IF YOU NEED ME
I'LL BE OUT HERE LIVING
WHAT I CONSIDER
TO BE MY BEST LIFE

OK, INHALE, BE
PRESENT, EXHALE, BE PRESENT, INHALE,
WAIT IS THIS PRESENT?
EXHALE
In paying close attention to the arrangement of objects in a space and in stripping context from the work, Olson seems more interested in how we behave in the space and what we see in the objects. In The Modern Art Notes Podcast, she cites poetry as sort of literary equivalent to her practice. If we view her work through this lens, it makes sense why the work on view asks so much of us. Olson provides the compressed visual, the minimum she feels we need to make meaning, and asks us to fill in the rest. That's why these shows may unfold differently for each of us, and why they are not the type that provide instant gratification. //

Karolina Hek is a writer working at the intersection of art, design, and the built environment. She is an editor at Boston Art Review, and her writing has been featured in Big Red and Shiny, Articles Magazine, and Landscape Architecture Magazine, among others.


"The Sun Rises in the West and Sets in the East" at Tufts University Art Galleries is an exhibition of work by eleven contemporary artists on planetary reversals and inversions—of language, signs and symbols, geopolitical worldviews, and ideological trajectories. The show's title alone prompts several disorientations, not only to our cosmic alignment, but also to the very geographical abstractions of the "East" and "West" and to colonial distinctions of the "Orient" and "Occident" that echo amid a political, economic, and military "rise of the East." According to Sara Raza (curator of the exhibition and author of the forthcoming book Punk Orientalism: The Art of Revolution), this project is not about negating dichotomies, but rather about what can happen when such relational poles are worked through in nuanced ways. Drawing its title from a phrase that recurs across Islamic cosmologies—including as a portent of the last judgment in the Quran—"The Sun Rises in the West and Sets in the East" follows an interconnected world plunged into darkness and decline. Through the cyclical framework of reversal, the exhibition ultimately prompts various shifts in perspective regarding worlds ending. As these works propose, it is among the ruins that new possibilities of being may arise.

Starting on the first-floor space, the exhibition opens with two large copper panels puncturing by what look to be hundreds of nails, which form two diamond shapes that each enclose a cross. These iconic works by Nari Ward feature a series of Kongos cosmograms, prayer symbols of both sacred and harrowing proportions. It was in an eighteenth-century church in Georgia that the artist first encountered the distinctive shapes drilled into the floorboards, under which uncounted people hid and were given ventilation to breathe as they fled along the Underground Railroad. In these works, Ward reclaims the ancestral and spiritual significance of the cosmogram as embodying the cycle of life, death, and rebirth while considering the healing properties of copper itself—an apt invitation to the show. On the opposite wall, a row of watercolors depicting bird taxidermies by Ali Cherri entitled Dead Inside (2020) also looks beyond existing dichotomies of life and death to reflect on, and cope with, an internal state of lived experience after trauma. For the Beirut-born, Paris-based artist, feeling "dead inside" while alive can become the basis for a shared poetics of loss, including for those of the diaspora.

The transformative framework of diaspora is also one that animates the exhibition as a whole, beginning with the artists' own migrations across often several geographies, nation-states, cultures, and worlds. A disembodied pair of prosthetic arms mounted on steel poles by Algerian-French artist Rader Atta extend outwardwards as if looking for an embrace. While such prosthetics refer to both the physical impacts of colonial domination across the world (survivors of war are often amputees), in the context of this exhibition, the phantom
The fate of a nation-state, as represented by four stacks of satirical newspapers in front of a covered seating area in Aseh Ali's The Future Tense (2017), is told through fifty fortune-tellers, astrologers, and other soothsayers' diverse prophecies predicting the political future of Turkey and the world. Among the many headlines, one reads "WOMEN TO SAVE THE FUTURE...There is a thick snake, like a cobra, which is stealthily moving from the West to the East..." With governmental crackdowns on freedom of the press and increasing censorship in mind, viewers are encouraged to take a newspaper, which disguises hidden "truths" as clairvoyance while expanding over the gray area between speculative fiction and fact.

Across from Çavuşoğlu's newspaper installation, what sounds like a proposition setup with a black-box space. And indeed Yael Bartana appropriates both the style of a Nazi nationalist propaganda and early Zionism films in Mary Koszmary (Nightmares) (2007), a work that invites Jews to return to Poland while reflecting on complex Polish-Jewish relations. The speaker Sławomir Sierakowski (real-life leader of a Polish leftist group) at first seems to be a lone apocalyptic figure at the back of a room in the Polin Museum in Warsaw, leading to a few caravans that have made camp atop its periphery. As his earnest and poetic speech progresses, however, the camera pans out to the field, revealing a group of children spelling out "3,200,000 Jews can change the lives of 40,000,000 Poles." In concluding lines—"Return, and we shall finally become Europeans. There is no future for chosen peoples. There is no future for peoples in general. Instead of identifying, let us become one"—Sierakowski calls for a unification that would transform Europe from the inside out by embracing difference. He and the children walk out of the stadium, holding up small Polish flags, smiling hopefully.

The burning of modernist forms constitutes a critical rebirth of meaning and materiality in Anton Ginzburg's Burnt Constructions: Gustaf Halls Initiative (2016), based on Russian Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko's Spatial Studies. Ginzburg applies what was historically a radically rational art for a society born of the Russian Revolution to a contemporary North American context (in Alberta, Canada). The work gives new meaning not only to productivist art, but also inverts the idea of "production" as endless growth, inherited from the modernist era of steel and concrete. These singular structures made of wood are rather creations born of destruction, both conceptual and material.

The steady sounds of underwater breathing lead to the lower-level galleries and an encounter with Ergin Çavuşoğlu's immersive video work Lundy, Louis, Barge and Troy (2014), which emerges from the dark as a two-channel installation featuring a World War I shadowed fleet (seen from above) in parallel to the contemporary vessels traversing the blue waters like shadows from above (seen from below). The continuous dissolution of empire is evident in these mirrored images featuring different temporalities of imperialist maritime ruin and new ruines in the making. Lastly, Nadia Kaabi-Linke's Road Works (Remont10) (2021), recreates a cobblestone pavement in Kyiv, Ukraine within the gallery space, to reflect on personal histories of migration and border crossing, as well as an endless cycle of crisis and reparation that draws from the work's title. Not easily translated, the Ukrainian word remont gestures toward an endless state of less-than-optimal reconstructions grounded in a place, such as to a road by the local people who travel it every day. Kaabi-Linke translates this precarious installation of unfixed stone into an embodied experience rather than a static image, which viewers are invited to walk across its unstable surface and reflect on their own simultaneous crossing of borders and rootedness.

What emerges from not the West's self-image (that creates the East), but rather from its epistemological collapse and subsequent ruin? "The Sun Rises in the West" is the question of an overgrown stadium at a point which holds an MA from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College.

"The Sun Rises in the West and Sets in the East" is on view at Tufts University Art Galleries (Medford) from August 30 to December 11, 2022.