It's not that the people don't care about these narratives or the ideas and the culture transmitted through them, it's just that they usually don't have time to hear them. I am a writer and a broadcaster because I believe that through words a heritage cornered and constantly captured by those who want to reduce it to individualism and spectacle can be conveyed. I write books and make radio to craft and spread stories infused with critical thought. I am currently writing a science fiction novel. I run workshops about the distant future, where I seek to generate environments where desire and utopia can become imaginable, and where mistakes can be made because, like a blank page, they are open to dialogue. But there is no way to shape the future without remembering historical tragedies. That's why I am currently rewriting, in a dystopian key, *Eugenia*, a sci-fi novel set in the region where I grew up. It tells the story of a government that controls

birth rates and accelerates pregnancies through eugenics. The protagonist is an Official Reproducer of a state that sterilizes indigenous people and reproduces only the Western norm. With this book, I want to warn about the racism that repeatedly undermines progressivism.

I escaped from academia and turned to radio and literature so that this and other stories could be heard. I fled from theory and institutional research because I believe that university and usual cultural circuits, including devices of denunciation typical of progressivism, have less power than narrative. I create radio and literature to prefigure the historical futuristic dream of pleasure and abundance that has so often been defeated, to dig up the dreams of the defeated and make them dreamable again, to redistribute our cultural collective wealth. A poetic wealth that is on the lips of everyone and is transmitted among common people, everyday folks.

Curatorial Comment

Alf's work, at once factual and fictional, historical and contemporary, is singular. Her work moves narratives in the present by placing the past in relation to the future, specifically in her regional place of upbringing, Mexico, but always in global contexts of migratory movements, tourism, imperialism, as well as solidarity. The word, through

radio broadcast and a profoundly prolific series of novels, is Alf's tool for radical critique as well as reimagining more just futures of desire. With dialectical profundity, Alf's work moves between dystopias and utopias, pasts and futures, Mexico and the world, offering readers and listeners not simply repositories of knowledge but much more: ways of seeing and being in the world anew.

Rohit Goel

COVER Inari Reséndiz cover of *Pepitas de calabaza*

RIGHT Photos of the Dream Lab, based on this excerpt of *Cocamex*, in Manila, Philippines, guided by Keren Lasme and Alf Bojórquez. We shared the questions in random teams and discussed the answers. We daydreamed about a utopian future.



I wrote *Pepitas de Calabaza* (*Pumpkin Seeds*, 2023). The protagonist, Paco, is a landowner who falls in love at university. Through the story, the city also becomes a protagonist. Mérida, in southeastern Mexico, has been ravaged by the allure of its beaches. Tourism displaces local people, and Paco, like many in the region, lives by selling land and renting rooms to Europeans. *Pepitas de calabaza* is a romantic novel about a city besieged by gentrification. In it, I explored the relationship between patriarchy and colonialism.



TOP Devadeep Gupta drawing based on *Pepitas de calabaza*

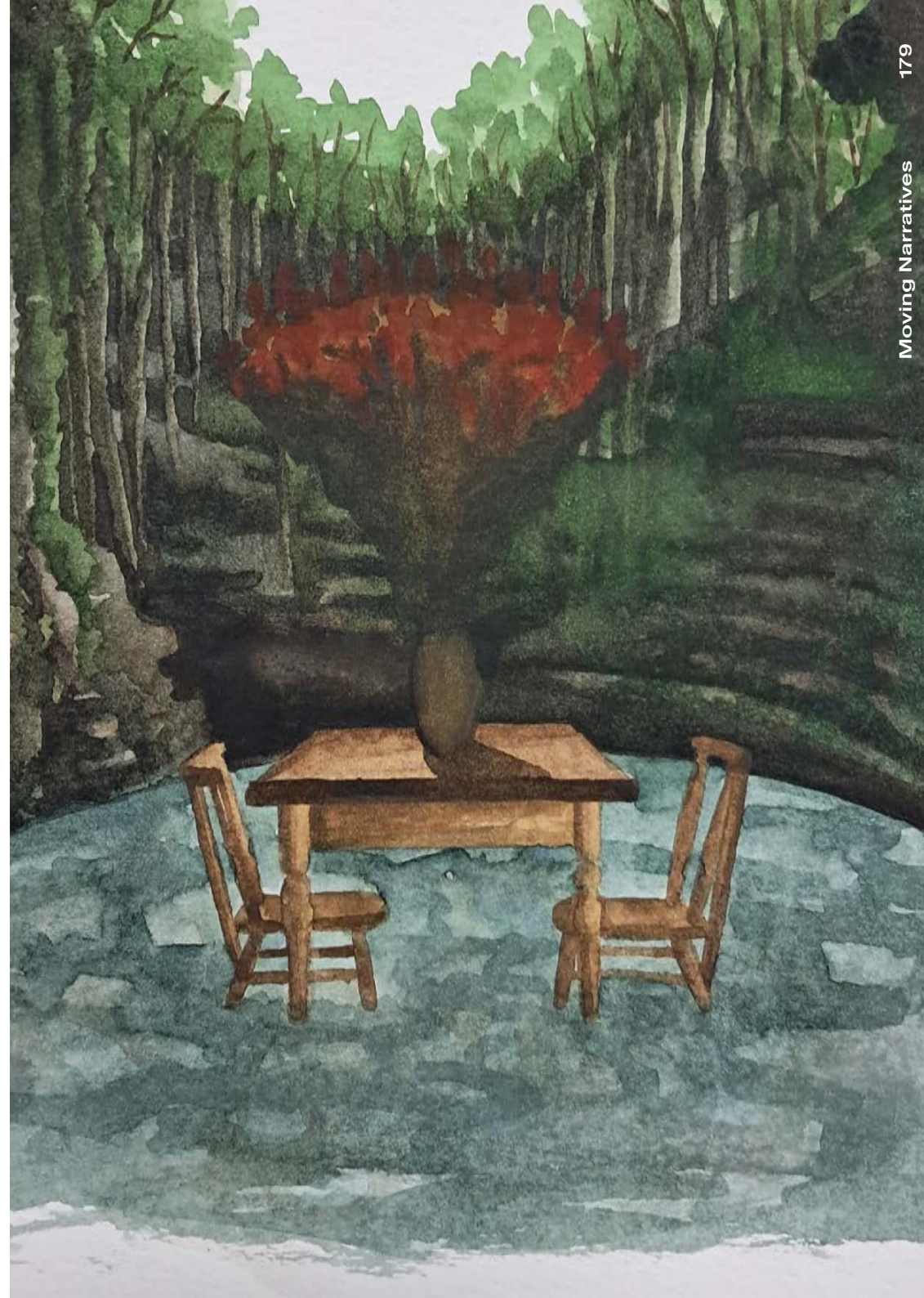
RIGHT Dian Succi alternative cover of *Pumpkin Seeds* (*Pepitas de calabaza*) dream excerpt. Translation by A. M. Burt.

He dreamed that he was walking through the swamp. Kilometers of muddy, hardened sand that dried the trees until they were stunted. There was no shade, and the sea was nowhere to be seen. Only the sound of the waves could be heard under a punishing sun. He entered a spring. But there was no way out. He was trapped in a kind of desert.

Mosquitoes began to form black clouds, biblical plagues that stared at him with crossed arms. He submerged several times until a water-logged spot started to suck him in, dragging him into the earth's depths and he emerged in a cenote in his backyard with his ears filled with dirty water.

He blew a whistle. It started to rain, and the water tank overflowed. The sea fell from the sky like one of those hurricanes that devastated entire towns, forecasted by the radio on any summer day. Paco found some pumpkin seeds in his underwear standing in the middle of his garden. Once again, the stones shaped like rattles.

Inside, Raquel and Teté were at a table with silverware, napkins, and a bottle of balché. He ground the seeds with his tears until he formed a green paste. He dissolved it in the alcohol and promised them that the concoction would ease their pain. It would help them forget Roi and don Paco. He sat next to them, and they drank until the last drop. At last, they would stop being sad.



In my second book, ***No Dam Can Contain a Furious Ocean, Potentia, Joy and Anarchism*** (2024), I narrated how colonialism domesticated my family and most people from popular classes, punishing block parties, leisure, and any form of collective pleasure. In that book, I elaborated my experience within the radical left. It is the history of the practice and research to which I have dedicated my whole life.



TOP Devadeep Gupta drawing based on *No Dam Can Contain a Furious Ocean*

RIGHT Dian Succi alternative cover of *No Dam Can Contain a Furious Ocean, Potentia, Joy and Anarchism*. André Léo in watercolor. Translation by A. M. Burt.

On the way to the cities, workers, women, and children roamed beneath a scorched sky. In their suitcases they carried plants, spices, and cookbooks. They were traversing a century in which the smoke of industry was just beginning to blanket the world. A young man was drinking and playing cards with his friends at the Artillery Academy of St. Petersburg. After three years of revelry, he was expelled and transferred to Minsk, where he became an officer in the Russian Imperial Guard. The expulsion failed to chasten him – instead, comradeship became his only refuge in the world. He was never a believer in political parties.

I was born two centuries later, near the Caribbean Sea, in a house where the scent of marijuana mixed with the sound of Led Zeppelin playing at full blast. I was raised on cold sandwiches and Cheerios that I never allowed to go soft – as soon as the milk hit the bowl I would shovel them into my mouth. The rest of the family funds went to Coca-Cola, beer, and cocaine. The few times my father would come around the house, he'd be doing lines in the bathroom. He never did it in front of the kids. He was an educated hippie.



In my third book, *Cocamex*, I returned to fiction. It's a book where two influencers discuss what the revolution was. They argue over the meaning of their actions: abolishing money and private property in a kind of carnival. I spent years studying the Mexican Revolution in archives and universities, particularly the radical imagination that circulated in poems, stories, and novels from the labour union newspapers of a century ago. *Cocamex* is a utopian novel that asks how the Mexican Revolution would look if it happened today.

It was a sort of island, with sand and palm trees, where hammocks hung, swaying completely silently, in which you were supposed to lie down and sleep. From above, signs hung asking: "Besides being happy and resting, what will we do when capitalism falls worldwide?" They handed out sheets where you could write whatever came to mind if you didn't fall asleep. What would paradise be like apart from nudity, pleasure, and rest? What would living without any guilt or lack be like? Besides criticizing, what does our utopia build or propose? What will the new horizon look like, the one that rises from the ashes of this one, when everyone becomes both builder and artist, creator and responsible for their destiny, at the



same time? How will we have fun in this world without money, fame, prestige, or any kind of competition? In the final section, artists distributed pamphlets with answers to these questions. Programs, plans, maps, schemes suggesting forms of organization and forms of life never seen before. The authors were from the Global South, but many people from the North had sent their dreams in letters. In fact, there was an entire brigade dedicated for weeks to translating a bunch of utopias from Asian, African, and Middle Eastern languages into indigenous languages. They organized in internet forums that supported our utopia. This part was called the Dream Laboratory, and anything could be published or distributed except failures, mistakes, or defeats. They only accepted constructive, affirmative dreams, full of spirit, honey, lubricant, glitter, slides, and smiles.

Of course, many people criticized the Lab and several of our creations. They argued that art and politics were being treated like a party, that we were seeking pleasure amid combat, amid genocide, and that this was immature, effeminate, bourgeois, childish, and unserious.





Fellows' Statement On Palestine

ALF BOJÓRQUEZ

Leading up to our first in-person meeting in Amsterdam, we collectively decided to do a sound, voice, and language exercise we titled *Anticolonial Karaoke*. At first, we heard songs from all over. We crossed borders by sharing the microphone, along with languages, accents, and pronunciations. But eventually, it was inevitable — pop songs in English took over.

Crossing language borders is not easy. Colonial powers remain as borders, taking the tangible form of walls, material borders that most people cannot cross. This is something we learned through *Moving* (pieces of) *Narratives*, as the privatization of post-service operations continues to reflect colonial divisions, where high costs and limited routes mirror the historical inequalities imposed by colonial rule similar to how language borders maintain such divisions.

All of these remain strong borders. For example, during the karaoke in Amsterdam, several of our Arabic-speaking members sang *Ya Rayah* by Rachid Taha for us — a ballad about people leaving their countries, whether

GIFT

as travellers, exiled, immigrants, or those yearning to return. The song originally comes from Algeria, which, as our mentor Samia Henni taught us, served as the laboratory for developing counterinsurgency tactics during its war of independence against French colonial rule. The methods used by France to suppress resistance were later adopted by other colonial and imperial powers, leading to the deaths of thousands of leftists across the Global South. At the end of our first Lab Week, we held a collective exhibition at Perdu, a poetry venue. Ngoc Nau and I sang a song she first performed with us during the karaoke night. Titled *Là XANH*, the song tells the story of the Vietnamese Red Army, who, like in most anticolonial struggles and revolutions in the Global South, ended up winning by cutting ties with old colonial power — in this case, during the First Indochina War, when they ultimately ended French colonial control.

During our second in-person meeting in Manila, we were supposed to travel to the countryside, but a

MOVING NARRATIVES

typhoon struck the capital, and we got stuck in the rain. Around 20 of us found ourselves stuck in the rain in the middle of a city with more than 20 million inhabitants, spending hours discussing Hegel and contemporary art. Then we started the second *Anticolonial Karaoke*.

I'll only share my favourite song from that wonderful night: *I'll Be There For You* by Bon Jovi, beautifully sung by Sara, one of the women who worked there. It turns out she was a rock singer and she had a band. Obviously.

Pop songs in English took over once again. We all sang loudly to the chorus because English — the borders it draws, the colonial powers it carries — is inescapable in this world. Even though we had a great night singing in the middle of a typhoon, far away from home, it felt as if colonialism was "singin' in our ears," mixed in our drinks and dreams: "When you breathe, I wanna be the air for you / I'll be there for you / I'd live and I'd die for you / I'd steal the sun from the sky for you."

Alf Bojórquez

When a revolutionary army loses an ally, it loses not so much military support; it loses hope. When the world is not watching, when the fear of diplomatic sanctions and the threat of widened war are absent, a foreign power trapped in counterguerilla operations is likely to make the final and the only move that may “win” — it starts to commit genocide.¹

Moving Narratives is a program that brought together artists and cultural workers from the so-called Global South. We started the program by focusing on counterinsurgency strategies and practices, a key aspect of which consists disseminating narratives that denigrate resistance movements against capitalist and colonial logic. We quickly realised that what ties this group together, among other things, is the fact that many of our practices seek to rewrite, in one manner or another, histories co-opted by fascism, colonialism, and other forms of tyranny, and to tease out the contemporary manifestations of these violent legacies.

This realisation was undoubtedly amplified by the fact that the program began amidst the

Israeli genocide in Gaza, still ongoing when we wrote this. The unfathomable scale of this genocide is designed to make any form of resistance to the Zionist project seem futile or naive. Add to that the massive forces that mobilized to deter and punish any form of dissent from university campuses to mainstream and social media, trying to depict our love of freedom as a hateful act, while jumping through rhetorical hoops to justify the acceleration of the Zionist project. The cultural and artistic spheres were of course not exempt from these systemic counterinsurgency tactics.

Certainly, anything we might do in the form of this publication would be insufficient to grapple with the violent transformations that are upon the Middle East, the world, and ourselves; but Palestine is our school and from it we learn many things. We learn, for instance, that there is a long history of the use of the arts in the service of resistance, meaning we all have work to do within our fields and professions. By looking to Palestine, we also learn that we are not alone, that we are in fact a majority.

¹ Eqbal Ahmad, “Revolutionary Warfare: How to Tell When the Rebels have Won” (1965). *The Selected Writings of Eqbal Ahmad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 21.

It seemed an impossible thought for us to put out this publication without Gaza, without its lessons, without its defenders. Beyond a nod, an ode, a gesture, we thought to compile something more operative, a resource, a guide. So we put together a modest collection of diverse initiatives for those who might still not have found a way to be in solidarity with Gaza.

For the most part, we have selected initiatives stemming from artistic and cultural milieus. There are also media links to consult for reading and listening to perspectives beyond and against American-Israeli propaganda. There are solidarity initiatives for Palestinian artists and cultural workers. And crucially, there are links to understanding the boycott campaigns against Israel and ways to participate. One of the few and most effective levers we have had as cultural workers and artists is to participate in boycott campaigns against Israeli institutions or those who support them. Needless to say, this list is (thankfully) far from exhaustive, and other tactics are not featured here, but that is for a different conversation.

Arts and cultural collectives for solidarity

We are Not Numbers ²

A collective of Palestinian emerging writers from Palestine, co-founded by the Palestinian poet Refaat Al Areer, who was assassinated by Israel in Gaza on December 6, 2024.

In 2011, he wrote a poem to his daughter Shymaa, "If i must die." ³

After his death, the poem went viral on social media. A few months later, Shymaa herself was killed by an Israeli air strike.

Some Strings ⁴

Launched in March 2024, *Some Strings* has brought together over 100 artists, producing nearly six hours of short films. Since June 25, these films have been shown worldwide, in cinemas and festivals as pre-programs or continuous screenings, with no set end date. *Some Strings* can be adapted to all kinds of community spaces, protest camps, and arts centers. This initiative aims to grow further, with its dissemination planned in the short, medium and long term.

United Screens for Palestine ⁵

United Screens for Palestine is an open, decentralised collective of programmers, cultural workers, and venues. They organize a film screening program called *Refusing to disappear*, to celebrate the rich legacy of Palestinian storytelling through films.

Musicians for Palestine ⁶

Inspired by Artists Against Apartheid, Musicians for Palestine is a collective that rejects the use of their music to "whitewash oppression and human rights violations anywhere." The group advocates for the cessation of weapons and military funding to Israel and any other state involved in "crimes against humanity." With more than 6,000 signatories, Musicians for Palestine stands for commitment to justice and human rights.

Skateboarders for Palestine Alliance ⁷

Skateboarders for Palestine Alliance (SPA) is a global community of skateboarders who make a call for "skateboarding platforms to send a clear message of support to the Palestinian skateboarding community and wider society of support and solidarity." The alliance



advocates for governments to halt their support crimes in Palestine and calls for an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories.

Palestine and the Right to Food ⁸

In August 2024, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, prepared a report examining the impact of Israeli policies on Palestinian food sovereignty, specifically how they undermine the Palestinian people's ability to access and produce food. This graphic report is a collaboration with Lebanese artist Omar Khouri, and draws on Fakhri's findings on the use of famine as a weapon of mass punishment by Israel.

Art4Palestine ⁹

Art4Palestine is a collective of artists dedicated to raising funds and awareness for Palestinian relief efforts. They call on people to donate to a Palestinian relief fund, call their representatives, or attend protests advocating for a ceasefire, all while receiving artwork in return.

Publishers for Palestine ¹⁰

Publishers for Palestine is a global collective of publishers, united in their commitment for

justice, freedom of expression, and the power of the written word. They organize the *Read Palestine Week* to encourage people around the world to read Palestinian poetry, fiction and nonfiction books. They read publicly, and in community, as part of the global resistance to genocide. You can download zine and books by Palestinian writers, about Palestinian history, and about organizing for a free Palestine through the following link ¹¹

Provoked Narratives ¹²

Provoked Narratives is an invitation, amidst genocide and ongoing aggression, to understand the narratives constructed around Palestine as part of a long colonial project, a blueprint of violence. It calls for reflection on the conflicted role of the camera, from its inception as a tool of empire, in shaping these narratives. This initiative invites us to consider how images have been co-opted while exploring their potential to resist and subvert.

The Palestinian Museum ¹³

The Palestinian Museum is a non-governmental association dedicated to supporting an open and vibrant Palestinian culture both locally and internationally. It presents and

contributes to narratives on Palestinian history, culture, and society from new and critical perspectives, offering spaces for creative ventures, educational programs, and innovative research. The Museum's mission is to produce and disseminate emancipatory learning experiences about Palestine, its people, and history through innovative exhibitions and programming, transcending political and geographical borders to connect Palestinians worldwide via digital archives and online platforms.

Writers Against the War on Gaz ¹⁴

Writers Against the War on Gaza (WAWOG) is a collective of media, cultural, and academic workers organizing to support Palestinian liberation and oppose Zionism and American empire. Inspired by the 1960s American Writers Against the Vietnam War, WAWOG began in October 2023 and has grown into a movement committed to solidarity, shared struggle, and social transformation.

Palestinian Arts and Culture Solidarity Collective ¹⁵

Palestinian Arts and Culture Solidarity Collective is an ad-hoc group of Global South cre-

atives and allies in the Global North standing in solidarity with Palestinian counterparts.

The Palestine Festival of Literature (PalFest) ¹⁶

The Palestine Festival of Literature (PalFest) is an annual event that brings together writers and artists to celebrate Palestinian culture and resilience. Through readings, performances, and discussions, it highlights the role of storytelling and art in resisting oppression and building solidarity.

Chinua Achebe ¹⁷

Nigerian writer, novelist and poet Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) was one of the patrons of the 2008 Palestine Festival of Literature (PalFest) along with Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and other prominent writers. Unable to attend the festival, Achebe instead recorded a video as an inaugural address in support of the festival's work and the importance of art and literature in times of political unrest. He also read a short poem entitled "Refugee mother and child".

Maen Hammad ¹⁸

Maen Hammad is a documentary photographer and



Kareem Barakat ollie in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah



Kilani pushing in Asira al-Shamiliya in the occupied West Bank



Kilani pushing in Asira al-Shamiliya in the occupied West Bank



Kilani pushing in Asira al-Shamiliya in the occupied West Bank

skateboarder who has spent six years documenting the Palestinian skateboarding scene. Originally from Palestine and raised in Michigan, he now divides his time between Boston and Ramallah, where he has been documenting life in the occupied West Bank since October 7th.

The Palestinian Feminist Collective ¹⁹

The Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC) is a U.S.-based group of Palestinian and Arab feminists dedicated to achieving Palestinian social and political liberation by addressing systemic gendered, sexual, and colonial violence, oppression, and dispossession. Their initiatives include organizing events, issuing statements, and providing resources that highlight the intersection of feminist and anti-colonial struggles. One notable project is the "Feminist Futures Calendar," which outlines principles guiding their decolonial vision and practice.

The Palestinian Cultural Society ²⁰

The Palestinian Cultural Society is a group of Global South creatives and allies in the Global North who stand with Palestin-

ian artists and communities. They work together to support and connect through solidarity initiatives.

Direct financial support

Gaza Community Mental Health Programme ²¹

Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) is a non-profit civil organisation, established in 1990. Working in the fields of mental health and human rights, it strives to improve the mental well-being of the Palestinian community by providing clinical, social, research and training services. In addition, GCMHP works to gather support and advocate for the rights of women, children, and victims of violence and human rights violations.

The Ghassan Abu Sittah Children's Fund ²²

This Fund is dedicated to the children of Gaza, providing medical care to those in greatest need and helping to alleviate pressure on the medical sectors in both Gaza and Lebanon.

The Owneh Initiative ²³

In the aftermath of October 7, 2023, the ensuing accelerat-

ed Israeli genocide on Gaza, and a new wave of unjust, politically weaponized conditions imposed by donors, The Owneh Initiative seeks to break away from the colonial funding system and secure the independence of Palestinian civil society organizations from external interference.

Solidarity Prints for Palestine ²⁴

A group of Majority World photographers, art and cultural workers and allies have come together to organise this fundraiser to contribute to The Owneh Initiative's SOLIDARITY FUND.

Global boycott campaigns and movements

Palestine. Boycott Israel ²⁵

This campaign urges solidarity with Palestinians in their struggle for freedom, justice, and equality. Whilst governments continue to financially support the apartheid state, individuals are called to stand against it and refuse complicity.

BDS ²⁶

The BDS movement stands for the global boycott of Israeli cultural institutions and events

that serve to whitewash or justify its regime of occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid over the Palestinian people. Just as South African anti-apartheid activists ad called on international artists, writers and cultural institutions to culturally boycott South Africa, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, PACBI, urges international cultural workers and cultural organizations, including unions and associations, to boycott or work towards cancelling events, activities, agreements, or projects involving Israel, its lobby groups or its cultural institutions.

Strike Germany ²⁷

Strike Germany calls for international cultural workers to withdraw from German cultural institutions in protest against the suppression of Palestinian solidarity in Germany. The movement demands an end to policies that restrict free expression, especially around Palestine.



24



25



26



27



28



29



30



31



32



33



Media and knowledge-based platforms

Raseef22 ²⁸

Raseef22 is an independent media platform that declares its non-neutrality and its commitment to a set of values, principles, and causes. It proclaims its solidarity with the people and their aspirations, being partial to the principles of human rights, and standing with everything that contributes to building societies that are open to and accept difference.

+972 Magazine ²⁹

+972 Magazine is an independent, online, nonprofit magazine run by a group of Palestinian and Israeli journalists. Founded in 2010, its mission is to provide in-depth reporting, analysis, and opinions from the ground in Israel-Palestine. The name of the site is derived from the telephone country code that can be used to dial across Israel-Palestine.

Bisan Owda ³⁰

Instagram of Palestinian journalist Bisan Owda documenting daily life in Gaza in the midst of a genocide. Bisan begins all of her videos by starting: I'm Bisan from Gaza and I'm still alive.

Eye on Palestine ³¹

Eye on Palestine is an Instagram network run by journalists and writers focused on documenting and showcasing the realities of the ongoing genocide in Palestine. The platform highlights stories of resistance, injustice, and resilience while promoting awareness through powerful visual storytelling and reporting.

Translating Falasteen ³²

Translating Falasteen is an Instagram page dedicated to sharing Palestinian experiences, histories, and narratives through translations of Arabic content. It aims to make Palestinian voices accessible to a broader audience and foster solidarity by bridging language barriers.

Visualizing Palestine ³³

Visualizing Palestine is a non-profit organization dedicated to using data and research to visually communicate Palestinian experiences, aiming to provoke narrative change and promote social justice. Their work includes infographics, interactive platforms, and videos that are accessible for online and offline use, serving a wide community of advocates, human rights defenders, academics, educators, and students. Recent projects

include “Intent Portal: Law For Palestine,” documenting genocidal incitement against Palestinians, and “Gaza- Resisting Cultural Genocide,” highlighting the cultural destruction in Gaza. Their visuals are free to download, use, and share under a Creative Commons license.

Palestine, Today ³⁴

“*Palestine, Today*” is an interactive map developed by Visualizing Palestine that illustrates the transformation of Palestinian communities since the Nakba in 1948. It highlights the experiences of various communities, including those that remained, providing a comprehensive visual narrative of the changes over time. Additionally, the Palestine Open maps is a platform that allows users to explore, search and download historical maps and spatial data on Palestine.

LearningPalestine ³⁵

LearningPalestine is a group of artists, academics, intellectuals, and community members who work to share knowledge about the ongoing Palestinian struggle for justice, liberation, and freedom. They seek to explore and implement new ways of disseminating knowledge as well as affordable and decentralized ways of reproducing it.

The Palestinian Sound Archive ³⁶

The Palestinian Sound Archive is a monthly radio show on NTS Radio, curated by Mo'min Swaitat. The program showcases a diverse collection of vintage cassettes from Palestine and beyond, featuring genres such as jazz, funk, and Bedouin field recordings. The archive serves as a platform to preserve and share the rich and diverse musical heritage of Palestine, offering listeners an opportunity to explore sounds that reflect the cultural and historical narratives of the region.

34



35



36



Final Words

We are sensitive to the tragic dispossession of the Palestinians because we could always sense that we had a hard time breathing in this cruel world. The genocide of Gazans by Israel has brought back to the surface our deep-seated knowledge that even as we are celebrated as being creative voices from the South, the moment we step out of our roles as speaking about colonialism as a relic of the past and begin to fight it in the present, freedom of speech clenches-up.

We are sensitive to Gaza because, in one way or another, we too are the bitter fruits of decimated peoples and plundered lands. But rest assured that a free Palestine means freeing us all. It means to imagine what actual, present-day decolonization means, beyond its metaphoric deployment as a hollow buzzword for parts of the art world and academia.

We are sensitive to all of this because we are artists and cultural practitioners, and we work with people, we feel their emotions in our bodies as ours, and these emotions are mixed with our work, and this small collection is the least we can do about it. We are sensitive to all of this, but sensitivity is not enough. That is why we made this list of possible actions we all can take.

Index of Artwork as Gifts



p. 35
Human / machine |
Painted partial objects
Dian Suci



p. 183
Anticolonial Karaoke | Bon
Jovi's *I'll Be There For You*
Alf Bojórquez

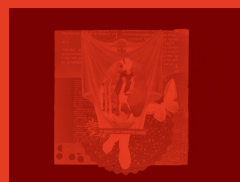


p. 95
Fallout / Buddha
wards off a demon
| Sri Lankan temple
mural
Abdul Halik Azeez

p. 21
Your Impactful Gifts!
For "Insurgent Practices
in Times of Total Wars"
Samia Henni



p. 57
Excerpts from a letter
| Assam Railways and
Trading Company
archives
Devadeep Gupta



p. 139
la mariposa (the butter-
fly) | Postcard collage
Mariano Pozzi



p. 81
Open ChatGPT | Image
Ngoc Nau



p. 67
*This is what it looks like
when doves cry(0)w...* |
Photo series
Elyla

p. 173
Dear Gina | Letter to a
beauty queen
Alfred Tarazi



p. 163
Hossein Sabzian | Abbas
Kiarostami's *Close Up*
Abdeslam Ziou Ziou



p. 117
Visual poem | Isna
Marifa's *Mountains
More Ancient*
Keren Lasme



p. 149
Books | Thongchai
Winichakul's *Siam
Mapped* and *Mo-
ments of Silence*
Mark Teh

Index of *Moving* (pieces of) *Narratives*

Introduction
Abdul Halik Azeez

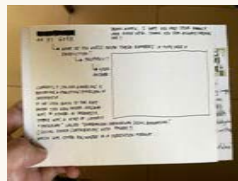


"thingbeings"
Devadeep Gupta



Propaganda
postcard
Ngoc Nau

Print with a prediction
Dian Suci



Stamps
Mark Teh



Book fragment
Keren Lasme

La credencial del camino
(The Credential)
Abdeslam Ziou Ziou



*The Latin American
Postal Tragedy*
Mariano Pozzi



Book and collage
Alf Bojórquez



Unsent stamps
Alfred Tarazi



Bloodstained feather
Elyla

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