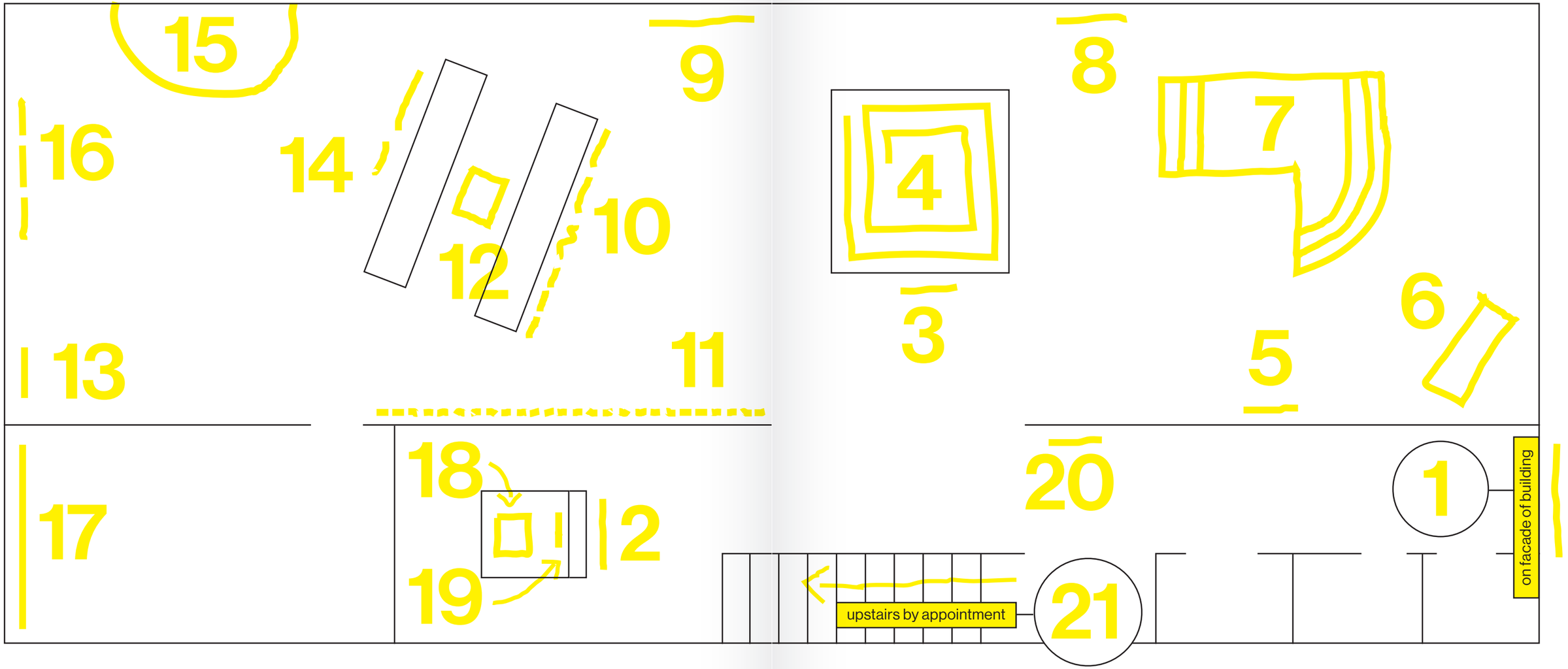
You to Me, Me to You

Curated by Francisco Berzunza



Narrating time – Francisco Berzunza (F.B.)
in conversation with Josh Ginsburg (J.G.)

J.G. What brought you to South Africa at first?

F.B. The first time I came to South Africa was after a breakup. On my second night in Cape Town, I met artist and educator Julia Rosa Clark over dinner. Julia asked me if I liked art.

"No," I replied.

She wondered if I knew any South African artists and I told her I had come across the work of Pieter Hugo, whose work I felt was very striking. Julia responded that she knew Pieter well, and that she would introduce me to him.

I lived in New Zealand when I was in high school, and stayed with a host family for six months. There, mistreated by the host family I was living with, I made friends with a set of twins who had emigrated to New Zealand from South Africa. The twins' family was extremely hospitable to me. Their mother was a painter, their father an architect. They had an incredible library of books about southern Africa. I would go to their house, where they would feed me, and I would spend time with those books. I was fascinated by what I saw – what had happened in South Africa in the 20th century, and in particular, with books about the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe from what had been Rhodesia, which sounded very epic to me. At that time, Robert Mugabe was all over the news because Zimbabwe was becoming a mess, and I was interested that this hadn't always been the case – that this utopian moment had once existed.

Julia acts as a very special node in Cape Town, connecting practices and people. She had left her position at Michaelis, at the University of Cape Town. In the end, she did not introduce me to Pieter. Marc Barben, who works at Stevenson, later introduced me to Pieter. But Julia introduced me to Marc, very early on. I became very familiar with Julia's work, and the way she thinks. And she said, "I know another Mexican, Georgina Gratrix, a South African artist who was born in Mexico," and we became close, together with Georgina's husband, Matthew Partridge. I met Joseph Gaylard at a party. Ntone Edjabe was playing, and I was struck by how incredible it was – the experience Ntone Edjabe created was truly astonishing, I think I cried – and Joseph, who is very smart emotionally, held my hand. These connections became very intimate very quickly.

I decided I would study for my Master's degree in Cape Town.

I developed a broad research topic that involved a small collection of silver coins found in the then Cape Colony from the 18th century, and pointed towards the trade of American silver. I was motivated by one coin signifying that everyone on earth is connected.

J.G. You didn't study art, or through the visual arts department?

F.B. I studied geography, and political science, and I see myself as a historian.

J.G. How does art become so powerful in the way you see the world, as a historian?

F.B. I have always struggled to define myself. I think it's a generational thing, to find it difficult to define oneself in one word, or profession. But I am a historian because, at the core of everything I do, I am narrating time.

How I see art intersecting with history is as follows: I do see myself as a political being, and I'm aware of how much care one must have when exerting power.

When one lives among endemic inequality and injustice, the real way to help, if one believes there is the possibility of effecting any change, is through politics – exercises that have a political repercussion in the public arena. An exhibition can be a laboratory of politics.

We live in an era where one's relationship to citizenship is complicated. To acknowledge pride in one's nationality can be misconstrued as identifying with the nationalisms that are rising globally, or else can be seen as passé, outdated, closeted. I have a pride in being Mexican. I feel a pride in belonging to a nation that constructed its national identity through beauty, very consciously, as part of the nation-building project. This isn't only a veneration of the sublime, and the mystical. This is where culture has an important place in society. The position I am wanting to exercise in the field of culture is almost a mystical job. As an example: I recall very vividly the moment, in 2018, of seeing William Kentridge's *More Sweetly Plays the Dance* (2015) open at the San Augustin Arts Centre (CaSa) for Hacer Noche. I arrived with a bird sitting on my shoulder, an injured bird that Paola Plaza (co-organiser of Hacer Noche) and I came across on our way there – the bird's arrival and its calmness in accompanying us

seemed like a sign, or an omen. We found Pieter Hugo standing outside of the room the work was playing in. I fell to my knees seeing Kentridge's work playing. I knew at that moment my life was going to change. Seeing that work in that environment, I could see what was possible, and what must be done, and what I must continue to do. That moment was very shocking for me.

Most people are incredibly curious, but many people are not given the opportunity to be very curious. You, at A4, are responsible for providing these opportunities of curiosity for people in your country.

J.G. Why this show? Why South Africa? What is its relevance here?

F.B. To go back to Hacer Noche in Oaxaca: that project wasn't obvious. But it allowed for this relationship with you, and our first complicity in exhibition-making.

I have no art historical training. The first exhibition we did together, I did not have curatorial experience. It was intuitive and emotional.

The artist and architect Mathias Goeritz used the term 'emotional architecture', which I find a very appropriate term to use for the style of curating I am talking about. An exhibition is choreographed and orchestrated. Beyond creating meaning between works, a curator is creating emotion. I have felt that I have failed, before, where things have ended up being cerebral, only. A highly researched exhibition, a monograph for instance, with one artist: this still needs to be emotional. I wanted an opportunity to go back and be intuitive, with the forces of randomness, serendipity, and emotional exhibition-making, which is very much related to love. Why not do an exhibition about love, and be emotional about it? It is very arrogant to say people will be interested in my own private life. But love is a human experience, we are all invested and interested in human emotion.

I have an emotional connection to Cape Town, and the fact that I have these emotional connections makes this exhibition possible because we are talking about emotions. South Africa made me an arts worker. Returning to South Africa as the place for this exhibition also enables the physical separation needed to talk about this love outside of the context in which I live, where I am known, and where the living of life and love can become fuel for gossip instead of the exhibition it has become in Cape Town.

J.G. What do you believe are the main differences between the arts ecology in South Africa and in Mexico?

F.B. I would say access to funding, and the role of commercial spaces in the respective ecologies. I believe the main difference has to do with how the public appropriates the spaces in South Africa and in Mexico. In Mexico, the public knows that cultural spaces are theirs. I'm not sure that is the same in South Africa: this powerful knowledge within the public that arts spaces belong to the public.

J.G. Is there a political dimension to this exhibition?

F.B. This exhibition is political because it will challenge so many people. Privately, the love relationship that inspired this exhibition challenges what love is supposed to look like. One can speak about so many issues through emotion, through simply speaking about loving, the human right to love and be loved.

It can be opportunistic, when people use politics to create a work of art. I am not an artist and this is not my intention. This is my experience and through my experience, I am living my life politically.

The type of projects that I want to do, they must always appeal to emotion because through emotions we can occupy a political space in a much more human way.

J.G. What can the human scale of love between individuals do for the broader community?

F.B. I am making a claim for only myself, but in being honest about myself I wish to be able to open up to other dimensions. Will anyone be moved by our story? Could people see beauty in our lives? I thought I had known love, until I met this person. Your parents have a particular love that you may not understand or come to really know about, until they disappear, as happened with me. There are infatuations, obsessions, people you love and desire, people you love and don't desire. Not missing the beloved when they are not beside you...that's what love means. That feeling that the beloved is always with you. I had experienced love through my very intense friendships with people. Love, for me, is peculiar, and related to beauty, not only physical beauty but the sublime. Oneself in relation to another provides an alternative rendering to generalised or reductive geopolitical terms, but in speaking of the limits of these terms, we can speak of one person's love for another.

J.G. What is unrequited about this love, or this exhibition?

F.B. There are so many things limiting our

August 12, 2023

Dear Fernando

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"I don't know how much time I have left, but I know that there are clouds," – *points at the sky* – "and in those clouds there are many things, there's the sun, as well. Clouds are near the sun. 'Clouds' and 'sun' are sister words. Let us be worthy of the clouds of the Valley of Mexico, let us be worthy of the sun of the Valley of Mexico. Valley of Mexico, the concept which illuminated my childhood, that concept shines a light upon my maturity and my old age".

– Octavio Paz, *Last public appearance,* Coyoacán, December 11th, 1997.

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J.G. What is unrequited about this love, or this exhibition?

F.B. There are so many things limiting our freedom that go beyond us, even where we may think of ourselves as 'free'.

I am very proud of the cast we have assembled for this exhibition: the repertoire. I believe that there is a mystical aspect to space, to environments, even though this may be strange to say. Mexico is drama, fire, lava. South Africa has this very stoic quality, of rocks and stones. That this project is taking place in South Africa, with the same sun we see in Mexico, under South African skies, at the foot of Table Mountain, feels very right to me.

James Webb

b.1975, Kimberley; works in Stockholm

There Is A Light That Never Goes Out (isiXhosa), 2017
Neon
45 x 260 cm (installation dimensions variable)

There is to James Webb's work an eloquent distillation in form and thought. While his primary medium is sound, the artist suggests that "listening and doing nothing" perhaps better describes his preoccupations. Attuned to the poetics of the ordinary and understated, his work draws attention to the numinous in the normal. With objects minimal and more often monochrome, Webb lends to his sounds a material housing.

Titled after a 1986 song by The Smiths, *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out (isiXhosa)* extends a conceptual circularity: illuminated, the white neon words become the light they speak of. In each modulation of the piece, the phrase is translated into the vernacular of its intended location – the cultural nuances of differing geographies offering variable interpretations of its phrase. "Translation is a process of something getting lost and something getting found; there is a transformation in translation," says the artist. The first of the works, written in Arabic, was conceived for Moroccan curator Abdellah Karroum's exhibition, Sentences on the banks and other activities. When *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out (Mixe)* appeared in Hacer Noche, curated by Francisco Berzunza in Oaxaca in 2018, it was interpreted as a statement of solidarity with efforts to conserve the language – that it will never die out. *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out (isiXhosa)* sees the phrase translated into isiXhosa – one of South Africa's eleven official languages – to read, "Kukho ukukhanya okunga soze kuphele." Including the work in You to Me, Me to You, brings the exhibition onto the street, where it may be experienced incidentally – in passing. On the facade of A4, *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out (isiXhosa)* faces the Magistrate's Court. Opposite the Court, Cape Town's Central Police Station; alongside The District Six Museum. Webb remains most interested in how the work's location may alter its interpretations.

Tina Modotti

b.1896, Udine; d.1942, Mexico City

La protesta. Corrido de la Revolución., 1927–1928
Wallpaper on MDF board
220 x 167 cm

"I try to produce not art but honest photographs, without distortions or manipulations," Tina Modotti wrote, extending the 'straight' aesthetic of the West Coast Photographic Movement towards the graphic sensibility and formal objectivity of social realism. A political activist, she was aligned with the Comintern and became a member of the Mexican Communist Party shortly after emigrating to Mexico City with Edward Weston (whom she took as a lover) in 1922. There, Modotti and Weston moved in avant-garde circles and counted among their friends Frida Kahlo, Diego Riviera and Jean Charlot. In 1930, as part of the government's anti-communist campaign, Modotti was exiled from Mexico. She remained a subversive figure, joining the fascist resistance in Germany and Italy before seeking political refuge in Russia in 1931. This move marked the end of her photographic career. She later returned to Mexico under a pseudonym but did not return to her camera.

"Many people could argue that this is not an artwork by Tina Modotti," Francisco Berzunza says of the scene in question. "This photograph is a record of a photograph. It is not an original, it is a trace." This trace is the digital printing rights to an archival Tina Modotti photograph, which Berzunza has printed to wallpaper and stationed at the entrance to the exhibition. Pictured is Diego Rivera's mural, *The Protest*, part of a fresco cycle painted at the Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico City between 1923 and 1928. With this cycle, Rivera established the Mexican Mural Movement with which Modotti was aligned.

As Berzunza points out, Modotti does not work as a photographer merely recording the works of other artists. Rather, she is working as a photographer by telling us where to look. "At a time when artists were preoccupied with eyes, Modotti pointed, with an almost obsessive manner, to hands – hands as a revolutionary quality, to harvest, make, to point, manipulate. With hands you can hold someone, or something." For a brief moment, Berzunza owned an original of this photograph: a silver gelatin print signed by Modotti. He acquired it with the intention to give it away to an artist friend in recognition of the part this friend had played in revealing to the curator that he, Berzunza, was in love. He would later confess to this love while standing in front of another Diego Rivera mural, *The Assembly*. "The concept of a gift is fundamental to this exhibition, the journey of which begins with the intention to give this exhibition away for love," says Berzunza. "Modotti wanted her work to be distributed widely. The murals, the photographs, these were intended for dissemination."

Modotti herself appears in Rivera's cycle. The scene, *In the Arsenal*, shows her passing out ammunition in anticipation of a great conflict. Her likeness in the mural marked the end of their friendship following Rivera's expulsion from the Communist Party, and is read as his veiled criticism of her apparent militancy. Modotti had previously featured in his other expansive cycle – *The Abundant Earth* – at The National Agricultural School, painted some years earlier. There, Modotti appears five times, cast as both virgin and Venus. She and Rivera were lovers at the time.

This image is among hundreds that Modotti made of the murals.

Dexter Dalwood

b.1960, Bristol; works in London

Francisco Fernando, 2023
Oil on canvas
30 x 25 x 1 cm

Dexter Dalwood tackles painting with the integrity of an anthropologist. “Having been at it so long, I can look at a painting and say ‘I have an idea of how to make that. I have an idea of how to construct it.’” More recently the artist’s methodology has been to paint paintings by painters, collecting data points en route to a work’s making. This occupation requires, one imagines, the discipline of a method actor. His is a physical engagement with the canon, digesting art’s history by experiencing its moves and moments through his body, whether “going at the canvas like a bull” (De Kooning), or with the “patience of a watchmaker” (Magritte.) Where Dalwood has long been a remixer of history in his paintings – finding fragments from elsewhere and reconfiguring them in the context of a work – he is, at present, less interested in mixing things up in one image, and more focused on individual paintings. To be clear: these paintings are not copies. What the artist refers to as “the picturing mind,” remains quintessentially Dexter Dalwood – that is, what an artist wants the painting to be, what he would like the viewer to think and negotiate when looking at an artwork. “The language of a painting is what you’ve decided is interesting for the painting in the particular moment you find yourself in,” he says. Where style is a “choice” – for instance, to mimic, modulate, or even antagonise – rather than anything inherent, the “picturing mind” remains more or less a constant companion through an artist’s oeuvre.

In *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, Jorge Luis Borges has an unnamed author come to the defense of Menard.

Those who have insinuated that Menard devoted his life to writing a contemporary Quixote besmirch his illustrious memory, begins an unnamed writer, *He did not want to compose another Quixote, which surely is easy enough – he wanted to compose* the *Quixote. Nor, surely, need one be obliged to note that his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of copying it. His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided – word for word and line for line – with those of Miguel de Cervantes… Being, somehow, Cervantes, and arriving thereby at the Quixote – that looked to Menard less challenging (and therefore less interesting) than continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the Quixote through the experiences of Pierre Menard.*

And from Menard, himself?

*The task I have undertaken is not in essence difficult…I have assumed the mysterious obligation to reconstruct, word for word, the novel that for him was spontaneous…Not for nothing have three hundred years elapsed, freighted with the most complex events. Among those events, to mention but one, is the Quixote itself.**

For You To Me, Me to You, Dexter Dalwood lent to the curator a painting that Dalwood had made after the painting *The Great Comet of 1843* by the British astronomer (and amateur painter), Charles Piazzi Smyth. Dalwood discovered, after agreeing to send this work to A4 for the exhibition, that Piazzi Smyth had been stationed at the Royal Observatory in the then Cape of Good Hope when he painted this work, considered to be an eyewitness account of the comet’s trajectory. ‘Obs’, as the suburb is fondly known, is not a ten-minute drive from A4’s location in District Six.

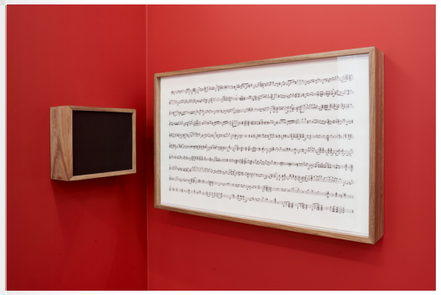
*Jorge Luis Borges, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* (1939).

Iñaki Bonillas

b.1981, Mexico City; works in Mexico City

The Return to the Origin, 2010/2023
Set of four diptychs
Silkscreen on cotton paper in a wooden box; speaker inside wooden box with cloth front
Dimensions variable

Iñaki Bonillas is attuned to the complexities and poetics of inheritances. As a teenager in Mexico City, Bonillas could be found in the company of artists twice his age, where he would spend long nights listening intently to their discussions about radical art. These gatherings became his education: in abstraction, in conceptualism. At times, the young Bonillas “wondered if they were making these artworks up – if they were making fun of me.” His experience was of a community of artists eager to share information and resources, whether these be books or stories of travel. From within this cohort of conceptual workers, he found his lineage, beginning to develop his practice. At the age of seventeen, Bonillas was included in a museum show by curator Guillermo Santamarina. Bonillas’s precocious offering – an installation consisting of the subtlest changes in light that, when isolated, became pronounced – attracted the attention of Galería OMR, the first gallery to take seriously the work of contemporary artists in Mexico. Since this time, the artist has turned his attention to the material traces inherited from his father and grandfather, engaged in a modulation that the artist likens to “amplifying an echo.” Referring to Bonillas’s practice, Josh Ginsburg says, “There is a point where the copy is so impossible it cannot be a copy at all, where the translation renders anew.”



Excerpt from a conversation with Iñaki Bonillas (I.B.)*, Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.)*, and Francisco Berzunza* (F.B.) *held in person, 5 June 2023:*

I.B. In 2010, after my third show with Galería OMR in Mexico City, I suddenly had this feeling that it was a good time to make a homage to my father. In previous years, I had inherited several things that belonged to him. My father was a professional bullfighter in the 1960s. This is a rare practice, for a father – moreover, to then have inherited this ephemera, as a son. Among the memorabilia I inherited were some albums of photographs, news clippings, a couple of movies filmed on 16mm. These things spoke to me of someone I hadn’t really had a chance to meet. He died when I was five years old, so while I have a couple of personal memories, the rest have been collected from testimonies, and most I have had to build myself.

Part of being a bullfighter was that he was quite a skilled musician. He liked to improvise on the guitar and record those improvisations on cassettes. I felt it was quite curious that none of these materials I inherited were in their original formats. I was not hearing him play the guitar live, or inheriting a score of musical notations – just these cassettes that felt like they were at risk of being about to break. The news clippings were turning yellow and I didn’t have the printing plates to produce them, only this feeling that in a couple of years more, they would be taken over by this yellowing, erasing the words that I would not be able to read again. The negatives were also missing from the

photographs, which had been stuck with bad-quality glue, the acid penetrating through the photograph. As for the VHS tapes, I had the same feeling about these as I did about the cassettes; that they would eventually be eaten by the machines they required to be played. Eventually, I felt I was doing an exercise of a 'double return' to the origin. I was trying to get back, to know and understand who my father had been to me, build up a lack of memory. When you don't have a paternal figure you lack a paternal memory, and I had the opportunity to build this for myself. The documents were begging me to restore them, to bring them to the original state so that somehow, they could be endlessly reproduced.

In *The Return to the Origin*, I basically returned to the origin of every document I had inherited. With the help of a musician, I was annotating each of the musical notes my father had improvised on the guitar. We built scores that could be played by anyone who could read music – we would always have the score. The same process of rewinding, or reversing back to the origin occurred with the photographs, and I retyped the paragraphs describing his more glorious achievements. The VHS film was reverse-engineered into a cinematic film. This ended up, coincidentally, being a project about the frontiers of the technical aspects of these material objects I had inherited, some of whose origins themselves were about to disappear, such as VHS, and cassette – these were on the cusp of having their production methods disappear, becoming the memory of the memory.

The works behaved as hinges that opened or closed the past.

J.G. Translation comes with loss, slippages, opportunities. You're constructing these memories, not for them to be pure, but that they create an electrical circuit, close the loop, set the signal moving. Are you translating it or are you creating a condition where we experience it as neither this, nor that, or something in between?

I.B. I am always asking this of myself when working with memories that were begun by someone else, amplifying an echo, where is my voice located, here?

J.G. A perfect translation is reversible, like mathematics. Translation in language aspires to perfect reversibility but it is not. Your work, as the hinges that you described earlier, create a third, in between.

Upon his arrival at A4, Bonillas encountered that his work was intended for placement on a wall that had, at the curator's request, been painted a vibrant red. At first, Bonillas found this choice disconcerting. Arriving at a resolve, three events occurred in quick succession. Bonillas recalled that the red of the wall was the same as the dust jacket of Terry Kurgan's narrative non-fiction work *Everyone is Present* (2018). Bonillas had encountered this book at Dashwood Books in New York City, the same year of the book's publication. Kurgan's book was one of Bonillas's first encounters with South Africa and he was especially drawn to Kurgan's material, her family photographic archive, and felt a kinship with her way of working. The photograph of the bench on the front cover of her book further reminded him of the bench Thomas Bernhard sits upon in the documentary *Three Days* (1970). Bernhard, particularly Bernhard's dislike of translation, was modulated by Bonillas into a work that deals directly with translation – asking scribes who work at Plaza de Santo Domingo in Mexico City to copy Spanish as well as German versions of a Bernhard text, and the surprising results that arose through this exercise.

The second encounter occurred while Bonillas was exploring the works in A4's Library (of which Kurgan's is among that number.) He come across one of his own, long out of print, concerning one of the first project spaces the artist had founded in Mexico City. He had not seen this book in many years. To come across a copy in Cape Town at the foundation in which he found himself working towards the exhibition You to Me, Me to You created a moment of synchronicity for the artist.

Looking at the wall, it now appeared to Bonillas that *The Return to the Origin* was enclosed by the same red as a Toreador's cape – the occupation of Bonillas's father as he played the guitar melody we hear alongside its transcribed score.

Georgina Gratrix

b.1982, Mexico City; works in Cape Town

The Insomniac, 2019
Oil on canvas
59 x 45 x 5 cm

Fleshy, gunky, meaty, gooey – these are among the adjectives with which Georgina Gratrix describes her paintings. Through the use of recurring characters and motifs, the artist works tirelessly against repetition. She describes portraiture as the discipline of "painting two eyes, a nose, and a mouth. How do you keep making that into something?" For Gratrix, the challenge, to "never feel like I've already made this painting," is the game – one in which the artist is compelled to stretch the arena of portraiture and still-life in canvases filled to the brim with paint that create something more than likeness. "A relationship is a third entity. It is never just, 'Who is this person?' but 'Who is this person, to me?'" When asked what she would consider to be a flattering portrait of her subject, Gratrix answers, "That isn't really my area of expertise." Instead, she is interested in how people choose to represent themselves, working, more often, from photographs that are easily Google-able, and the selfies that swamp social media platforms. Often, she only feels a painting coming together in a moment of erasure, of wiping away eyes painted over eyes, or an easy gesture of pulling apart any tendency from a subject to save face. Proposing a revisionist approach to the tired and self-serious genres of historical painting, those "stodgy, stoic canvases by so many important men", in the artist's words, the resulting paintings are at once seductive and unsettling; tactile for their textured surface, disconcerting for their image.

That *The Insomniac* has been Francisco Berzunza's Whatsapp profile picture for years is a matter of some curiosity to Georgina Gratrix. She has painted another portrait of Berzunza, one she felt was pleasing enough to present as a gift to his mother. That painting hangs pride of place in his family home. This one, the artist refers to as "an attic work," strangely discomfiting, pale, "almost Frankensteiny" (a parallel, one imagines, to the portrait of Dorian Gray – that other painting in an attic – in which the protagonist persists untainted by age and action while his likeness grows increasingly deranged). Most of the preparation for You to Me, Me to You occurred online, the curator based in Mexico City while A4's team worked on the ground. Calling this portrait his "digital replica", Berzunza wondered, "is this me communicating, or is this digital construction of me communicating?" It was thus that he (or the digital 'he') summoned the work from Gratrix's storage, claiming the portrait had become, "essential to my persona... It's the face many people associate with me." That painted face, Gratrix suggests, looks sleepless, on edge – even crazed. In a conversation with Berzunza about his intentions for the exhibition, Gratrix asked him: "Why does your love life inspire death?" To which he replied: "Maybe my love life *is* death." Or, if not death itself, perhaps a long sleepless night. Considering *The Insomniac* in the context of You to Me, Me to You, this writer is reminded of a poem by Rumi (a poem that is cited, in a different context and for another work, by the artist James Webb, who also happens to be present in this exhibition) –

When I am with you, we stay up all night.
When you're not here, I can't go to sleep.
Praise God for those two insomnias!
And the difference between them.

Dineo Seshee Bopape

b.1981, Polokwane; works in Johannesburg

a love supreme, 2006
Single-channel video, sound
7 min 50 sec

Dineo Seshee Bopape assembles the personal out of the public, inscribing individual intimacies in commonplace materials: from found objects, sounds and images to more elemental matter: clay, soil, ash, wood. Land is central to her practice, in works which hold both the histories of contested spaces – those of colonial conquest and capitalist extraction – and earth's transcendental significance in productive tension. These considerations of memory as both metaphysical and material impression more often pair the organic and fabricated, analogue and digital, in installations of poetic discord that are multilingual, transcending singularity. Speaking of her "hunger for elsewhere", the artist addresses the globalisation of the art market, the statelessness of artists, embracing "hyperbole," where a shifting self-image offers a means with which to enter alternative worlds.

In *a love supreme*, the artist enacts a sensual labour, slowly licking chocolate from a pane of glass. Where the film first appears largely abstract, the nature of the erotic task concealed, an image slowly becomes apparent, consuming the opacity that disguised it. The screen, performing like a mirror, becomes a surface on which to enact self-love; to clean, to tend, to adore. In place of wounds, we find chocolate. Where this substance threatens anonymity, the artist eats it away. The action is accompanied by John Coltrane's seminal 1964 recording of *a love supreme*. A mountain rock is placed atop the screen (when the work is shown in Cape Town, this means the pale brown Table Mountain sandstone that is present in this exhibition). Bopape toys with the tired tropes that persist to describe black bodies – unmasks these tropes in a world of her own making. Speaking to Ross Simoni (2021), the artist spoke of her work as exploring "my place in the world in relation to, not in any order, colonialism, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, racism, classism, capitalism, feminism, MTV, media, plants, soil, space, beauty, water, ethics."

Slavs and Tatars

formed.2006; works in "an area East of the former Berlin Wall and West of the Great Wall of China"

To No One and to Two, 2023
Aluminium, wood, mimeograph print on paper, mural
Dimensions variable

A geographically unlocated collective whose individual members like to remain anonymous, Slavs and Tatars articulate their position as "a faction of polemics and intimacies devoted to an area east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China known as Eurasia." The book – as object and mechanism – is primary to Slavs and Tatars' work, which began in 2006 as a reading group centred on out-of-print literature from Eurasia. The collective's multivalent research-based practice finds form in publications, lecture-performances and exhibitions that parse the region's histories and ideologies as traced in its languages. Holding competing truths and disparate claims in proximity is primary in their research strategy, which traverses myths, oral traditions, esoteric imaginings, spiritual expressions, and scholarly philosophy, to produce syncretic understandings of the cultural and political shifts that have shaped the East-West borderlands. Theirs is an archival and restorative project; a way of accounting for and insisting on Eurasian presence, while gesturing to the limits of knowledge, explanation, and logic in reflecting the region's multiplicities.

To No One and to Two is a homage to the 18th-century German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann, a radical theologist who resisted the Enlightenment's call for reason in favour of affective, humorous, and mystical experience. "My coarse imagination," Hamann wrote, "has never been able to conceive of the creative spirit without genitalia." Central to the installation is a republished edition of Hamann's essays, with an introduction by Slavs and Tatars, centred on the limitations of secular knowledge and the value of faith and sexuality in philosophy. Hamann's essays do not make for easy reading. As Slavs and Tatars said in conversation with Francisco Berzunza, "Hamann was the first writer in Western history to write deliberately *not* to be understood. He didn't believe in clarity. He believed in – not obfuscation – but he always talked about how he wanted his readers to be swimming like an archipelago. He didn't want to create land between the texts. He wanted people to swim the distance between them... What's really interesting about Hamann is his relationship to sentiment and emotion, an unabashed approach to sentimentalism... You see this kind of transparency you don't often witness in philosophy, this laying oneself bare in an emotional sense without compromising on intellectual rigour."

Graciela Iturbide

b.1942, Mexico City; works in Coyoacán

Jardín Botánico de Oaxaca, 1998–1999 (printed 2023)
Silver gelatin print
50.8 x 61 cm

Graciela Iturbide navigates layers of Mexican culture through poetically composed black-and-white photography. In 1978, Iturbide was commissioned by the National Indigenous Institute of Mexico to document the cultural practices of the Seri communities in the Sonoran Desert. She has continued to engage the cultural landscape of indigenous and marginalised communities – many of whom have been subject to the violences of Catholicism or other religious doctrines as a colonising force: the Zapotec and Mixtec, the cholo communities of East Los Angeles, trans communities in India, and the refugees of political and drug violence in Mexico and Panama.

By the time Iturbide enrolled in a film-making programme at the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográfico, later assisting photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo (whose work is also included in this exhibition), she had suffered profound loss. Her daughter died at the age of six after a short illness. Iturbide became estranged from her family after her divorce (brought up as a devout Catholic, she had married aged nineteen) and subsequent decision to enrol in film school. The artist's earliest photographic series documented 'angelitos' – children who have died and whose spirits soar into the sky according to Mexican folklore. Though she has since moved on from photographing the dead, her work continues to contain allegories towards death and trauma as symbolised by the wounded plants and injured objects that are her chosen subject matter. "Ultimately, I think photography is a ritual for me. To go off with my camera, observe, capture the most mythical part of man, then go into darkness, develop, choose the symbolism."

When asked by the curator to participate in You to Me, Me to You, Graciela Iturbide declared that her work had nothing to do with love. He persisted to disagree, seeing in her plant works "botanical gardens as symbols of care, and building society...what you at A4 would call an 'arts ecology', and what I refer to as the public space." Many of these plants had been brought by different communities in Oaxaca, donated, says Berzunza, by these communities, as exemplars of what it means to heal. Seeing these propped-up cactuses – domesticated into narrowness, necessitating falsework to thrive – Berzunza finds evidence of the structures we can use to support one another: "Love can be helping each other to grow," he says.

Moshekwa Langa

b.1975, Bakenberg; works in Amsterdam

Index Drawing (you give me the creeps), 2004
Mixed media on paper
140 x 100 cm

Asked for an adjective to describe his practice, Moshekwa Langa replies with 'fugitive'. Like an anthropologist recording his surroundings in obscure maps, each work is an index of a moment

Victoria, Sasha and I had just had lunch. We began to speak about Sophie Calle's series *Exquisite Pain* when Sasha's partner Alejandro arrived, interrupting our conversation with individual greetings that he doled out affectionately. I was tense and he noticed.

"What's up? You seem off," he ventured.

"Well," I replied, preemptively embarrassed by what I knew was a ridiculous sentence, "I'm going to declare myself to a guy I really like tomorrow." It sounded even worse outloud than it had in my head. "I wanna die."

Amused, intrigued and keenly aware of my obsessive desire for control, he asked for a detailed outline of what I had planned. And so I set the scene. We would be at the Ministry of Public Education in Mexico City, standing under Diego Rivera's murals – specifically a panel called *The Protest*, in which the mass of raised hands reminded me of a night when Fernando and I joked around about our own hands, his massive, mine small; the same panel that would appear in the Modotti photograph I would later gift to Alfredo Jaar. It would be morning and light would filter through the tortured branches of the towering jacarandas. I would say: "I have two things to tell you. One, I love you. Two, I'm in love with you."

(As it happened, we didn't stand in front of *The Protest*, we stood in front of *The Assembly*, though the light fell exactly as I'd imagined. I said what I'd come to say and he responded:

> "I get that we're not lovers but we're also not friends, so what are we?" I said, "I'm Francisco to you and you are Fernando to me. I've only asked one person to be my boyfriend so instead I'll ask this: Do you want to be Fernando to me?"
> "Only if you'll be Francisco to me.")

With his usual confidence, Alejandro smirked and made a wager: "I'll bet you (*large sum* redacted for the sake of decency) that in five years you'll be together. You're planning this too much; it's like you're making a film. You're nuts to be nervous," he said, standing to leave as quickly as he'd arrived and squeezing my shoulder on his way out. They were the words I needed, offered to make me brave; it's a cliché but also true that sometimes all a friend has to do is be there.

He was, in any case, half right. It's accurate to point out, as Alejandro had, that I'm disinclined to leave things to chance and that my yearning for narrative and beauty (my frustrated directorial instinct?) often leads me to shape reality – or at least my recollections of it – into a sequence of cinematic events, of moments fertile with inferred meaning. Five years haven't passed yet, but I doubt Alejandro will win his bet.

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Fer, above all, is generous. It's hard to talk about this in a way that's not connected to me and our relationship, but I'd like to try because his kindness is more expansive than just one person. If he can help someone, he will; even if he can't, he will always try.

I've seen him call around to friends, one by one, to gather resources for someone in need. I've seen him go to the villages where his NGO has worked for ten years – he founded the project, which provides clean water for over 1000 families in Oaxaca, when he was seventeen – and take the time to speak with and listen to every person, seriously, thoughtfully and in depth. He's always trying to reassure you (to reassure me). I don't know how much of that comes from a desire to be loved, how much of it is finding the right thing to say to defuse tension, to deescalate a moment of crisis, at least for a moment. I do know it makes me feel cared for and protected. I believe it makes others feel that way, too. It's remarkable to carry that kind of love with you and be so willing to give it away. It is through giving that he receives, and that is something many of us should learn from.

Moshekwa Langa

b.1975, Bakenberg; works in Amsterdam

Index Drawing (you give me the creeps), 2004
Mixed media on paper
140 x 100 cm

Asked for an adjective to describe his practice, Moshekwa Langa replies with 'fugitive'. Like an anthropologist recording his surroundings in obscure maps, each work is an index of a moment soon passed, an exercise in visual note-taking.

Langa's text-based works (many of them composed of shorthand notes the artist had taken in Amsterdam and Brussels when first adrift from his birth country) came to be called *Word Towers*, each work, *Untitled*, followed by a Roman numeral. This work was among that number, officially known as *Untitled XV (Word Tower)* in correspondence with the artist's gallery at that time. In preparation for this exhibition, Langa took the opportunity to bestow upon this work its rightful name – *Index Drawing (you give me the creeps).*

Excerpt from a conversation with Moshekwa Langa (M.L.)*, Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.)*, Sara de Beer* (S.d.B.)*, and Francisco Berzunza* (F.B.) *held online, 24 July 2023:*

M.L. In Amsterdam, at the Rijks Academy, I met people doing lots of things that didn't mean telling a concrete story. I was asking myself, what am I supposed to do here – in this arts school, a place of higher learning? I didn't know how to start to address the things that were fascinating to me. Everything became fair game – how I constructed myself as a youth, a man, a foreigner. Shorthand became the material for me to make sense of my world. I really began to articulate my excitement, frustrations, and angers, and made a series of works using texts. Later, these became what were called the 'word towers'.

One of the first ones I have is 'creepy', painted with nail polish. I was recording everything interesting to me, in shorthand, "This, I must not forget. This, I must not forget." The things I mustn't forget became motivations. It grew very organically.

There were too many stimuli at once and everything was slippery. I needed something to ground myself. I supposed I realised I was forgetting a lot of people's names. My memory was all that I had.

A new place was very exciting, but offered less of a feeling of belonging. I was discovering myself. What made me the person that I am, the one sitting right here? I had the sense of everything slipping away from me. I was a young man at the beginning of my adulthood. And as I was getting more and more into Dutch (I was becoming myself in a foreign place, clearly where I did not belong, but where else did I belong? Finding myself right here, now, in these moments, I was separating from my school years – from boarding school, from farm life, from Yeoville, but I was not yet grounded in the Netherlands. That feeling of slipperiness was pronounced even then. It became louder with each setting sun, with each rising moon.) I was also finding my way among these versions of English I was encountering: from London, from Istanbul, from the Netherlands. To add to this, I found I could understand people in the Netherlands because of my time spent within a majorly Afrikaans setting

in Mooiplaats, in Donkerhoek, near Cullinan, near Pretoria, on the way to Witbank, with mountains, and what I suppose were farmlands, with the smell of pig farming, with the smell of sulphur periodically drifting through, things that I had not been used to before... I thought of the languages in which I was proficient, of Northern Sotho Sepedi, in which I had to gain the singular and the plural. And I thought, I can use the same way of learning to gain a new footing in this place.

MO-MO
LE-SE
N
BO-GO
BA-ME
MA-DI
DI-MA
GO
(the mnemonic for singular and plurals in Sepedi)
('n' remains the same in both forms)
('go' remains the same in both forms)

I was to later make a series of works inspired by the recognition that in German in particular there is a masculine and feminine form in formal language use, to that end. I made a work titled *schauspielerin*, which was a text and a form of abstract drips made with nail polish and, probably, Tippex. So content and musings were very important to me, so too was visualisation, and the work was made up of a mashup of thought brought into a visual sphere. What endures, in this case, is a striated form of a long-winded process. Maybe I was struggling with being coherent and disintegrating. *What are you doing, how can this be understood? What is it? Why make it? Is it important? If it can be explained, then why make it?* These were the things that needled me at that time, and still do at this time. So, the debris on the floodplains.

Writing everyone's names down in the works was calming. I could know how I could relate to everyone, whether negative or positive, when I wrote their names down. I wrote extensive notes and could not make a singular sense of them chronologically. They were all important to me, all of them, how to make sense of this litany of information. Do I start from the beginning, but what is the beginning? Is it when my parents met, or when I was born, or when I have clear recollections?

The most practical way to think about how I came to this jumble, was through reading James Joyce's *Ulysses*. If this was an acceptable art form, I thought, this is the art form I would like to involve myself with.

Is it better to be named or not named? I grew up in a place where the streets have no names. I lived in a place that was without names but in which it was easy to find one's way around. I knew how to navigate by knowing the place, knowing who lived where and what went where. The town I was born in, Bakenberg, wasn't named on any maps. It was probably a dark spot in the history of demarcations in one of the previous South Africas, before I was aware. I did not suffer from not having street names, how I and everyone navigated the terrain was sufficient. It was a big place, but also a small place.

But you could ask anyone where things were, and find your way. Then, when I came to the Netherlands, this required never asking anyone for anything because everything was already written down. This was challenging, it caused distress, two incompatible systems operating on the same hard drive. They melded eventually.

The more I started to write I realised that to every name, I had a strong attachment (but then I always did because I retained those particular names, fight, fondness, peculiar, strange and unusual, or just ordinary, positively or negatively) – and that these names exposed other people. A normal inventory was actually an extremely revealing form of self-portraiture. This gave me something to struggle with in my waking hours, this meant I had declared all people who might not necessarily want to be known, to know me. I was implicated and implicating others in dark shadows, in happiness and in sadness, in joy and in dark thoughts and all else that might fall between.

Thembinkosi Hlatshwayo

b.1993, Johannesburg; works in Johannesburg

***wanders about*, 2023, archival pigment ink on Photo Rag, 31 x 21 cm**
***hearts can't make it up*, 2023, archival pigment ink on Photo Rag, 10.5 x 15.8 cm**
***some of us love badly*, 2022, archival pigment ink on Photo Rag, 75 x 50 cm**
***some of us love ourselves worse*, 2022, archival pigment ink on Photo Rag, 28.5 x 41.5 cm**
***too hot like a heater*, 2023, archival pigment ink on Photo Rag, 54 x 37 cm**
***catching up with yourself*, 2022, archival pigment ink on Photo Rag, 32 x 41 cm**
***my love*, 2023, archival pigment ink on Photo Rag, 75 x 50 cm**

Thembinkosi Hlatshwayo's first encounter with his parents' tavern, an extension to his family's home in the Lawley township outside of Johannesburg, was through a window – his view obscured by burglar bars and a lace curtain. "Nothing was clear," says Hlatshwayo. "That influenced how I started working with the layering of the photos. The not-so-easily-accessible image." Resisting ideals of scenography, Hlatshwayo photographs aftermaths – the marks leftover after actions. This is not a forensic investigation on the part of the artist, where these marks could be sought for evidence, the path rewound in the hopes of reconstructing past events. Instead, Hlatshwayo asserts the marks' primacy – as fascinating in and of themselves – by placing the photographs he has printed in compromising situations. On a table in a bar, drink and ash fall on the surface. Intervention is inevitable, he seems to be saying through this action: we may as well invite it, as willing participants in time's march. "Things are always moving, things never die, they move, and my role in this movement is to accept it all, the impermanence of things, that for me is an act of love."

To develop a selection of photographs for the exhibition You to Me, Me to You, Thembinkosi Hlatshwayo was invited to take up residence at A4 Arts Foundation.

An excerpt from a conversation with Thembinkosi Hlatshwayo (T.H.) *and Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.)*, held in person, 4 August 2023:*

J.G. There is a lineage of photographers and photo-documentarians but your material negotiation is more akin to the way Moshekwa Langa works. He has a material dexterity. How did you get into photography?

T.H. I joined Of Soul and Joy in 2016 and the journey of me being exposed to bodies of work and storytelling began. In 2018, I went to the Market Photo Workshop. At the time, I had begun trying to confront my childhood memories of the tavern and how it affected me. This is a tavern my family runs still, in the deep south of Johannesburg. The tavern always had interesting marks. From the marks, you could tell what was happening the previous night.

Because of the violence, the community called the tavern Slaghuis (slaughterhouse). My process was informed by the word "slaghuis," the violence in it. So I became violent with the image. I would also take images and put them back into the tavern, for the images to act as (recording) surfaces in the space.

J.G. It makes the work entirely robust. It only grows through contact with the world. It can't be damaged, it can only collect. But if a love isn't returned, what is it? Is it necessarily reciprocal? Does it rely on consent or can it be given without return?

T.H. My role is to accept the impermanence of things. That, for me, is an act of love. So It can be given without return because it's already there.

J.G. You can't lose anything that's always there, so you need not possess it. How has your perception changed?

T.H. There's something empowering about going back to a space that caused you harm and that you wanted to escape from. Having a conversation with that space and taking your power back from it.

Bas Jan Ader

b.1942, Winschoten; d.1975, Atlantic Ocean

Study for *In Search of the Miraculous (One Night in Los Angeles)*, 1973/2023
Twenty-six silver gelatin prints (framed)
8.9 x 12.7 cm each

Bas Jan Ader's foundational works centre on a single verb: *to fall*. Following his relocation to America's west coast, the Dutch-born artist fell in with Los Angeles' Conceptual art scene of the 1970s alongside the likes of Chris Burden and Jack Goldstein, with whom he shared a proclivity for precarious performances. The 'fall' works, which came to define his short career, distil Alder's dedication to gestural simplicity, of action pursued to its logical limits. The artist falls from a roof, from his bicycle, from a tree branch hanging above a river – the performances compelling for the commitment with which the artist resigns his body to gravity's pull. While parallels are often drawn between these performances and Buster Keaton's deadpan acts, any humour in the 'fall' works is largely eclipsed by the violence of their fulfilment. Similarly opaque in their intentions, his proceeding works, which demonstrated less a *fall* than a *falling apart*, appear torn between self-seriousness and irony – the artist sends photographs of himself crying to friends, inscribes pop-song lyrics on pictures of late-night wanderings, proposes a work with the premise: "My body practising having been drowned." This last has since gained the weight of prophecy. In 1975, Ader was lost at sea. His disappearance coincided with his final performance, the second work in a trilogy called *In Search of the Miraculous*. In death, Ader has become a modern-day myth: a tragic figure lost in pursuit of the transcendent. Popular imaginings, coloured by this romance, have further obscured the attitude with which his works were first conceived. The story of his death precedes his practice, circumscribing its resonances.

In 1973, Ader performed the first part of a three-piece work. Titled *In Search of the Miraculous (One Night in Los Angeles)*, the performance is recorded in a series of black-and-white photographs taken at night in the city's outskirts; beneath an underpass, alongside a freeway, in a back alley. Together, they trace the figure of the artist (most often cast in silhouette) as he moves about the darkness with a flashlight. Ader plays the part of protagonist in an obscure Hollywood film, the plot uncertain, the genre undisclosed. On each photograph, Ader's cursive scrawl transcribes lines from a 1957 song by the Coasters, *Searchin'*:

> *Well, now, if I have to swim a river*
> *You know I will*
> *And-a if I have to climb a mountain*
> *You know I will*
> *And-a if she's a-hiding up on a-blueberry hill*
> *Am I gonna find her, child, you know I will*
> *'Cause I've been searchin' (gonna find her)*
> *Oh, yeah, searchin' (gonna find her)*

"Ader's search for the miraculous, his journeying in and around the sublime," critic Bruce Hainley writes, "acknowledges even as it anticipates a contemporary yearning for the heroic, for art to tap into something greater and grander than the self-weary self... If he knew that his strivings were grand, he also knew that they might fail – or that he may fail them – yet he ventured on anyway, winnowing the materials of his art until it would go on without him, winnowed so that even the irony fades, only to return in unexpected ways."

Miguel Cinta Robles

b.1997, Oaxaca; works in Oaxaca

Writing device to craft love letters, 2023
Red cedarwood, water from a specific river, encapsulated flower and paper made from Toloache (Datura Stramonium), bottle with accompanying potion and dried seed capsules
30 x 30 x 30 cm

Miguel Cinta Robles' projects are wide-ranging and more often collaborative, nodes around which communities take form; from *Terreno Familiar*, an experimental food garden and educational project on his family's farm, to *Margarita*, a research space in Oaxaca de Juárez focused on the intersection of art technologies and ecology. His practice asks after alternative strategies to engage the natural world, integrating the fields of agriculture, ecology and art-making to explore political and social issues around land, food sovereignty, and access to nature. Pursuing novel taxonomies, Robles considers associative and affective ways with which to approach and produce eco-agricultural knowledge. Walking workshops in the mountainsides, practical classes in permaculture, and gatherings centred on syntropic theory – all these form part of a complex, hybrid practice. Complementing and extending his agri-activism, Robles' sculptures are more often composed of plant matter and natural material from the region, chosen for their medicinal and mythic resonances.

Intended for the composition of love letters, Robles' moveable writing bureau extends reflections on the folklore surrounding a single plant: Datura stramonium in Latin, Toloache in Spanish, Jimsonweed in English. The plant is present in all its parts and expressions: seed pod, flower, leafing stem, root – its respective phases held in discrete cedarwood drawers. To the artist, the bureau is a vessel of "essences and energies" with which to guide the writing of letters. Included in the drawers are sheets of paper made from pulped Toloache and pressed flowers – picked on a full moon when their scent is most pungent – a bottle with water from a river infused with roots and seeds, and preserved specimens of a pod. Made in conversation with Indigenous healers, the work was formed, the artist suggests, by intuition, divination, and magic. Western scientific formulations, disregarding myth and mystery, classify the plant as simply toxic. As the artist writes:

> *Toloache could help us reshape and challenge our perceptions regarding the historical mistreatment and persecution of women and indigenous groups for their practice and preservation of profound knowledge and connections with sacred plants. Throughout history, Western thought has stigmatised, persecuted, and punished these relationships through witch hunts, genocides, scientific control, and suppression. The taxonomic classification of these plants has reduced their wisdom to mere commodities within the pharmaceutical industry or relegated them to myths or ethnographic tales.*

Bas Jan Ader

b.1942, Winschoten; d.1975, Atlantic Ocean

Bulletin 89, in search of the miraculous (songs for the north atlantic), 1975
Printed paper
42 x 29.7 cm

(Please refer to the artist's bio on page 22)

When *In Search of the Miraculous (One Night in Los Angeles)* was first exhibited, Ader displayed alongside it a bulletin published by Art & Project, an alternative art space in Amsterdam. The publication included the musical notation to a 19th-century sea shanty, *A Life on the Ocean Wave* (1838) by Epes Sargent and Henry Russell, as well as an image of the artist on a small sailing boat. The exhibition, held at Claire Copley Gallery, LA, was accompanied by a musical performance of seafaring songs. Together, the bulletin and shanties announced the artist's upcoming gesture, the second in the *In Search of the Miraculous* series: Ader intended to set sail from Cape Cod, Massachusetts, to Falmouth, England, in a thirteen-foot vessel. The performance would last sixty days; the voyage documented in a logbook and photographs. On July 9, 1975, Ader sailed out into the Atlantic. His wife, Mary Sue Ader Andersen, photographed the artist as his boat was towed out from the harbour. Three weeks later, radio contact onboard *Ocean Wave* was lost. On April 16, 1976, the crew of a Spanish fishing trawler found *Ocean Wave,* bow submerged, the boat unmanned. That he disappeared in his search, rather than diminish the work's success, has affirmed its lasting intrigue; the lone figure of the artist set adrift at sea.

Sophie Calle

b.1953, Paris; works in Paris

Exquisite Pain, 2000
Vinyl wall text and book
Dimensions variable

A certain slipperiness defines Sophie Calle's practice, which turns on a singular, voyeuristic intrigue into the lives of others. Central to all her works is stated absence – of the beloved, of sight, of permission to intrude. The artist performs as a storyteller, spy and stalker, compiling intimate accounts of her subjects (who are more often unwilling strangers). The resulting narratives speak to loss, longing, and the opacity of selves other than one's own. Missed connections offer a theme; suggested encounters fail to arise. A curious inclination to expose domestic privacy and an archival impulse to document – in words and photographs – directs her work and its indiscretions. Calle, disguised as a cleaner, photographs the possessions of guests in a hotel. She shadows a man to Venice and records his every movement unnoticed.
An address book found in a street is returned to its owner but not before the artist has photocopied it; every contact later interviewed to form an impression of the stranger to whom the book belongs. Text is primary in recounting these encounters, the artist distilling her transgressions in lyrically spare prose. Calle maintains a distinct distance from her stated subjects – even her own heartbreak and the death of her mother – framing her vulnerabilities and those of others with studied detachment.

Thirty-six days ago, the man I love left me. It was January 25, 1985, at two in the morning, in room 261 of the Imperial Hotel. So begins Calle's *Exquisite Pain*, a work that extends personal grief into collected reflections on love and loss. The work proceeds towards a rupture; for ninety-two days, the artist awaits the arrival of her lover, recording her happy anticipation in a series of photographs. The day arrives. He fails to appear. The relationship ends (over telephone, across continents). Heartbroken, Calle recounts the subject of her grief to anyone who will listen. In turn, she asks each listener, "when have you suffered the most?" The resulting exchanges, accompanied by images, comprise the book's final thirty-six spreads. On each: two texts – the artist's and the stranger's – and two photographs. Narrating and re-narrating her grief, Calle attempts an escape from her mourning. For sixty days, she repeats the story of her heartbreak. Writing on the fifteenth day following the rupture, Calle says: "He's the one I want to talk about. Until I'm up to here with him. Disgusted. He's the one I have to get rid of." Witnessing the suffering of others becomes a balm to her grief – "they made my pain manageable" – a way out of heartbreak's hold. Though perhaps self-interested, Calle's mourning mechanism offers its participants both cathartic release and an object of safekeeping (a book) to house their pain. The viewer assumes the part of distant witness, watching at a remove the grief of anonymous others.

Excerpt from Sophie Calle, Sans Titre *(2012), a film by Victoria Clay Mendoza with Sophie Calle* (S.C.):

S.C. People think they know my life because I am always talking about it. But I do not feel like I am revealing anything.

My work is not a blog nor an intimate diary.

This happened, that happened but it is not The Truth. I have selected one moment amongst many others, separated it, given it importance and written it, generally it is just an ordinary moment.

We have all received a break-up letter, been left, felt lonely, I just use those moments for my work and to turn the situation around and distance myself from it.

Obviously I speak only of situations gone wrong.

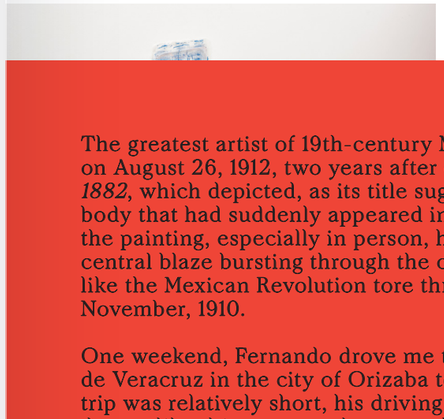
Who wants to know I spent six years with a man that loved me and with whom there were no conflicts.

I live the happy moments, the sad ones, I exploit for artistic reasons, to turn them into a piece. Even if the starting point is therapeutic, the real reason is for the piece to end up hanging on a wall or be in the pages of a book.

Thato Makatu

b.2000, Oslo; works in Cape Town

home is..., 2022
Screen prints on butcher paper, embroidery thread and plastic tubing
75 x 50 x 25 cm (each)



The greatest artist of 19th-century Mexico, José María Velasco, died on August 26, 1912, two years after completing *El Gran Cometa de 1882*, which depicted, as its title suggests, the transit of a new celestial body that had suddenly appeared in the sky. Like the event it depicts, the painting, especially in person, has a mystical quality with its central blaze bursting through the open void of the sky, very much like the Mexican Revolution tore through history on the 20th of November, 1910.

One weekend, Fernando drove me to the Museo de Arte del Estado de Veracruz in the city of Orizaba to see the painting and though the trip was relatively short, his driving made me feel safe, as it always does – like things are under control. Once inside the room, where the painting is closely guarded to protect it from the subtropical humidity – you have to request permission to see the canvas, among the finest in the collection – I stood hypnotised, as much by Velasco's enigmatic work as by the beauty of Fer looking at it. Seeing his curiosity moved me deeply. Velasco paints the comet as a radiant streak of light reflected in the mirror of a lake at the bottom edge of the frame. Fernando stood there glowing, blinding me with his own light.

To Thato Makatu, art is intuitive. As a child, they would copy their older sister's drawings while their mother sang and danced in
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The night had been eternal. We'd been talking for hours and sharing intimacies that we'd never shared before and my nose was bleeding and I thought the night had finally come when you would allow me to sleep with you and feel your body near mine in the way I'd wanted and told you I'd wanted (and that you'd told me that you didn't) for so long. Instead, you rejected me and when I asked what I would get out of all of this if I couldn't even satisfy this one simple desire, you told me,

> "A wonderful life."
> I said I loved you but I wish I'd said, "That's bullshit."

We went to sleep in our separate beds and the next morning, when you came to say you were sorry, you found me shaking. You took me in your arms and thanked me. I asked you for what. You said, "For helping to make me the person I want to be." It was a cliché, but it felt true, or at least sincere, which is not the same thing.

I know now that I made *you* the person *I* wanted you to be – a character in my unmade movie – and that, in the process, I became something more like the person I have probably always been. I'm sorry and I'm not.

Your words that morning reminded me of a song by the Pet Shop Boys:

> "I never dreamt that I would get to be
> The creature that I always meant to be
> But I thought in spite of dreams
> You'd be sitting somewhere here with me."+

Sharing loneliness is also an act of love.

+ Pet Shop Boys, *Being Boring*, Behaviour, 1990

Thato Makatu

b.2000, Oslo; works in Cape Town

home is..., 2022
Screen prints on butcher paper, embroidery thread and plastic tubing
75 x 50 x 25 cm (each)

To Thato Makatu, art is intuitive. As a child, they would copy their older sister's drawings while their mother sang and danced in the family's kitchen. One of four siblings, Makatu's childhood was dictated by their parents' work in International Relations and diplomacy – moving often, and long distances. Preoccupied with objects that contain, or prompt, memories of previous homes, Makatu dislocates notions of belonging. "I'm interested in containers as spaces," says the artist. "The box prompts the memory of the object." Transposing memory into moveable artwork, they rebuild home elsewhere – their print installations emulating the tiles of a house in Boksburg; suitcase rubbings memorialising the many trips made. Foremost a printmaker, Makatu works in layers to conceal and reveal personal and familial intimacies.

An excerpt from a conversation with Thato Makatu (T.M.), *Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.), *and Sara de Beer* (S.d.B.), *held in person, 27 July 2023:*

T.M. The suitcase rubbings are of the suitcase I had with me on my move to Cape Town. This was the first move I took alone, to study at university. International postings are for four years, and that's the amount of time my family and I would spend in each place we were posted to, and then an undisclosed amount of time back in SA, before the next posting.

My mom knows where our luggage has been, what it carried, how old each luggage piece is. That suitcase is apparently as old as I am. As a child, my mother did the packing. What was I required to do? I was required to push the suitcase to and from, and in, the airport. Moving to Cape Town, I used one of our older suitcases to pack and I found myself to be a useless packer. I pack everything. The suitcase explodes at the seams. The ladies at the check-in counter tend to take pity on me.

I used butcher's paper. I wanted to use baking paper, but I couldn't get sheets large enough. The considerations of the art you want to make are often based around what's financially feasible, particularly when living as an art student far from home but still wanting the work to achieve the effects I had in mind. I wanted this sense of being able to conceal, then reveal in layers, so nothing was fully see-through like acetate or clingfilm. I wanted the suitcases to feel more body-like, more fluid. The paper folds in on itself. The materials I use are the ones that are the most intuitive for me to use; that through their use, afford me the ability to get my emotions or thoughts out. Paper may not be structurally sound, and it may be difficult to archive, but I like paper best.

I'm interested in containers as spaces. Objects that are put into the container affect the container itself. Recently, I've been working with delivery Takealot boxes for a project, and I found that when I see the box, I remember what I bought. The box prompts the memory of the object.

The suitcase is part of a love letter to our family home on Olympus Road, in Boksburg, which we lost last year. I was asked by my lecturer at the time, "How do you access that home, that space, without being able to physically go there?" The artwork, *home is...*, came through thinking about the power of moveable objects, like suitcases, to evoke love, family, and community.

Pieter Hugo

b. 1976, Johannesburg; works in Cape Town

1944-03-03, MALE, MARRIED, 2021-12-21, CAPE TOWN, NATURAL CAUSES, 2023
Pigment print
12.5 x 16 cm each (unframed)

"I am of a generation that approaches photography," says Pieter Hugo, "with a keen awareness of the problems inherent in pointing a camera at anything." Hugo works with a large-format camera, which requires a *setting up* of the image, a conversation with his subject, necessitates time spent. Hugo's photographic essays have included such various subjects as Liberian boy scouts, people with albinism, Nollywood actors, and Mexican muxe.

This triptych is a dispatch from life's edge; set in a hospital bed, the hand of a loved one reaching into frame in a final gesture of care. The title is taken from his father's government-issued death certificate; a life recalled in six words and two dates.

Excerpts from a conversation with Pieter Hugo (P.H.) *and Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.)*, held in person at A4, Friday 4 August:*

P.H. My father became very ill just after the lockdown lifted. He went into hospital – at first for something minor, but then it became increasingly serious. Two days or so before he passed away, it became clear that he wasn't going to turn a corner, although the doctor never said so. I was not living in Cape Town at the time, but I came down – and I was shocked when I saw him. I hadn't realised how serious it was. I think my mom, in my communications with her, had omitted the gravity of what she was facing. We went to visit him, and I just knew I wasn't going to see him again. He was slipping in and out of consciousness; his complexion had changed completely. He became very childlike – he was heavily medicated – but had brief moments of recognising what was going on around him.

These three portraits were made. I'd been taking some pictures in the room – it gave me the space to distance myself at moments when it became too much. We were sitting there for hours. At that time, the work I'd been busy with over the last couple of years was very much around my family. And I'd realised that if you don't insert yourself into your work, what's the point of making it in the first place? That it might feel transgressive, but it's necessary.

There was a moment when my mom had her hand on his head, and those are the last frames I made of him – after that, he didn't wake up again. We left that evening and received a call later that night to say he had passed.

We had a wake at my mom's house a year or more later. I didn't feel like making a speech, but I wanted to contribute in some way. I went through my parents' extensive family albums and my dad's phone, his digital archives, and put together a series of photographs – roughly chronologically – from birth to death, the journey from his early youth to the portraits of him in the hospital.

I became a photographer because of my father. He bought me my first camera. He was interested in photography. He was a terrible photographer, but he got pleasure from my pursuit of it and encouraged it. He was always very willing to pose for photographs for me.

Unfortunately, a few years ago, I got drunk and burnt down my archive of photographs I'd taken in my twenties and earlier. Stupidly. It felt necessary at the time. Now, I regret it. I don't think I ever recalled my dad saying to me, *please don't take a photo*. He was always up for it. He always had a pose that he struck when I photographed him – kind of pulled his head up to a certain angle and lifted his chin in a weird way. Very unnatural. This is among the reasons why I didn't feel that taking photographs with him at that stage of being so incredibly vulnerable was wrong or inappropriate.

When I look at these three pictures, I see a silent scream. I see someone acknowledging: *the reason I'm being photographed is because I'm not going to make it out of here*. It is a moment of lucidity, the gravity of that situation sinking in.

J.G. Your dad's initial interest in photography ultimately inspired you to pursue this gesture, and this act of photographing him is something of a love note to him. There's a circle there, an offering back to him.

P.H. I didn't have a smooth relationship with him. It was very fraught. I photographed him and my mom together for *Kin*. It's not a particularly flattering photo of them. He had strong opinions about the image but wasn't upset about it, only annoyed that I photographed him while he had a hangover.

J.G. That transition from a family photograph to an artwork is quite a curious one.

P.H. In my family's house on the West Coast, there's a wall of family photographs next to the fridge that one can't help looking at. Something about those family photo walls; you just get sucked into them. This wall infuriates me because it feels like a wall of lies. Even though it's not – those moments did happen, and they are real – it still feels like propaganda. It is a very curated view of family life.

J.G. Images constitute a fraction of a life, and family photos tend to be the affirming edges of it.

P.H. Exactly. These photographs serve a function to project an image of happiness and stability, which is not true. It is only a very limited facet of the bigger picture. I think that a lot of my work, which can be very confrontational, and sometimes border on cruel, is a reaction against this.

—

P.H. When I started practising as a photographer, and I started working in medium and large formats, making portraits, I was always working on a tripod. The ritual of taking a camera out of a bag, asking permission to photograph – most people think you're just going to make a quick snap – but then you take the tripod out and put a large-format camera on it. The process alerts the subject that there's an important dynamic that's at play. Often the subject realises this and switches into something that is more earnest – not something taken, but now a collaboration.

J.G. The staging brings both parties into view... Your dad as a subject is an interesting case in relation to this. Here, you have command, total command, in a sense, because he was not able to relate physically in his vulnerability.

P.H. The power balance lies with me. But my intent isn't malicious. In fact, it is the opposite.

J.G. Your father encouraged you in a discipline that ultimately gave you a tool to process his death. That is quite a remarkable gift...
The photograph becomes a mechanism for saying goodbye.

Dayanita Singh

b.1961, New Delhi; works in New Delhi

Mona and Myself, 2013
Moving still image
3:45 min, looped

To Dayanita Singh, photography proposes itself not as static images but as literature, each exposure a phrase in an expanding narrative. She calls herself a "bookmaker working with photographs," yet her books are seldom pages held between a cover as one might expect. More often, they are wooden structures – or "photographic architecture" – in which collected images can be arranged and rearranged. These "unbound books", some small and box-like, others large folding screens, are at once artwork, archive and memory objects. She calls them museums, these sculptural books, each of which follows such indefinite themes as 'chance' and 'continuity'. Collected in their respective museums (such as the *Museum of Machines,* the unfinished *Ongoing Museum*, a *Little Ladies Museum* and the *Museum of Embraces)* they retain a fluidity denied most photographs, consigned as they so often are to bookshelves or the walls on which they are hung. Most are intimate portraits or empty interior scenes; all are lyrical in affect, offering a vision without cliché or sentimentality.

Excerpt from a conversation with Dayanita Singh (D.S.)*, Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.)*, and Francisco Berzunza* (F.B.) *held online, 27 July 2023:*

D.S. I met Mona in 1989, and I photographed her until she passed away in 2017. Even now, she's still very present in my work, leading it almost. Centre stage in my *Museum of Dance* but also enters my family portraits and *File Room* works and these montages appear, almost by themselves.

Mona was my best friend.

We made a book together in 2001, and I continued photographing her because that's what I do, and that's what she liked. This moving still image of Mona in this exhibition was made by chance. I had not set up to make a film. I was not prepared to make a film – that's not what I do. But I've always missed the sound in photographs...or more than sound, I've missed the breath. And how the face changes... How to bring a little breath and a little sound into the photograph? I wanted to find this for years, but didn't know how I could do it. Any conscious attempt seemed certain to come off as intentionally 'arty'. It's as though chance heard me and presented this work to me.

Mona had come one day to the studio. She often came in the summer because I had air-conditioning and it would cool her down. She was lying on the bed, and I was taking photos of her just by the by, as I often did. I played her favourite song, which I found online. I found it and I played it, and I was taking her portrait and I forgot to lift my finger, or I pressed the wrong button; I'm still not even sure what happened.

At first, Mona is not able to hear or quite understand what is going on. She's trying to remember it, and then she finds it – and she becomes the song. At some point, I lifted my finger and I continued making pictures. It was only when I sat down that night to review the images, to look at the stills I had made that day, that, suddenly, there was this piece. Just imagine! I'm looking at still image after still image. And then...I see this. I see it again and I see it again. The next day, I told Mona that she had to come back – something had happened. She saw it a hundred times over, and she was crying and I was crying, and that's when I thought that we have created *something* – and whatever this something was, it wasn't about taking pictures of her. This was something else.

As for love, I could say, Mona was – is – the big love of my life. Mona was sometimes my mother and sometimes my child. She showed me how to live outside the box. I could show you all those photographs I have taken of Mona. I could make a museum for Mona. But this moving still image, I feel, is the culmination of three decades of work – that all the other work could be put aside. It's not great resolution, it's not great sound. But when I heard about this exhibition, I thought – this is what I'd like to show.

Mona was the most unique person I've known in my life. It would be fair to say that I'm the artist (or whatever other name you want to give for what it is that I do) in no small part because of Mona. She *lived.* Against all the odds.

J.G. It's such a beautiful story. I was going to ask after the phrase 'moving still image', but that no longer needs qualification – it's an astonishing situation. And what's fascinating is that both parties were unselfconscious by default – because neither of you knew this was happening.

D.S. This unselfconsciousness and intimacy – how do we get to that in photography? It is almost impossible. There's a photographer and there's their beloved, and there is self-consciousness on the part of the photographer and the person being photographed. And yet when it happens, like here in this moving still image, it's such a gift. Because we didn't know this was happening, we were both so unselfconscious.

J.G. Considering the usual dynamic of the photographer and the subject, here, in this work, there's something else going on. There's this unique case where neither party is the subject because, in some sense, Mona is also photographing – or witnessing – you. You have to receive this unexpected event and be open to it. I'm also curious about the fact that you photographed Mona over a life. Does Mona function as a photographer of you by default? Because of this lifetime of engagement?

D.S. Mona was very aware of the camera. In time, people may ask, did she construct all this in the graveyard for the camera? In 2017, I was at the Guggenheim in Venice, and I got three missed calls from Mona. But because I was on a guided tour, I couldn't take the call. So I came out, got onto the vaporetto to Giudecca, and called her. Her nephew picked up and said that something had happened. *We've been trying to call you*, he said, *we think she's going*. And I said, *it's not possible. She'll wait for me. I'm coming back in five days.* I asked him to put her on speaker phone. He put her on video. When I saw her, I realised that this was serious. *Mona, Mona, what are you doing? Wait for me. I'm coming, I'm coming.* All this time, somehow, I was taking screenshots while I was talking to her, and she was opening her eyes and trying to say something but was unable to talk. And then, I started to get hysterical and luckily I had friends with me on the vaporetto, holding me. I kept saying, *Mona, Mona, talk to me, talk to me*. Her nephew took the phone and told me, *she's passed*. Even in her death, Mona waited. She realised the importance of a life documented. She realised that even her passing somehow had to be documented.

That is why I say that I am informed by her – my work, my work ethic, everything – the way I think about museums, even, you could stretch it that far. Mona built a house in a graveyard because she was thrown out of her community. Besides, she was so unique that she couldn't be part of any community. She built herself a house in the graveyard where she 'claimed' she had some aunts buried. She said, *I'm a caretaker.* It grew and it grew. She made things out of what she had and from her dreams.

J.G. She lives amongst those that live forever.

D.S. Yes. She's buried there too now. She's buried in her house.

J.G. In both a conscious and unselfconscious way, she became some kind of configuration of self. It sounds to me that Mona was, whether in front of the camera or not in front of the camera, that *life* was continuous. There was no effect of the gaze; that she was entirely comfortable?

D.S. Or it was entirely for the camera – life.

J.G. As if life was all lived in the realm of perception? That is a beautiful notion – to live in such a way that the gaze is integrated. That it is continuous as opposed to a life that is faceted by a gaze, whether you become alive for the camera or you don't become alive, whether you're alive continuously – whatever the case, here it is integrated. The feeling you're perhaps responding to is one of freedom. A person pushed to the perimeter of

the periphery of society, who finds an ultimate expression of freedom.

D.S. Absolutely. With so few means, she truly freed herself from society. Her courage is unmatched, to go and live in a graveyard and then build a house and live there with her monkeys and ducks and dogs. Mona is a remarkable person, not like anybody else.

I sometimes feel I have failed, not being able to put the pieces together or articulate them. For the book's release in 2001, since Scalo is a Swiss publisher, I said to her, *Let me ask the Swiss Ambassador if he will launch your book*. In my mind, I was thinking, would the Swiss Ambassador agree to release her book at the Swiss Embassy? When he agreed, I thought this was fantastic, and told Mona. *I'm not going to the Swiss Embassy,* was Mona's reply. *If he wants to release my book, he has to come to the graveyard in his black Mercedes with the red-and-white Swiss flag flying.* I said, you know, he's not going to come to the graveyard. And anyway, why are you asking me to do that? And she said, *Because, at the Swiss Embassy, all your friends will come, they will appreciate what you have done and they will shake my hands and that's it. But if it's in the graveyard, then all the local police stations will know that Mona is an important person and that they need security. You'll have to inform all the police that the Ambassador is coming.* And so that's what happened. The Swiss Ambassador came to the graveyard to launch the book. Mona decorated the entire graveyard with marigold… even the ducks were made to wear marigold garlands. That's where her book was released.

(I'm very happy to be sharing this with you because I don't know, maybe the time is right, maybe enough time has passed. I haven't been able to put the pieces together like this.)

J.G. On a slightly adjacent note, it's both a really beautiful and powerful gesture, but also very pragmatic. The artwork, this collaborative artwork, went on to have a real effect in the community because it was not isolated in the world of books. The launch served a function beyond the book: evidencing and communicating respect and value.

D.S. And we did this a second time, following the precedent Mona had set. I was invited to the French Ambassador's home to receive an award from the French government [*editor's note: Singh was awarded the Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2014*]. At the time, I had an exhibition of my book objects at the National Museum. *I'd like you to come there,* I told the Ambassador. It took some persuasion but he came to the National Museum, where Mona was the chief guest sitting right in front in a wheelchair, whereupon the Ambassador kissed her hand in front of all the staff and guests of the National Museum.

Yes, Mona is still omnipresent.

When you are an outcast among the outcasts, you are really pushed to the limit. You have the audacity to demand that the Swiss Ambassador will come here to release my book! Or you're alive, you stay alive, until you know that your photographer is somehow documenting your death – that it has been witnessed by the same person who has witnessed most of your life. That's an amazing character.

F.B. In the context of this work, Dayanita, I remember you once told me about the song, which is quite important. Can you tell us more about it? What is its title? Perhaps we can research it further.

D.S. The song is called *Rasik Balma*. It is from the film *Chori Chori.* The words, in English, would be –

My dear beloved
Why did you connect your heart to mine
like a disease that will never leave me
my dear beloved.

It's from a wonderful film. The actress who played in the film – Mona actually met her once – her name was Nargis and she was probably the most beautiful woman of Indian cinema. This was Mona's favourite song.

There's a word in Hindi – 'dard'. Mona seems to me like the epitome of dard. Sweet pain is not quite the same. It's that overwhelming emotion when you see a beautiful flower or a sunset – or a piece of music, more a piece of music – when you're reduced to tears and you forget yourself. You forget where you are, what body you're in. It's another kind of experience. This song is very much about dard.

Mona seems to me like the epitome of dard.

J.G. …

What are you working on at the moment?

D.S. I'm working on these *Montages*. They are architecture ones, but Mona is probably invading those as well. It's like she won't leave. I don't think she'll ever leave, you know. I made these *Montages* – of Mona in family portraits – which she would love, and of Mona and her Bollywood stars. She would be most thrilled about those. However, I suspect she's going to enter the architecture *Montages* as well.

It's interesting that this exhibition came up at this time. I met someone that I was deeply in love with twenty-two years ago and I'm deeply in love with him again with absolutely no contact in between. Through this experience, I'm thinking a lot about how intimacy and romantic love is represented. I've been looking at all this photography and realising there is a problem: there is always a photographer and a subject. What happens when both people are photographers and they're working in an unselfconscious way? Where are the love stories that are not about a photographer and a subject? When both are both or neither. I'm very interested in intimacy and love. Some things are in the process of emerging. I have to study it more.

F.B. I have one final question before I forget, Dayanita. The man who the show is about, asked me something and I'm not sure how to honour it. He said, *please do not turn me into a character.* But as I've been writing these texts, it's unavoidable, he's become a character. And my question is, is Mona a character?

D.S. Certainly not to me, but I could imagine that for the viewer she is. Though she wouldn't see herself as a character, the reader could, the viewer could. Though Mona has a knack of slipping away from categories.

J.G. What's interesting about the case with Dayanita and Mona, in relation to this show and your question, Francisco, is: where is the reciprocal edge in your story? Because Mona speaks back. Mona controls the lens. There's a reciprocity there that she's aware of and in conversation with.

D.S. She's actually leading the process.

J.G. Yes, there's a director-actor relationship, where both parties are subject to each other. And the film – the moving still image – is the quintessential moment within that because it collects you both, unannounced. So Fran, I wonder if the question is, where's this man's voice? He who is the subject of your exhibition? That may reconcile that question of characterising him because if he can speak back, then you're not characterising him. He is present and has a voice of his own.

F.B. Yes, of course. Well, here we are.

D.S. *Here We Are*, that's a good title.

J.G. It is! What you're moving through now sounds like a beautiful twenty-two-year reflection on where you were and where you are now.

D.S. In some ways, twenty-two years just vanished. Twenty-two years didn't happen at all, or else we had been together for all this time, without knowing it. I was experiencing this at the time when I was sent the email for this show. This is why I asked for a conversation. This felt like a sign: Why is someone curating a show about love and why is he asking me to be part of it?

F.B. I have to say that this exhibition has a very mystical quality. We just carry on with the flow of things.

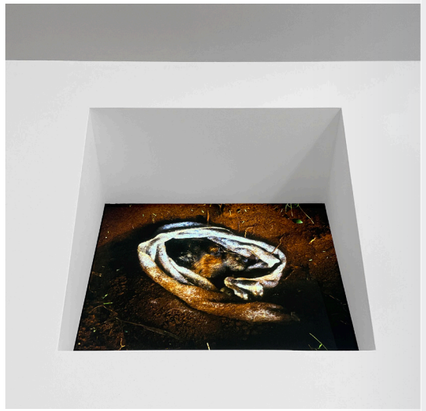
D.S. That's what I'm doing. I'm going with the flow of love. I really miss Mona because she met him twenty-two years ago and she asked him – and this connects to Mona's song, *Rasik Balma* – is this English love or Hindustani love? *You have to tell me what the difference is,* he replied. She said, *If you don't know, then there's no point telling you*, or something like that. Mona really grilled him to know whether he could become capable of Hindustani love, as he is English, but she also adored him. He came to Delhi last week, twenty-two years later. I wanted to share this meeting with her. The whole graveyard would have been full of marigold to receive him. She would be so happy that what she predicted twenty-two years ago came true, has been true. This makes me miss her terribly because, otherwise, Mona's in my heart. She's with me all the time.*

* Throughout this conversation with Dayanita Singh we talked about how public scrutiny and fascination with the state of Mona's physical body and status pulled focus away from Mona, herself: her extraordinary, rebellious, and revolutionary life. At the same time, we worried together if making no mention of Mona's identity undermined her courage and diluted the bigotry she faced. We landed on this footnote: "I am the third sex," Mona told Singh. "I am not a man trying to be a woman. It is your society's problem that you only recognise two sexes." Mona Ahmed was born in 1947 and died in 2017.

Jo Ractliffe

b.1961, Cape Town; works in Cape Town

Love's Body, 1997
Perspex print, lightbox
82 x 82 cm



To Jo Ractliffe, photography is "largely about guarding against loss," of giving to memory an image, that it might be kept safe from forgetting. Her photographs more often consider the traces that conflicts have left on the land. Atrocities of the past, now mute, are evoked in bleak emptiness. Preoccupied by all that photography necessarily leaves out, Ractliffe considers the silence implicit to her medium. "I try to work in an area between the things we know and things we don't know, what sits outside the frame...these oblique and furtive 'spaces of betweenness'." More often, her titles alone establish the significance of the scenes she pictures, where dusty landscapes are revealed to be minefields; rocky outcrops, the sites of mass graves.

When Francisco Berzunza asked Jo Ractliffe to suggest an artwork to be included in this exhibition, he had in mind a photograph Ractliffe had taken in Oaxaca of the curator standing together with his friend and collaborator, Dario Yazbek Bernal. Listening closely to what underpins You to Me, Me to You, Ractliffe instead brought out *Love's Body*. Berzunza chose to place the work into a raised structure – reminiscent, perhaps, of a tomb. Above *Love's Body,* he placed a photograph by Manuel Álvarez Bravo, and at the work's back, Diego Rivera's mural *The Protestor* as photographed by Tina Modotti.

An excerpt from a conversation with Jo Ractliffe (J.R.)*, Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.)*, and Francisco Berzunza* (F.B.)*, held in person and online, 1 June 2023:*

J.R. He was only ten years old. It was inexplicable. I remember waking up in the morning, and he was lying outside on the stoep. He was dead. It was an incredible shock. And I remember that, within a few hours, he was buried. Stephen and his dad dug this big hole, and it was all over very quickly. I was never alone with him. I didn't have that kind of moment, of parting... I suppose when you lose something or someone very special. He was so present in various parts of my life over the last ten years, spatially – the way that I moved in the house, in the garden, so much in my life was governed by his great big body. Even my work.

I decided to photograph him. I'd always argued that photographs were fundamentally separate from the real. That the photograph couldn't stand in for experience.

J.G. There's something, formally, about this image with its blanket, that is particular. How was it constructed?

J.R. I photographed with a twin-lens reflex. And I'm above looking down, so I have to invert my camera. It's almost shot upside down. And it's a square format, which means it's quite balanced in that way, centralised. It's shot on slide film, which has a much more saturated colour. And there's that Joburg red earth, which has a very particular quality. It's quite lush in that way – a kind of visceral red, that Joburg earth.

J.G. The image, in some way, allowed you to let go of Gus, knowing you had something to carry, to show others.

J.R. What I was doing wasn't very different from the ways that people have long dealt with grief, particularly in the early days of photography. It was quite ordinary – though maybe not so much now – to photograph your dead... It's a way of thinking about the photograph, not simply as a transcription of something but as an actual material object. It's like the wafer and the wine, which stand in for the body and blood of Christ. Here's a photograph that stands in for the body pictured. The photograph starts performing or enacting something. It was a different way to think about what photographs do. They are material objects that have a force; they assert themselves.

J.G. Did it change the way you took photos?

J.R. No, not necessarily. But it changed the way I thought of photographs and death – the understanding of the photograph being tied up with death. It actually shifted that. I don't think that all photographs are memento mori simply because they're always about the past, and the past is irretrievably gone. I think photographs are distinct from their referent or subject. They enter a present as their own object.

Curiously though, I have never actually printed this photograph. It's presented as a lightbox. So it's remained a spectral thing, a kind of emanation of something, ghostly – disembodied.

Manuel Álvarez Bravo

b.1902, Mexico City; d. 2002, Mexico City

El Soñador, 1931
Silver gelatin print
25.3 x 20.3 cm

Cautious of political adornment, Manuel Álvarez Bravo opted instead to portray the universal through images of the individual – shop windows, ritual decorations, the surfaces of walls and floors. With his work deeply rooted in indigenous Mexican culture; the artist's familiarity with surrealism becomes apparent in his explorations of earth, death, and religion. Heralded as the most important figure in 20th-century Latin American photography and a pioneer of artistic photography in Mexico, Álvarez Bravo grasped the medium through the study of photographic journals. It was in these local and international publications that he discovered the work of Edward Weston and Tina Madotti, both of whom became close colleagues and confidantes. At first a student of painting and literature, the years that shaped his career were those following the Mexican Revolution – the documentation of everyday intimacies amidst a rapidly modernising Mexico a recurring theme in his earlier photographs.

In Parallel Play at A4 (June 6, 2018–September 27, 2018), Jo Ractliffe pinned Manuel Álvarez Bravo's photograph *Striking Worker Assassinated* (1934) to the wall. The artist was in the process of prototyping strategies towards her then-upcoming exhibition, to be held in Oaxaca, Mexico, curated by Ractliffe and Josh Ginsburg. The exhibition formed part of Hacer Noche, a major project of Southern African arts in Oaxaca organised and produced by Francisco Berzunza. Ractliffe titled her exhibition for a note above the door of Manuel Álvarez Bravo's studio, which reads 'Hay Tiempo, Hay Tiempo' (There is Time, There is Time).

For Ractliffe, Álvarez Bravo's photograph offered not only a distinct visual lexicon but a curious parallel to her image of a dead donkey found on a rural roadside, titled *End of Time* (1996).

"Your work," Berzunza told Ractliffe in a conversation held in anticipation of You to Me, Me to You, "I have decided to place together in the exhibition...yours and the Manuel Álvarez Bravo photograph. They go together." Two figures – one asleep, the other dead – pictured in quiet repose.

Pedro Slim

b.1950, Lebanon; works in Mexico City

Untitled, 2023
Silver gelatin print
43.9 x 43.3 cm

In the 1980s, in a photographic studio in Mexico City, Pedro Slim began developing what would become the series *From the street to the studio.* Acclaimed for documenting male beauty at a time in which it was distanced from mainstream Mexican culture, Slim photographs those excluded from representation. Attentive to light and form, Slim records the markings on these male bodies; tattoos, ages, Slim's subjects d and classist society – th camera

himself and Fernando

I had just arrived at my friend Ignacio's house from a long day at work. It is not an exaggeration when I say that Ignacio taught me how to *see* over the course of our now defunct friendship. I miss him.

That night, I was telling Nacho about an exhibition I wanted to make and said something along the lines of

> "My *dream* is to put together..."
> Nacho cut me off.
> "Fran, Fran stop dreaming!" He insisted. "One wakes up from dreams."

Manuel Álvarez Bravo

b.1902, Mexico City; d. 2002, Mexico City

El Soñador, 1931
Silver gelatin print
25.3 x 20.3 cm

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Curator Francisco Berzunza commissioned Pedro Slim to take this image of himself and Fernando Elizundia Domit.

Kemang Wa Lehulere

b.1984, Cape Town; works in Cape Town

I LOVE YOU TOO (Cape Town), 2023
Public participatory project

Working against collective forgetting, Kemang Wa Lehulere gives to South Africa's recent past images, objects and gestures – each a mnemonic sign for those stories lost in historical abstraction. Working between amnesia and archive, Wa Lehulere's installations and performances become poetic translations of memory. He counts among his many mediums collaboration, quotation, and objects found and made. Wa Lehulere's historical impulse is not one of nostalgia but rather a critical re-examination of inherited truths. History, after all, is not static but generative. To the artist, it lends itself to be reimagined and revised.

"The aspiration," Wa Lehulere writes, "is to paint a social portrait through prose and poetic form by way of public declarations of intimacy." A people's library of love letters, *I Love You Too* holds space for vulnerability. An open invitation to the public, participation involves booking a twenty-minute massage that is received in exchange for speaking a love letter. Writers play the part of amanuensis; giving words to the participant's sentiments. Establishing "a moment of tenderness that connects people," *I Love You Too* is a gesture of love about love.

You to Me, Me to You marks the second iteration of Wa Lehulere's *I Love You Too*. Letters from the project's first iteration are compiled in *I Love You Too, a collection of love letters from the people of Manchester* (2021), available to read in the Gallery.

Book a time slot on A4's online calendar.

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Excerpt from a conversation with Kemang Wa Lehulere (K.W.L.)*, Josh Ginsburg* (J.G.)*, and Sara de Beer* (S.d.B.) *held in person, 4 August 2023:*

K.W.L. In February 2012 in Houston, Texas, I presented some work, including what we had been doing as the Centre for Historical Reenactment collective in Jozi in the aftermath of the murder of Mozambican musician Gito Baloi.

He had been killed a block away from where I was working in Johannesburg. The title of his song *Na Ku Randza* (1997), which translates as 'I love you', inspired us to undertake multiple interventions outside, in the public realm, and inside of our space.

While invited to a closed symposium at the Menil Museum, in Houston Texas, one of the participants in the symposium was then the director of the African Film Festival in New York. After the presentation, she came up to me and said, "You're trying to tenderise your people."

That phrase stuck with me for many years – I wondered, how could I develop a project in the future to speak to this? To take it further.

I Love You Too, this idea of love letters as a project, arose from this phrase, as an exchange of tenderness.

For the longest time my work focused on a particular lensing of history, and together with the collective's very politically charged energy.

I remember Thembinkosi Goniwe asking, "What do revolutionaries do when they're not being revolutionary?" What is beyond the sloganeering, politics, political positioning? What makes us human?

I don't want to talk about the idea of 'humanity', or some other version of this, but I am interested in talking about finding commonalities: what makes us common as people across the world? Everyone desires love. Even if it hasn't been had, felt, or experienced, love is nevertheless desired.

I was curious about public participatory projects, and this feeling I had that, oftentimes, these kinds of projects ended up taking more from people than they gave. How can one create something that spreads tenderness and love? And how can we talk about love without it feeling cheesy or like a gimmick?

J.G. Even talking about love in art suggests the art is cheesy, when it's just speaking about love. Part of this project, we've realised through talking together with the artists and with our team, is about practising or testing how to speak about love, and what happens to us when we do that.

K.W.L. Love is something which is often expressed privately. Growing up, I was always curious about people who wrote declarations of love in the toilets – the boys' toilets at school, and on school desks. School desks are the material I've been working with for so long and I often come across these declarations of love on them.

These marks people leave behind... These are not marks for the people who make them. They may sit at the desk every day while considering making a mark, but these are marks made for people to find in the future. How is love, this thing we all desire, something we are so often shy about?

I've wondered after small signs of affection – those things like holding hands. I grew up with toxic masculinity: for the generation of black men in Gugulethu where I grew up, holding hands with one's girlfriend in public would have been seen as a sign of weakness. Apartheid governed and controlled black bodies in the public space. With friends from Cameroon, or Zimbabwe, they experience similar controls and limitations when it comes to public displays of affection.

J.G. 'Love' appears in other of your titles.

K.W.L. *Bring Back Lost Love* began as a joke. In downtown Jozi, there are all these signs advertising the work of prophets. Call them if you want a penis enlargement, to get rich... all kinds of scams.

I wondered what it would be like to call one of these guys and present them with an impossible challenge: to *Bring Back Lost Love,* in this case, lost land in relation to the Native Land Act of 1913. But the idea for *I Love You Too* was there first, it's only that it was difficult to find support for the project, because perhaps it seemed so divergent from work I'd done previously, or it was difficult to visualise. But I'd been thinking about it for years for more than ten years. When the Manchester International Festival [MIF] published the first iteration of the book in 2021, it was perhaps easier to see the project's form and have it understood.

J.G. Love seems to be a part of your practice more widely – love as a strategy for confrontation.

K.W.L. I developed a frame of thinking that I would describe as very radical, in the beginning, and then more refined within the academic space of universities, but both of these mindsets were about thinking critically. The training was towards criticising, problematising, analysing, not towards tenderness.

At some point, I felt exhausted. I enjoy humour, why could I not make humorous work? In fact, humour is incredibly challenging – to open yourself up, and look towards a moment of joy – when you have been trained to see problems.

We are not trained to be generous. This was about finding fault in my own thinking patterns.

At the Zeitz Museum, we tested the project with Zeitz staff – for this test the project was not open to the public. But there were individuals who burst into tears after their sessions, overwhelmed by the experience. One individual expressed that they had never felt love in their life. I understood we had to develop an 'aftercare' for the project. It's now a requirement for there to be a person on the team who is there to sit and be with each participant after their experience. [*Editor's note: the project involves each participant receiving a massage from a trained masseuse. While receiving this massage, they are asked to narrate a love letter. A writer is present in the room and commits this letter to text.*]

We so often take it for granted; that people know love. My parents weren't allowed to be together because of apartheid. Even though they both died when I was young, I knew that I was loved. I knew that my father loved me. Even if he couldn't be with my mother. But this is not true for everyone; not everyone has the experience of being loved.

J.G. Perhaps it's the most radical act of all, to make a practice about love...

K.W.L. When *I Love You Too* was first conceived of, I wanted it to take place at a taxi rank, or the train station, between 5.30 and 7pm. These are the hours when black bodies are in transit after a day of labour, moving, working, serving. What would it mean to gift someone a massage, a moment to rest, at the end of a long day, and then for them to take those feelings of tenderness with them, and share those in the home? This is where I would still most want it to take place, no matter the logistical complications involved.

J.G. This may be a bit of a far-out question. Is there a part of this project that is about developing self-love?

K.W.L. Each time I've developed a project, I've developed my thinking, and sight of the world. At present in my studio, the oil paint I'm currently working with is teaching me patience. I've been wondering, who would I write to, if it were my turn to get on the massage bed and to write a love letter?

There's a video in which Slavoj Žižek proclaims that the idea of universal love is disgusting, because rather than loving, he is indifferent to the world, and that love is a violent act, an act of picking out one small detail from the others, even if this detail is one single, fragile individual, who one chooses to love above all else. To paraphrase Žižek, creation is a catastrophe. We must assume it's all a mistake and still go all the way to the end, knowing everything is imbalanced, and doing this is called 'love.' In his words, love is evil.

As a parent now, when I look at how soft and gentle my son is, because he is such a loving boy, I find myself asking, "Am I ok with him going out into the world, with this gentleness?" It is beautiful – that he is this way, but the world is tough and unforgiving, full of heartache, swindlers, scammers, and fraudsters.

How does one protect a child, who has this gentleness, without risking that one forces them to become tough? My love for him is also my desire for him to be able to be himself. But this means I have to stand by and see him get hurt – this dangerous openness – as he learns how to be appropriate in this world where hurt people hurt other people.

Talking about this now, perhaps this is the realisation: that the person that I would write my love letter to, is my son.

S.d.B. Talking about romantic love may be a way to cultivate wisdom in loving – a love muscle, as it were, that's responsive, flexible, fit: that moves nimbly and smartly.

J.G. It is love, if it's unrequited? Does love exist where it is given, only, without a force to press back against it – to answer back? Love is possibly something that's cultivated only in the time between its sharing. That it becomes material through the response: *I Love You Too.*

K.W.L. Black men have not been allowed to be tender. We have had to fight, to battle, to struggle. At some point, I didn't want to always be fighting. One project in the wake of Gito Baloi's death was to stand and hand out roses on the street to passersby. Just – here, this is for you, no explanation or expectation.

When I think about black male artists who have successfully worked with love and tenderness, I think of Moshekwa Langa. Moshekwa writes the names of his past lovers as a catharsis that is also an act of preservation – this is still confrontational. Ernest Mancoba's move away from South Africa and his decision to follow abstraction, to work in that way – I think this can be thought of as a radical act of self-care.

J.G. I don't see this work as departing from your other work. It's more like a glue that binds them all together.

S.d.B. Besides, *I Love You Too* carries its own humour, to tenderise, through massage: that's how one softens a steak.

K.W.L. It's a direction I like moving in. Even if it's considered divergent from what I've been doing before.

The exhibition opening saw a performance of *There is a Light That Never Goes Out*. Composed by Johnny Marr and Steven Morrissey. Arranged by Philip Miller and Tshegofatso Moeng. Conducted by Tshegofatso Moeng.

From the curator:

"This project is dedicated to Fernando Elizundia Domit. I would like to thank Victoria Clay Mendoza, Guadalupe Lara Vargas, Dario Yazbek Bernal, Michael Snyder, Edgar Lópeznavarrete & David Rimoch, Guillermo Moisén, Toni Sadurni, José Ignacio González, Raúl Olvera, Karime Sierra & Jeronimo Bernot, Patricio González Caraza-Campos, Poppy Sebire, Paola Plaza & Rodrigo Aragonés, Harris Whitbeck, Alejandro Ramirez Magaña, Ernesto & Eva Rimoch, Sasha Sokol & Alejandro Soberon, Paloma Porraz, Elena Navarro, Gabriella Nugent, Daniela Verdes, Pablo Arredondo, Jade & David Poritz, Daniela, Roberto & Isabel Madrazo, Pablo León de la Barra, Alfredo Jaar, Daniela Zárate, Khaldun Ahmed, María Ines Parra, Jaime Ruiz, Manolo Penagos, Mauricio Aguirre, Perla SanJuan, Andres Nizri, Sharon Fainstein, Javier Amescua, Malik Al-Mahrouky, Salim Currimjee and Cy Schnabel for their support in making this project as well as Galerie Nordenhake, Gallerie Perrotin, Frith Street Gallery, Simon Lee Gallery, Proyectos Monclova, Bas Jan Ader Estate*, and Archivo Manuel Álvarez Bravo, including the artists participating in this project, Iñaki Bonillas, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Sophie Calle, Miguel Cinta Robles, Dexter Dalwood, Georgina Gratrix, Thembinkosi Hlatshwayo, Pieter Hugo, Graciela Iturbide, James Ivory, Moshekwa Langa, Thato Makatu, Philip Miller, Jo Ractliffe, Dayanita Singh, Slavs and Tatars, Pedro Slim, Kemang Wa Lehulere, and James Webb. Special thanks to all the staff at A4 Arts Foundation for their dedication to the project."

Francisco Berzunza (b. 1989) is a historian based in Mexico City. He has produced and organised exhibitions with Marlene Dumas, William Kentridge, Alfredo Jaar, Slavs and Tatars, Dexter Dalwood and Pieter Hugo, amongst others. Recently he has been appointed as a member of the development committee at the National Gallery in London, tasked with organising the first monographic exhibition of José María Velasco in the UK. He serves as a policy advisor to several financial institutions in Mexico and abroad.

You to Me, Me to You – Wayfinder (2023)

Design – Ben Johnson
Editor – Sara de Beer
Writers – Lucienne Bestall, Sara de Beer, Khanya Mashabela, Lily van Rensburg

Works included in the exhibition courtesy of: blank projects; Galerie Nordenhake; The Estate of Bas Jan Ader, Mary Sue Ader Andersen, The Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York, Meliksetian | Briggs and Simon Lee Gallery; Perrotin; Stevenson; Sfeir-Semler Gallery; Frith Street Gallery; The Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive, Aesthetic Research Institute, UNAM; Michaelis School of Fine Art (UCT); Private collection in Mexico City; Private collections; and the artists.

A4 would like to extend our thanks to blank projects, Galerie Nordenhake and Stevenson for their contributions towards the realisation of their respective artists' works.


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