



## REVIEW

**"THE SUN RISES IN THE WEST AND SETS IN THE EAST"**

**TUFTS UNIVERSITY ART GALLERIES**

**AIDEKMAN ARTS CENTER**

**40 TALBOT AVENUE**

**MEDFORD,  
MASSACHUSETTS**

**THROUGH DECEMBER 11**

# SIGNS OF THE HOUR

## CONTEMPORARY ART AT TUFTS UNIVERSITY

"The Sun Rises in the West and Sets in the East," on view at Tufts University Art Gallery through December 11, begins in contrast. On one wall, two copper works by Nari Ward — "Restin' Well" and "Restin' Paradise" — draw the viewer to examine what look from afar like stars. The pieces radiate a spiritual energy, so bold they nearly have a sound and taste. On the opposite wall, 12 quietly vibrant watercolors by Ali Cherri hang in a row. Each depict a songbird lying dead. Taken together, the two set the tone for an exhibit rooted in place and perspective.

In Ward's works, copper nails punctuate a copper sheet treated with darkening patina to form concentrations reminiscent of constellations or points on a map. The symbols do, in a way, reference the sky: the formations are interpretations of the Congolese Cosmogram, a spiritual and cultural symbol core to Kongo culture from before European contact. Ward's use of copper invokes its real and metaphorical qualities of resilience and conducive potential to create what look like bursts of light. These spiritual yet terrestrial works center iconography and materials to explore issues of economic labor, cultural memory and migration through transatlantic pathways.

Across the room, Cherri's "Dead Inside" depicts delicate dead birds. Though they appear to the viewer as if lying on an examination table or pinned to the wall, these watercolor portraits are infused with a sense of vibrancy and pride. The romantic tones of the pieces can be attributed to the artist's use of hues inspired by those produced by a Claude glass (or black mirror), used in the 18th century for landscape painting. With compelling juxtaposition between the grim and the nostalgic, Cherri invites viewers to consider perception and romanticization. Thus begins the group exhibition, "The Sun Rises in the West and Sets in the East."

Guest curated by writer, editor and curator Sara Raza the exhibition takes as its starting point the fragile political state of contemporary global society. Raza has brought together works by 11 artists reimagining and resisting the profound transformations, disparities and power struggles currently at play in local and global communities alike. These shifts relate to how states and societies govern,



**Lida Abdul, still from "What We Have Overlooked," 2011, 16mm film, 3.44 min, 2 channel video installation. Courtesy Giorgio Persano Gallery.**

regulate information and police movement: who is allowed where, what counts as knowledge and how resources (including labor) are controlled. As explored in this exhibition, the roots of such renegotiations of power lie in the legacies and ongoing practices and policies of colonialism, imperialism and capitalism. In other words, "The Sun Rises in the West and Sets in the East" explores how traditional ways of knowing, living and relating "have collapsed and fallen into an arbitrary order (or disorder)" in today's world.

Several works in the exhibition speak to the threat of oblivion. Lida Abdul's 3:44 minute film, "What We Have Overlooked," explores this topic as it pertains to the artist's place of origin: Afghanistan. This two-channel video installation centers a black-clothed figure. On the left side projection, his face fills the screen, gaze intense. On the right side is a landscape view of a turquoise body of water surrounded by snow-capped mountains. In this projection, the black-clothed figure attempts to plant a blood-red flag in the center of the lake. He wades farther and farther out until only the flag and his head and arm remain above water. The sound of wind persists throughout the film, creating a sense of emptiness and foreboding.

In "What We Have Overlooked," the determination of the protagonist (who eventually fails and dies) alongside the unexpected feeling of confinement given the mountainous border culminates in a sense of alienation from what looks to be a homeland. The words that flash occasionally on the screen: "We do not want to become legendary because we'll disappear," and, "We want to place flags in waters so that we can move with it," for example, articulate the pain of instability and dislocation and a deep desire for repair.

One photograph in another work dealing with dislocation, Emily Jacir's "Where We Come From," features a young woman wearing a beaded necklace and brown button-down shirt. She appears to be sitting across from the photographer in a

restaurant — in front of her sits a warm drink in a glass mug. Her hands are crossed, and her hair is up. She looks at the camera with a soft smile and sad eyes. As with each photograph in Jacir's series, beside this picture is a framed piece of paper with words in English and Arabic. This one reads: "Go on a date with a Palestinian girl from East Jerusalem that I have only spoken to on the phone."

"Where We Come From" presents a performance of subversion through cultural transaction to address issues of displacement and policed borders. As the artist has a national identity (and the right documentation) that permits free travel between many states, she asked over 30 displaced Palestinians: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" This moving series portrays Jacir's fulfillment of these requests, including "Water a tree in my village of Dayr Rafat," "Bring me Arak" (an anise liquor) and "Go to the Israeli post office in Jerusalem and pay my phone bill." Beside "Go to Bait Lahia and bring me a photo of my family, especially my brother's kids" are four photos of smiling children picking strawberries from rows of greenery. Together, the images and written words in this series poetically broaden and shift viewers' understandings of the experience of dislocation.

"The Sun Rises in the West and Sets in the East" also features works that invite a more active form of viewer participation. Asli Çavuşoğlu's 2017 "Future Tense" welcomes visitors to "please take one." Drawing on questions of truth and freedom of the press, Çavuşoğlu's satirical international free newspaper spreads "news" in the future tense as told by fortune tellers. By doing, so Çavuşoğlu creates a space in which hidden truths can be "smuggled" and censorship is resisted.

Another interactive work is Nadia Kaabi-Linke's "NYSE Road Works (Remont III)." This site-responsive installation invites viewers to walk across unfixed and uneven granite stones reminiscent of





those outside New York Stock Exchange. Overhead, a ceiling panel featuring a 1:1 ratio lattice creates a sense of confinement; like something is looming. This sobering work references global exploitative economic systems of enslavement, inequality and extraction, calling for a reimagining and restructuring of “human-centric financial models.”

The works do not need thorough academic analysis in order to be read by viewers; however, for those inclined to dig deeper, the Tufts University Art Galleries has made tactful use of online platforms. Linked on the exhibition page of their website is an extensive resource page with additional information about the artists; learning materials providing historical and theoretical background for many of the themes in the show; and stimulating questions for self-guided inquiry.

The name and subject matter of this show initially took inspiration from the eschatological prophecies (predictions for the end of days) of Islam, in which a collapse of society would be marked by “a rise in ignorance and moral corruption, ecological disasters, and the reversal of the rotation of the Sun from West to East.” In film, sculpture, painting and installation, the exhibition’s works offer neither instruction nor judgment of what has come and what may arrive. Rather, these works offer examples of cultural resistance — through satire, trespass, honoring and reimagining — and invite a re-orientation towards a comfortability with change. Many viewers may find this exhibition at once disorienting, confronting and validating, affirming we are not alone in our yearning for stability and belonging.

**Hannah Carrigan**