

GHOSTS
SHELTERING
BENEATH A
CLOUD OF
ENTROPY

OMAR
KHOLEIF



The air-conditioning unit in my dust-filled office in the United Arab Emirates where I have now worked for nearly eight years has turned the color of ash. I sit beneath it on this evening as it spits out gusts of cool air. An hour before twilight, a faintly illuminated black box transpires on my laptop screen. A telekinetic force communing polite voices via the internet, a vestige, which delivers data via information packets—not as is often aphoristically misrepresented in popular culture via the metaphor of the “cloud” but rather via underwater sea cables—through the fiber that generates the optical, the ocular.

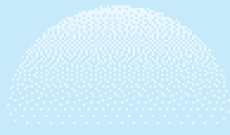
Catching a shallow breath, I consider allegories for thinking of the pictographic plane, the image and art’s history today. Canonical notions of time are habitually demarcated by the heroic action of painting and the concepts of figure and ground—of skies and clouds; of topographical scenes of bodies ensconced in land, in earth sitting before water. The connective tissue that is the mass medium of *this* time—the internet—which tethers the multiverse of media and its platforms, is where the eye should begin its critical journey. To unfold the entanglement, as it is also representative of what is most un-seen, of what exists within the interstice, as much as at the precipice.

I cough a hearty one, my chest full of air as the uncleaned HEPA filter brought in to placate my sickly chest whirrs towards me in the 19th century Islamic heritage house named after the sea merchant who once owned it. It now functions as a hybrid residency space for artists and arts administrators on the Northern coast of an Emirate, an isle that is tended to by the imagination. I peer through metallic bars that have been corroded by the humidity wrought by sea water. Between them, plume-like assembles mushroom abundantly, Leviathan-like through the sky above the water in reddish hues ascending and descending through a color scale with the hour, and the passing of minutes. Up the scale, magenta, into an exaggerated lilac, below, turquoise deep. It is a queer, femme sky, as opposed to the outward bleak muscularity of Constable or Turner.

If we hollowed their pictures of everything but the sky, which of the ‘masters of the sky’ might have one deem the more ‘camp’ of the pair: Constable, surely?

I return to the darkness of light itself, to the meeting in The Netherlands, where our subject remains a lurid abstraction. The request to perambulate around the exhibition of Evi Vingerling and Katja Mater seems a peculiar one at first. For our invitation includes few clues. The proverbial pages of time are left unsealed for me to enter, but the compass is also mine to navigate with.

What world will you make, what routes, paths, and loops will anchor or unsettle you in this space?



Feted Clocks

I advance conclusively,
Turn the key
In the Violet Hour
Time has revealed itself to be pregnant, succinct
The end is a velvet penumbra
As nimble as lotus flower
Swallowing its shadows
For 40 days and 40 nights,
In natural light
Doused in Black and in White
The stain of *their* beloved force
Has been deposited into boxes—
Unmoored at a certain lux
Dedications begin to unspool
Like spit that splits into a tourniquet
Ruins that shall never be archived, never to be conserved
Not beyond this fleeting instant.

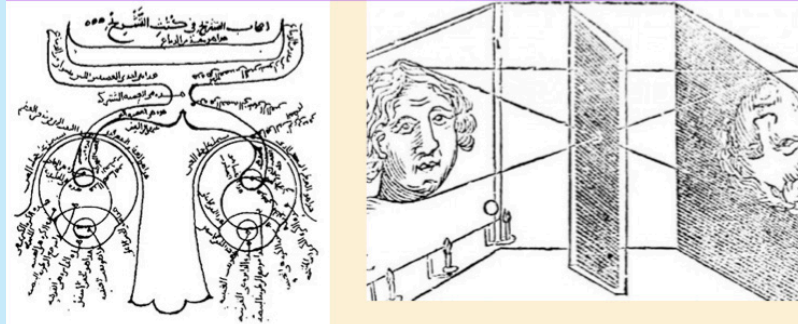
O. Kholeif, 2025

In the bitter chill of winter, Evi Vingerling and I have ventured by car to visit Katja Mater in Brussels. I have been fighting illness for what feels like too long. By mid-life, death has winked at me more than once. I was petrified I would fall sick the previous night, so I spent it sleeping with my coat on. But today, the constitution of my body has been resurrected. Katja is nursing us both with herbal tea. Around us, a series of metallic sheets serve as partitions on the walls. Mounted on them are photo papers, each is composed of texts on double-sided aluminum panels, of mottos—refracted poems that assume the configuration of the cylindrical frame of a clock. As I peer at them, they are clearly mirrors, portals of time that have been bisected in the middle, a quest by the artist to intervene and thwart narrative, while still offering clues as to how a body can be disassembled and pieced back.

Titled, *Regardez les tUous/Watch Them All*, 2023, these artworks serve as one of the key ingredients that inspired Katja to use the building which we shall find ourselves inhabiting as a Camera Obscura.

One of the earliest ocular “illusions” as it were, the Camera Obscura finds its route in the words sketched out in *The Book of Optics/Kit b al-Manir*, a seven-volume treatise on *looking* authored by the Arab scholar of physics and mathematics, Ibn-al-Haytham, who was known in western Europe as Alhazen (965-c. to 1040 AD). Alhazen’s argument that vision was created by “light” entering the “eye” is regarded as “intromission theory”—into the dark vessels of the sheltered sphere, a picture—vision is constructed. It laid the foundations for the modern-day camera and photography that would come to bear, a fact that is widely excluded from much official record in the scientific study of optics. Here, the first

models for today's photographic apparatus—the lens-less camera—the pinhole camera and the Camera Obscura are meticulously detailed.



In shadow play, in puppet theater, in the carnivalesque mythology of yonder, the Camera Obscura often assumes a tent-like structure, or a box-like apparatus. The image is sometimes mirrored or turned upside down. Inside the dark box where light is received, the pictographic field might be found bounded by a series of bars that delineate the framing of a particular picture before it is channeled back outward. Mater's proposal to unbuckle certain shutters that cover windows, while leaving others closed, to control the entry of light's pathways, inside and out, by installing five lenses to windows in the Spring at the old country house of Amelisweerd in Utrecht, speaks to architecture's propensity for constructing imagination. Just as much, it is an allusion to the very topography of image making. A series of inhabited skins here will begin unfurling. To achieve this, Mater, starts first, with the act of layering an imprint of time itself.

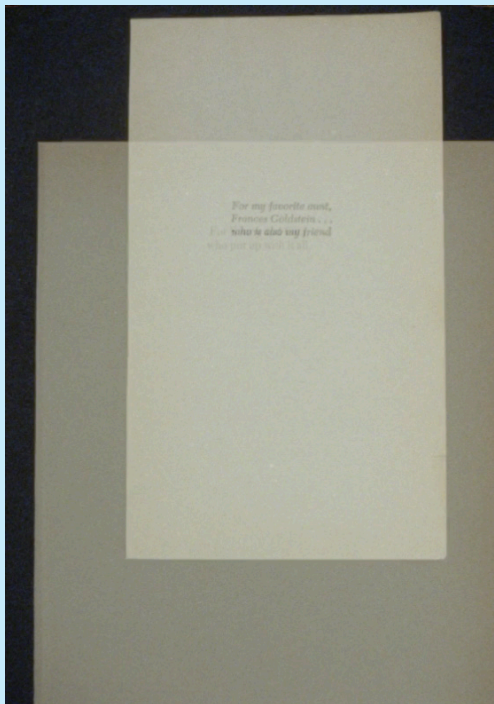
No two experiences of looking for the visitor shall be the same, no matter how controlled they may feel or seem. Except perhaps for the uncanny specter of the ghosts that live beneath the linen that primes these walls on the second floor of this country manor. As one overlooks the parkland, reminiscent of a forest in the city of Utrecht, histories usher themselves inward, creolizing temporalities of pasts and present in an affectionate embrace across an expanse of stately rooms and creaking wooden floors.

The sound of Mater's 16mm projectors roil and whip in adjacent rooms, analogues life, unspooled from the ground?

An exhibition always reaches its destination, somehow.



For Sue
To Véra
For Maria
for Lisa Marie
To dearest Gordon with all my love
For darling Becky
To H. T. J. N.
*For my favourite aunt,
Frances Goldstein . . .
who is also my friend*
For Sonny and Gita, who put up with it all.
Voor Sean
For Russel and all of our companions



I once wrote a memoir, in fact, twice, I wrote a memoir. Let me begin again: There were three different occasions when I authored a book that you might deem to be a memoir. A written record. The word, “memoir” evidently stems from the 15th century. It suggests a note, a memory, to “keep in mind” from the Latin “memoria.” It is an act of salvage, of terror, of recantation. I performed this act, each time, partly to purge demons, but also with the hope of being seen by others for who *it is that* I am. The first of these was authored and published in 2013 and narrated in a

lilting voice. A cinematic reverie, embodying myself as Bjork from Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark*, 1999. It encompassed all the sadness held within my body. When published, it was met with acclaim, and it secured me my first literary agent. The initial print run sold out within weeks and became a "cult" classic. The book also destabilized many aspects of my life. It led to death threats from individuals whom I had revealed to have been violent to myself and others, and for a significant period, it severed my relationship to my family.

The dedication for this book came easily. *For Sophia*—the person who championed it. There were several who felt left out of this. Chiefly, my partner. For the elongated version brokered by my agent, I spent two years during every waking moment attempting to craft it. I even hired someone to help me. It was titled, "Not All Bodies are Heavenly". All I dreamed of was authoring the dedication. *For Frank, for standing by me, for the journey, for the shelter, for the home...* I cannot quite recall the rest. Frank refused to be cited in the manuscript by his real name. After he read the final version, in anger, he booked a flight and left home. His anguish sat lumpen on the floor of the dining room long after he'd gone. Several notable authors, of great esteem, read the manuscript and noted that although it was beautifully written that it should remain in a drawer until my passing from this life to the next. I felt bruised. My dedication was my only way to acknowledge the one thing that I had managed to construct in this lifetime, my semblance of a family.

Several years later, a professional memoir of my career was published. I asked that the cover be produced in an iridescent and lustrous gold. The book itself, the object, was and is intended to function as a performance. If it is not read, that is okay. I agonized over the dedications for months. In the end, it was dedicated to my godchildren: my Dutch Syrian god-kids, Anouk and Ayk, as well as my British god daughter, Ariel, whom I asked to ruffle a feather or two. They serve to sever me from the present. They are my hope for a family, which I could not have.

Dedications, like acceptance speeches at award ceremonies, have as much to do with the author as they do with the named recipient. They are ritualistic processes that demarcate an "ends" to an end, delineating the edges of an experience. Katja Mater's *DEDICATION*, 2025, a 16mm moving-image work of pages from books upon books is an unceasing archive of stained lives, of dislodged presences, of the graft of authorship, of suffering, of life itself.

It is the newest work amongst the suite of works presented by Mater in the exhibition. Its genesis relates to the death of both of Mater's parents, primarily Mater's mother for whom these books belonged. It consists of the dedication pages most of which are taken from the seemingly innumerable books from Katja's mother's library that were donated to "goodwill" after her death. Each dedication is akin to an index, a totem, an heirloom, a painter's mark, a loving bruise accidentally imprinted onto the skin of a lover who loves too intensely. Names of myriad linguistic

and ethnic background are exposed suggesting a decentralized map of world literature. The mother was clearly an individual with capacious interests, a voracious reader, a keeper of print and material culture. Here, although exhumed, these vestiges, those authors, many of whom too shall have left their bodies, remain abstract ghosts in the darkness, flickering in the loop, severed from their original context—kept in a holding pattern—as if Katja were tethering the mother’s heart to her own through the spool of film itself, not in digits, not via cable or wire, not in fiber optic cable.

One of the most striking dedications that I ever came across was revealed to me in 1990s. It related to one of the most storied authors of her generation, Joan Didion. On Page 68 on the 29 April print run of *The New York Times*, a headline read: “A Talked-About Dedication”. The story read:

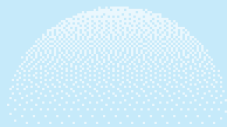
Joan Didion is angry with folks at Simon & Schuster. It doesn't take a great reporter to figure it out. All you have to do is pick up her latest book, "After Henry," a collection of essays just published by Simon & Schuster, and read the dedication. "This book," it reads, "is dedicated to Henry Robbins and to Bret Easton Ellis, each of whom did time with its publisher."

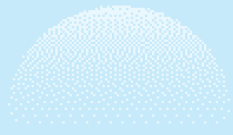
From today’s vantage point, it *might* surprise that the publishing goliath didn’t reprimand the star author, despite the affectionate tone of the essays therein. In Didion’s 2005’s memoir *The Year of Magical Thinking*, the author reflects on the role of “the dedication” as the reader orbits through the poignant, circular, and harrowing cadence of her prose. It is a diary of grief or rather, a chronicle of what it means to be barely coping. Surviving the death of her daughter Quintana who died at the age of 39, and later her husband, Gregory Dunne. At one point, Didion reflects on a book dedication from a previous volume, where both her husband and daughter’s names sat side by side on the page, followed by the word, “Generations”. She laments how she had not appreciated this sufficiently at the time, during their life. She continues, “The message that if death catches us, we only have ourselves to blame”. Dedications thus constitute an orthography of longing, of want. When gone, it is impossible to reclaim.

Stitching Joints Since 1770

British soldiers
Shoot into a crowd
3 people down

Another 2 collapse, slowly.
King’s and Queen’s
Queens and Kings
A Queen for a King.
King and Queen





A Knight
trapezes
to their death
from aboard a ship
traveling via Boston
to London

Meanwhile
Indentured
bodies
their skin
once as smooth
as the finest
flax

stand staring at themselves in mirrors
burnished
from
sun
and rain
from capturing their yield.
Tobacco.
Sugar.

Coffee:
To awaken *others* in the mornings.
beginning the kickstart
the harvest of the former Republic's economy.
Where are those ghosts today?
Their plaques?
Their monuments?
Where do they stand?
How should one best celebrate Black and Brown people's lives?

Perhaps, the committee might consider that we erect a statue right
outside of the country house?
Next to a bronze that we might produce
For Napoleon Bonaparte
and another
For Napoleon Dynamite.
With love,
Fondly,
yours, ever.
Regards.

O.Kholeif, March 2025

A Brief History of Wall Coverings, Sort of.

China 200 B.C., some say is when it all started. Pictorial planes of birds. But the ones that line this country house are apparently facsimile of the authentic artifact, I am informed by an agitated passerby. “Commissioned for the European gaze”. The consciousness of this vaguely rounded statement smacks of a certain oddity. Perhaps confusion and privilege. A naivete afforded to a person who may in that moment choose to turn the other cheek to the context of the lived experience in-situ in the myriad lands where such pictorial fields are produced. The import and export trade that sustained economies of scale in smaller western European countries from the Middle Ages onwards were notorious for GDP growth built around trading with other cultures. The performative, self-Orientalizing tendencies found in the carpets and wallpapers that form the drapery of such estates continues to present day. The aesthetics that are produced are generated through multiple forms of consciousness, as well as through a multi-tiered economic system, where scarcity models are developed for different sets of eyes: the tourist gaze, and the local gaze, however, may also convene under one sky.

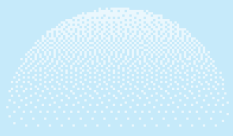
The Textile Museum in nearby Tilburg houses an archive of techniques and uses that have been developed throughout the ages. A cursory look at its public archives will lead you to trace wallpaper’s popularity to the carpets sold by sea merchants in the Arabic-speaking world since the Middle Ages. These nations, which stretch from Mauritania across northern to eastern Africa around the Gulf Peninsula, along a multitude of waterways shows a realm embodying various cultures, of various languages. A universe noted for adorning walls with the abstract pattern and motifs found in carpets. The finest of these were notably made of silk. Various accounts suggest that that in the late 17th century, there was a ban of such production in certain European nations, chiefly in France, to protect silk and satin to be maintained for the purpose of producing clothing instead. Within this narrative, wallpaper, which up until this point was used to adorn the interior of domestic furnishings, to protect the bottoms of skirting boards, the insides of cupboards, kitchen drawers and the like, begins to take on a more refined function and importance in the Netherlands and in other western European countries.

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London, which holds one of the world’s largest public design collections was conceived during Queen Victoria’s sovereignty in tandem with the Great Exhibition project that took place in the purpose-built Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London in 1851. The result was the revitalization of what today is a museum and educational district—the legacy of the Great Exhibition, inclusive of today’s V&A. At the time, the V&A sought to spearhead a renaissance in wallpaper design, thoroughly archiving and indexing motifs and designs that would encourage education in “taste”. The testament of good wallpaper was that which fused designed elements with naturalistic motifs. The museum annotated landmark patterns, symbols and grids from Andalucía (that of the Moors, i.e., the Arabs) through to China and Japan, encouraging sophistication, simplification, and what was deemed

“elegance”, arguing for an avoidance of pure repetition, i.e., that which could be supported largely by machine technology, in favor of that which could also be paired with handmade techniques.

Alongside permanent displays at the Victoria and Albert Museum, counter narratives have been presented such as the ecstatic exhibition at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art titled, ‘With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art, 1972-1985’, which offered a contemporary contra narrative to the hegemony of the monolithic encyclopedia proffered by such behemoth institutions. Here, one could cherish the sovereignty of camp, ostentatious color fields, mythological references culled from recent history, mapping a trajectory against the backdrop of a changing political sphere demarcated by waves of immigration, racial tension, LGBTQi liberation, the rise of the AIDS/HIV virus, xenophobia, and so much more.

Why has our imagination so continually been stunted by official record, and the history it notarizes?



HER-STORY

*Saidiya V. Hartman one of great exponents of literary and cultural theory manifested a path for us:
To re-conceptualize the archive
as a seat and site of and for multiple forms of individual imagination.
The archive is more than ever, a place of invitation.
It is a place for call and **Response**.*

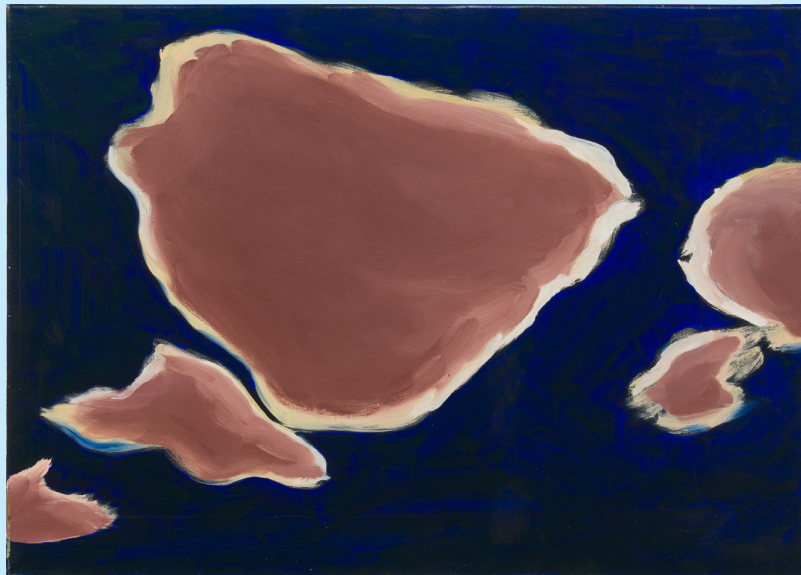
*If we have learned any lesson.
Any lesson at all.
Of sex
Of gender
of sexuality
Of body
of soul
of mind
of heart
of kindness
from the object
What is it?*

*Negligence is epistemic violence.
Negligence is torture.
Negligence is a mind game.
Negligence is violence.
A body is a body is a body is a body is a topography.
To be Expanded upon
Just as a house*

can be a home
can be a museum
can be a house
can be a home.
Blank spots
do not get dropped.
We fill them-in.
Together, or alone, if we must.
With our friends, or with whomever, if must.
Life is an all-over painting
A cloud constantly transmuting back and forth into a shroud.
Credit to the Empire.
Credit to the Empire.
To the statues, which we will not upturn.
As they remind us, not to forget.
They are indices of time.
They are fun, camp, joyful, surreal time.
Camp ghosts, camper than Christmas trees.

A Tree growing in and out of time
A Tree growing in and out of me
A distended limb,
Growing out in and out of me,
And into you.
Persistently, between and amongst us.
My Life full of holes
The ghosts maraud under the queer cloud of entropy.

O. Kholeif, 2025

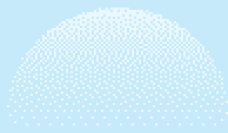


Threading through Clouds

A cloud from 2001, resembling a crater, painted soon after 9/11 sits before me in Evi Vingerling's studio. Hundreds of tubes of gouache, hollowed of their contents sit spread across tables forming a dimension unto themselves. The deceptive forms in Evi Vingerling's paintings lure the spectator into their orbit via their layered sheets of color in silica gouache or in egg tempera. Peer a little closer and they swell, contract, jump at you. Aspects of a painting begin to evoke the appendages of Lebanese artist's Huguette Caland's iconic series, *Bribes de Corps* (1970-1982)—abstract constellations of body parts. Thick, shaded, a corporeal imaginary, which becomes looser as you inch closer and notice the soft edges. Each resembling skin, unpeeled shells, cracking, unbuckling at the seams.

The metaphor of the sky and ground as a simulacrum for the body is a fundamental course through which to examine, study, and focus the gaze on Vingerling's epic scenes—symbolic fields for deep time and for the experience of flights of fancy. Speaking of purpose of art, the artist Louise Bourgeois once noted that "art repairs the damage inflicted by life." The subconscious imagination unfurls in an act of constant worldbuilding, a realm constructed from embodied memory, abandoned, fleeting moments, reconstituted, re-formulated through a suturing act of negotiation that occurs in the studio, in a singular act between the artist and the canvas.

Spending several days with Evi reveals that that in this engine, there are no shift breaks. The charge, the flicker, is constantly alive, animate. Simmer. Although unassuming, Evi is persistent in her acts of foraging, taking inventory, negotiating the constant act of being in the world. Her presence, and orientation as a gendered subject, a diasporic entity, who passes in the context of the everyday of her life. *But does she*, she queries? As she wonders and wanders through city streets, before venturing to the grocery store to prepare a meal. She is still painting all the while.



The Experimental Science of the Click

Working backwards and forward,
if only life were a slot machine.

Iron-clad

Life as a casino.

A dizzying amount of work

A bandit problem.

A housewife problem.

An index.

A gateway to life.

Portals, Doors, Windows—

Flung Open.

Trade OFFs.

Experimental intervals.

Drug companies.

The indefinite future.

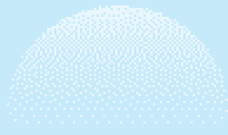
Theoretical forever.
Medical companies.
An endless present.
A cured patient.
A forever patient.
A discounted problem.
Now, a fixed interval of time.
Everything is *a*lways familiar in the unfamiliar.

Optimistic robots
Formal justifications
Benefits to the doubts
Meet new people
Try new things.
Try and prevent regret.
The JACK Pot.

after the rain,
in-side the cloud
after the drain.
Contested algorithms
I am the
Optimal scenario.
I am matter.
I am mountain.
I am a clinical trial on trial.
Exploitation over exploration.

O.Kholeif, 2025





1, 2, and 3

The edges
slip into me

Like a slick silkworm, this one made of silica.
The board slips, underfoot

She wept.
Amidst dandelions.
in the nest.
Thick fingers.
FAT as a Fat chip foothill.
WOMAN doormat.
WOMAN donut.

Who is this man who makes you tremble?

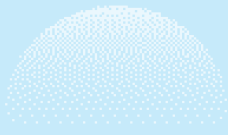
O.Kholeif, 2025

Utrecht is perhaps my favorite city in The Netherlands. Some find this peculiar considering its fraught social and political history. A plaque in blue, the rarest color in nature, hosts a stone, which commemorates the lives of those persecuted violently, those confronted with a form of vehemence, which today feels not so scarce at all. My eyes cruise back to Evi Vingerling's Untitled painting of the clouds made in October 2001 at the Royal Academy in the Hague. It's mist enrapturing me. It predates another painting that is absent from here, of autumn leaves falling at the base of a tree.

Another body, another metaphor, shedding, unveiling. Vingerling notes that before these paintings—this untitled painting, she was “still finding her way.” Sketching a path throughout the Country House, one is encouraged to wind down the staircase, to engage the silence, to attempt to find what Patti Smith called an act of *Woolgathering*—the experience of “catching fleeting thoughts”. Here, you might hear an echo of a song, or find a cloud hanging from a staircase—be it real or imagined, from a memory fold, another symbol, akin to Winston Churchill's infamous Black Dog: is it waiting to be punctured by us? To be let loose?

Shall we make it RAIN?

Evi Vingerling has been authoring a memoir since 2001 out of teardrop and the salt stain that it has left behind. Born in The Netherlands, she moved away with her family when she was 6 years old, living in Georgia and the United States, returning along to study at the age of 19. Having spent several years in the United States, the America she knew during the attacks of September 2011, felt incredibly distant. But her muffled cries, bottled up here, are more than one woman's tears. They are tears that could fill an “endless ocean” to invoke Lubaina Himid, a platform for the weary and wild to find catharsis of mind, for only then will water find its perfect memory.



The Undergrowth

The explore-exploit TRADE-OFF.
Amidst the under-growth
We sobbed
In Lewitt's Corner.
Everything that sounded like music
Now it looks like music.
All that I've seen; the every-thing.
The cloth that dries the blood
after the Razor's Visit
Caresses me
I am playing dead.
Holding a French Press.
Under a bed of Roses.

A portrait
A dancing dancer
Leads us to The Bathers
A Nude
To Testes
A-dangling
Tuned into, and out of nipple-turds
chilled.

O.Kholeif, 2025



I have not stopped coughing since the day that we sat down to look at Ruchama's face. Ruchama means beloved in Hebrew. She also went by the name of Sara. Her portrait exists here. Her eyes a piercing blue that cuts like a knife. Vingerling made another painting for Sara while she was still alive, battling Cancer, a fight that she eventually lost. This wispy portal of orange and yellow hues concocted out of poetry and whipped cream is called *Zalvende woorden (Soothing Words)*, 2024. Gazing at the image as it hangs in Vingerling's home with its intended airiness, I am struck by a bolt of melancholy.

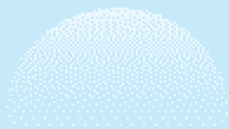
The words of public intellectual Jacqueline Rose from November 2024 stirs in my mind, "surely all times are dark times for women" she notes in the preface to the reissue of a volume of collected tales of women. At the time, Rose was reflecting upon a question from one of her readers. Woefully, she acknowledges in response, ten years on that the position of women, has "darkened still more." Sexual violence and abortion rights have become vessels negotiated in the backdrop of a global pandemic—the woman's body, what should be a personal vestige has been banded about as political fodder for the masses, as a guise through which to construct and consume institutional power.



Vingerling's paintings are quiet in their resistance; they are as solemn as they are proud. Take for instance her epic skyscape stretching out to the grand scale of a history painting at more than 3 and a half meters wide and nearly two and a half meters high. It is called *F.of.F.* It was completed in 2025. Reading the title, it reads like many things: F for Father. Yes, that is correct. But as an anagrammatic, "picture poem" to quote artist

Fiona Banner, it is also a rejection of self, an admonishment to “Fuck off!” as it is a screech, “For Fuck’s Sake!” I cannot live like this anymore.

The charged vessel that occupies the ocular centerpiece here at first resembles a ship. One that has been charred from having moved through murky waters, through a trenchant ocean, carrying bodies, lives unloaded, rebooted, some rescued, others that could not be saved. I flinch unexpectedly as I notice the stark contrasting blues in the base of the canvas. The pathways, the gangways: is this a sky, or a waterway? This mutable facet is left porous. It is an open-ended question. An opening that the artist invites the viewer to parse through. It becomes abundantly clear that this vessel, with its almighty heft that it is as much a tumor, as it is a remnant of pains lived, memories experienced, which Vingerling has excised, the wailing of a body that is no longer constituted as it once was. If my words read akin to a series of tongue-twisted similes, then perhaps it might be worth revisiting the physicality of Vingerling’s earlier paintings, her body of work, of her as a mountain, dancing, dancing, dancing.



Sorting

They say that I remind people of Eve.
Of a rapper who was all wo-MAN.
Always metaphoric.
Ovid’s COVID.

A character
As unerringly as the mills of the Gods.
an invention
of limited use.

A facet
A tabulation from the literature
That everyone knows.

Succumb to the thicket.
Succumb to the sickness.
To the very thing that colors you, and me, and all the everyone's.
The largest, the smallest, or the rarest,
Universal user interface
Vice and virtue.
A misnomer.

O.Kholeif, 2025

On my visit to meet Katja and Evi, one of the several references that I am given is Anne Boyer's book, "The Undying". It is a treatise on modern illness, the medical industrial complex, our bodies, death and exhaustion. I read it as fatigued as each subject that the author describes. I read with the feeling that I am descending into my own pit of darkness, of loss, decadent life turning into disrepair. Its spark diminishing, for too much expectation, too much extraction, from this body, had been wrought. Never had I ever, experienced an unprompted thank you, or an, I love you.

I did not feel bitter, just lonely.

Back at the Country House, I wandered about with the ghosts—the ones enmeshed in the wallpaper. I read an entire thesis regarding the wallpapers by a scholar by the name of Hilda Groen. It did not precisely salvage the wound. It was authored, contextually like most academic documents of this nature, for those who had never seen such skins before. I wanted to know what to do with such ruins. To Know : why do they remain? Whom do they truly belong to? Must they exist or should they be covered up, to sleep and dream in clouds of their own making?

A document was sent to me decoding various instruments from within the varying scenes, authored by an intern at the house who was originally from China. Amongst the annotated notes, a detail came into focus—a series of handheld fans from the Qing dynasty, ones traditionally used by male literati to reveal their status, or class, were notably abundant in the wallpaper. This descriptive act of pomp and circumstance felt an important detail to dwell upon as it suggested that the subjects on view were not subaltern, but rather a nobility unto themselves. Figures reified, cleaved to an eternity that is not ours to make or undo.

Attempting to sleep in the makeshift bed that I had made for myself in The Netherlands that night, an unrelenting spasm began to pulse in my lower back consuming the entirety of my body. Only birdsong could save me, I thought. I began, for the first time in a long time to dream of my mother. A poet, born to a "retired singer". To a family of actors, "stars" they would say, in Cairo, Egypt. She could not survive me, or her children, and so she escaped. By age 11, she had become a healer living in Chiang Mai,

Thailand. At 16, I wrote the script for a horror movie set on this “retreat” of hers. Amazon studios endeavored something of the sort not long ago with a mini-series with Nicole Kidman playing the lead role. She and my mother indeed bear some resemblance.

As I awaken from my stupor and clean the white sleep marks from my eyes, Evi Vingerling drives me back to the Country House. We begin to sing songs by the American singer, Jewel. But I cannot sing very well since the doctor botched my voice. Evi doesn’t judge, not yet. As we approach the park, I start to see Katja Mater’s work imprinted in the rooms in crisscrossing diagonals—shuttling back and forth, virgules of life and death intersecting at a half-way point. It is then that I come to realize the greatest absence of my life: a home. But this house, which has served many is not merely any museum or tourist attraction, it has become a home for the people of Utrecht, the Netherlands, and the world. It is a house as memoir, not an annex, but a core that serves as an embodiment of several souls.

For this lingering body—longing to belong, it offers several moments of respite, a sense that there is a site for the communal act of suturing, I exhale in relief.



Me as Mountain

I should
Return to *The* third
Before I come back to *the* First
Version
Of me.
Moi
the Perfect lip.
Dapper as such.
C’est moi
Strained, sprained
Splayed, and separated
like the foot, still crooked
from that blistering
Death in LA LA Land.

be. Death’s Bitter Butter
Death’s Survivance.

the Vellum’s grooves conceal
lumps and bumps.
bumps and lumps.
Inside are
Sketches for “mysweetheart” the drunk.

tracing over the paper
it was then that I came to realize that
the surfboard
he gave me

was intended to be used for a kind of waterboarding
he/they wanted to drown me out

when you are raised to fear water
you can never learn to swim,
just look at the mountains
as your body, slowly sinks.

when nature brought me to safety
I promised myself to live this next act
on my own terms
no longer assembling, and disassembling
my needs to the whims of others.

I sunk deeper into the blue hue
pollinating seeds
giving life to flora and fauna that had gone extinct
painted them as protective skins
as windows, as shields
with the seasons, until they became efflorescing pinks.
In the nude, I examined my body
watching the moon and the sun glare at me
together under one sky.
were they interrogating me?
holding me to task?
I could hear his voice:
"Unclench your fist". It was my father.
I would fall, unbalanced to the ground.

Listening to the improvised instruments,
never to be ascribed to sheet music
I sunk into depths

But awakenings are a strange thing

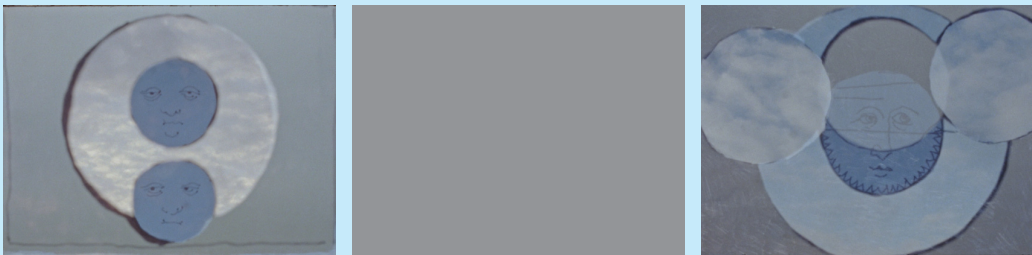
I see me
for the first time
as mountain
A body with organs
A body with portals
A body that has the potential to transmit light

I turn to *'he him', and 'they them', and 'she her'*
I slink myself around them and sing
Shower Me
SHOWER ME WITH ALL THE LOVE IN THE WORLD
I promise, I won't say no, not this time.

O.Kholeif, 2025

"You are losing your shape" read the words in a diary kept by Katja Mater,
one that the artist maintained keeping track of time after Mater's father

died and before Mater's mother passed. *When Things Fall Apart*, 2024 is as much a memento mori to the form of a being, as it is to the vessel that holds life itself. It is a ceremonial act against the cognitive decline that accompanies grief. The brain fog that leads to temporal disorder and dislodging of sense and sensibility. Handwritten words on paper transpire in frames stitched into the light of celestial bodies as they flow in and out of the light of the darkness. A collaboration with death doula Staci Bu Shea, this assembly of thought forms and embodied feelings clusters a thematic: life and death, day and night, which flows throughout the exhibition, transmuting across the corridors, where these themes find a rejoinder in the spectral planes of Evi Vingerling's paintings.



Here, in the glittering silence, I can hear the ghosts marauding underneath a queer informatic—data streaming, learning, between walls. Vingerling's best friend Sara, finely painted line by line, her face looks as if it was composed from fragments. It is akin in some senses to a Lilypad from a Monet painting, a specific kind of impressionistic painting. Here, her massive eyes, cut as they did in real-life, offering shelter and reprieve, a lenticular form that follows us wherever we move. As you descend the staircase to the wallpapered rooms to examine the Chinese wallpapers, you will find hanging from an all-mighty hook, released from the wall supported by the wooden baseboard, Vingerling's *Reason for Living*, 2024.



Vingerling's vertical landscape is redolent of the California desert. It meets the eye with hues that soften and thicken along the expanse of the canvas. What at first may look like a forest-fir, could also be a cactus, co-habiting with the flesh of a palm-tree, with the swollen bodies of other plant-life, co-habiting in an endless web, in a life cycle. The journey of the cloudscape, of the body, of the mind, of the interior and the exterior self is part and parcel of what one might deem here to be an act of "survivance."

As I returned from The Netherlands to the UAE, I sunk into a stoop on the corniche of Sharjah, where my friend, the curator and art historian, Naomi Beckwith was to meet me. I prepared to march when she asked me to pause and to just "sit for a while". This was something that felt alien, a particular invitation. We wandered through corridors of the mind, back to the roots and seats of our mentors, to the dead. She explained a concept to me articulated by writer and literary theorist, Gerald Vizenor regarding "survivance". It is an Indigenous term that argues for resistance as opposed to "pure survival" strategies. It is a summoning, a refusal to remit to the genocidal ambitions of settler colonialism, a term that has also been used to discuss the diasporic experience in a culture that is ever fluid, mutable in its embodied reality. It thus resists hearing to the pure tinge of "endurance" emphasizing the counter-tone, the contra-pose of reclaiming the colonized narrative of living with the ghosts, carrying the dead, breathing new life into the ocular, in a guise contrary to the pure stereotypes left with us by our mythologies.

The brashest of the ghosts that continues to resound in my head is that of my mentor, Jean Fisher. She was an artist who dedicated her life to writing about other artists, just like me, through a poetics of her own. Her death left me unmoored. This is an experience that will eventually become familiar for all of us humans. Eventually, we must learn to find solace in the space of feeling, to cleave to comforts, whether through the act of convening together or communing through art and ideas. Katja Mater and Evi Vingerling have offered us a platform for what I have referred to in the past as an act of “dreamwork” the result of an “emotional politics”—one where the abundance of feeling is ripe to build upon, our own form of enchantment. All we need to do is allow ourselves to look through the portals, the windows, and doors that life sets forth before us. To consider how the tender hook of love is abundant, how the crest of vulnerability emboldens, for the act of *feeling* openly is an act of resistance all its own.



Author Bio

Professor Omar Kholeif, PhD is an award-winning author, artist, and historian of visual culture –the avatar of Doctor O, and the heteronym of poet, Blake Mitchell, among other non-Portuguese poets. They are the founder and principal of artPost21, a not-for-profit cultural agency, publishing house, and collection that explores art and culture at the margins of society. Since 2018, they have served as the director of collections and senior curator, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE. They previously served as Manilow senior curator and director of global initiatives at the MCA Chicago; curator at Whitechapel Gallery, London; senior curator of Cornerhouse, Manchester and FACT, Liverpool. A longtime trustee, and former program director of SPACE, London they are ambassador for Mental Health Research UK and a research professor in the school of arts and the creative industries at MIMA Research Institute, Teesside University, UK.