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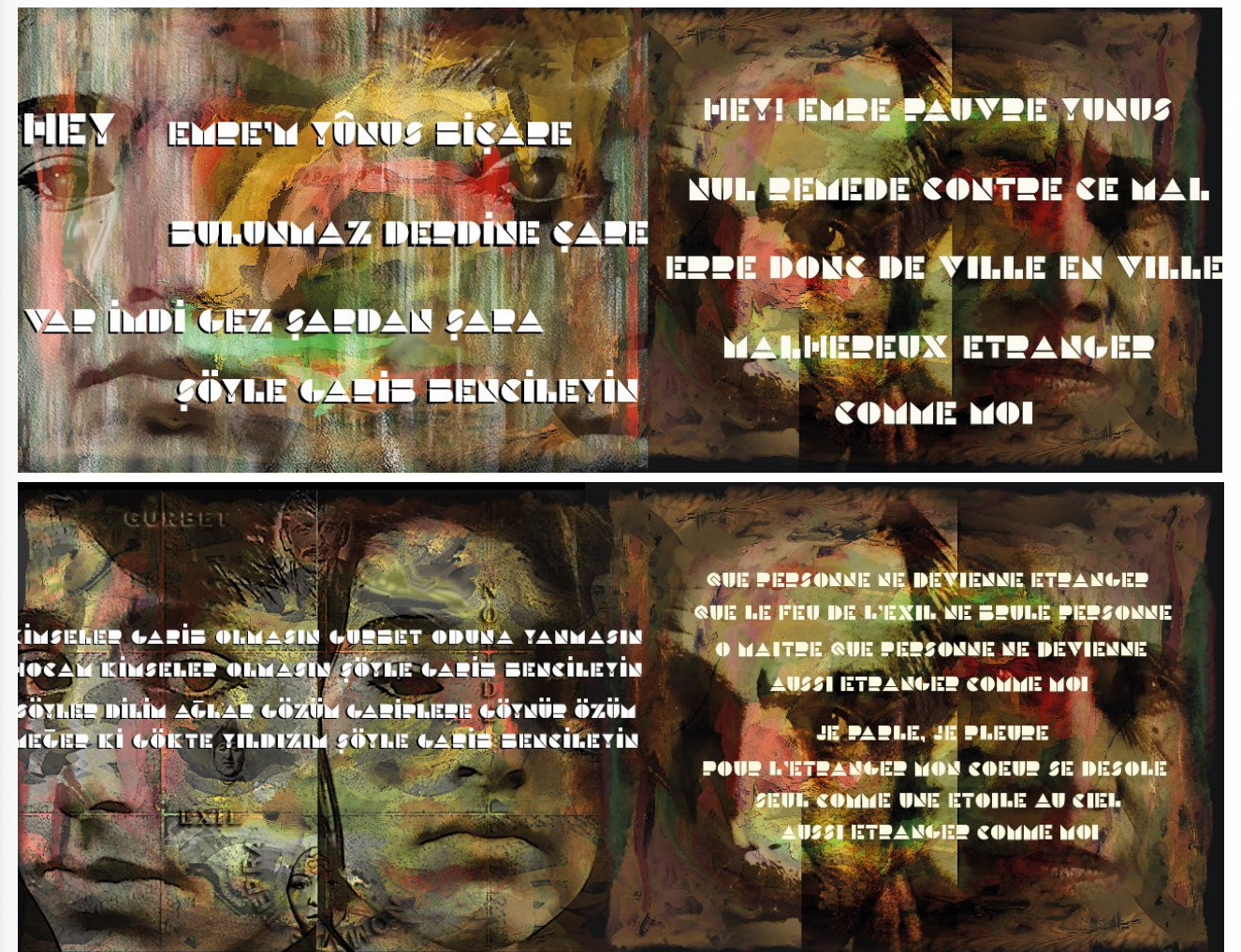
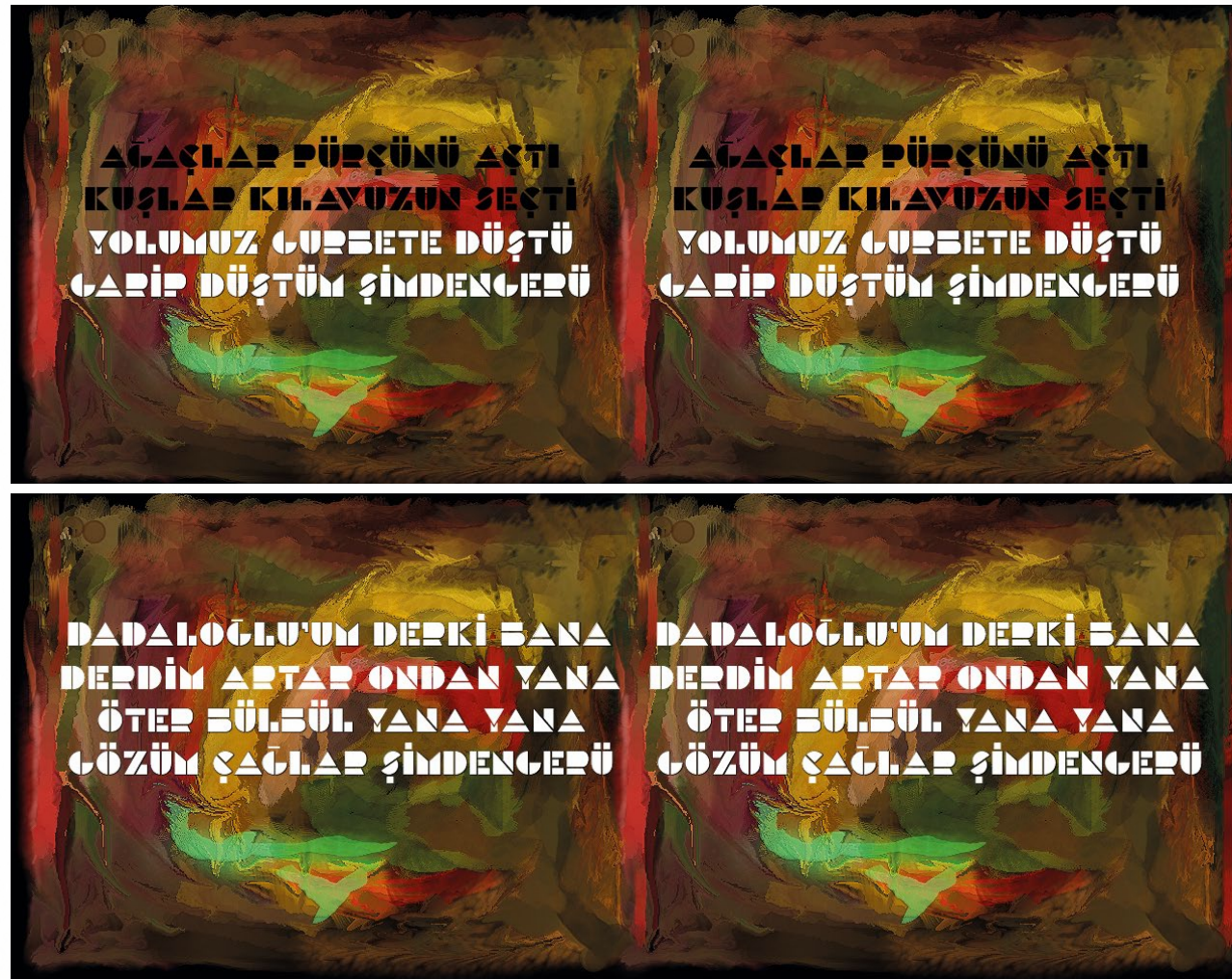
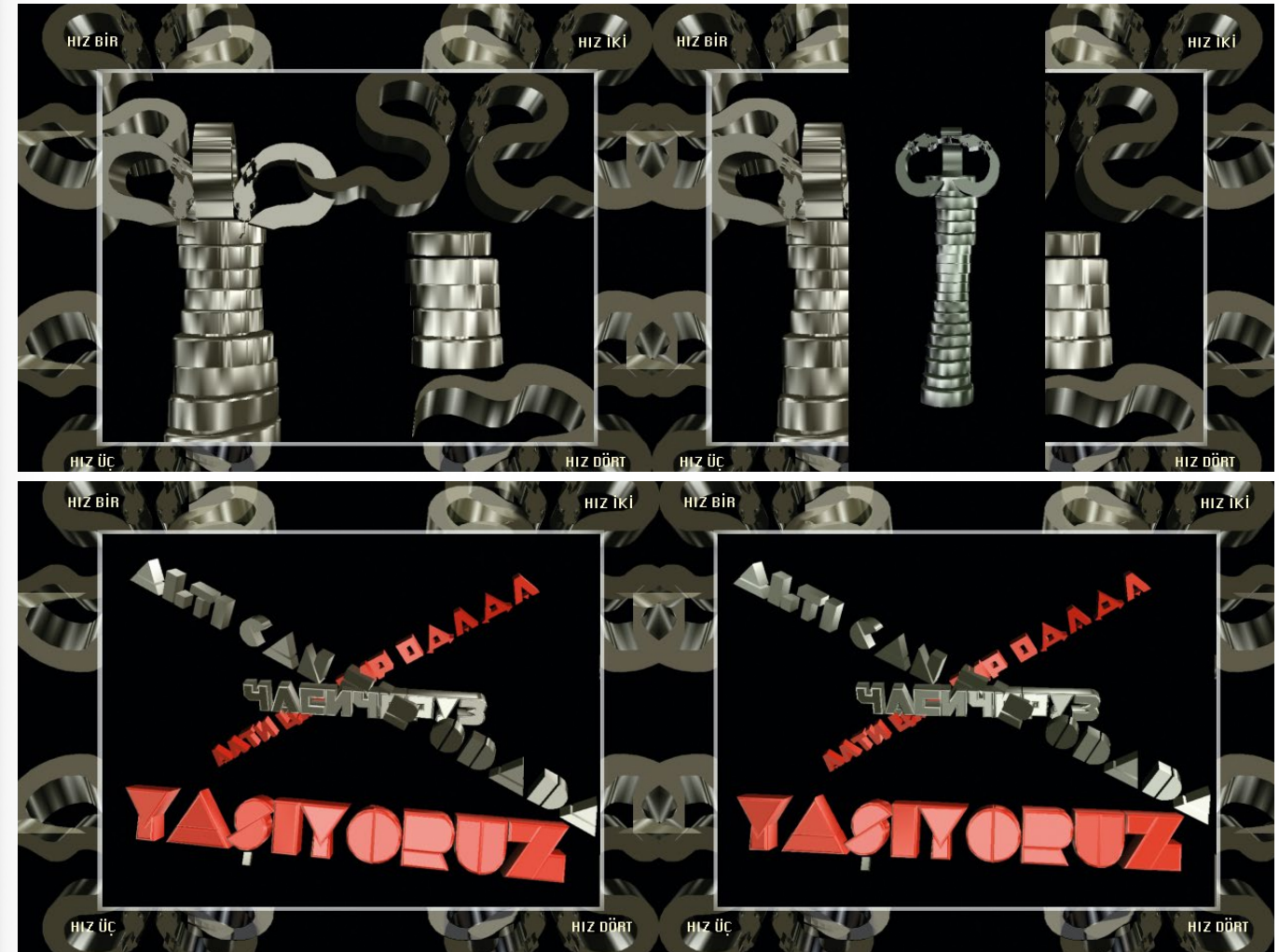
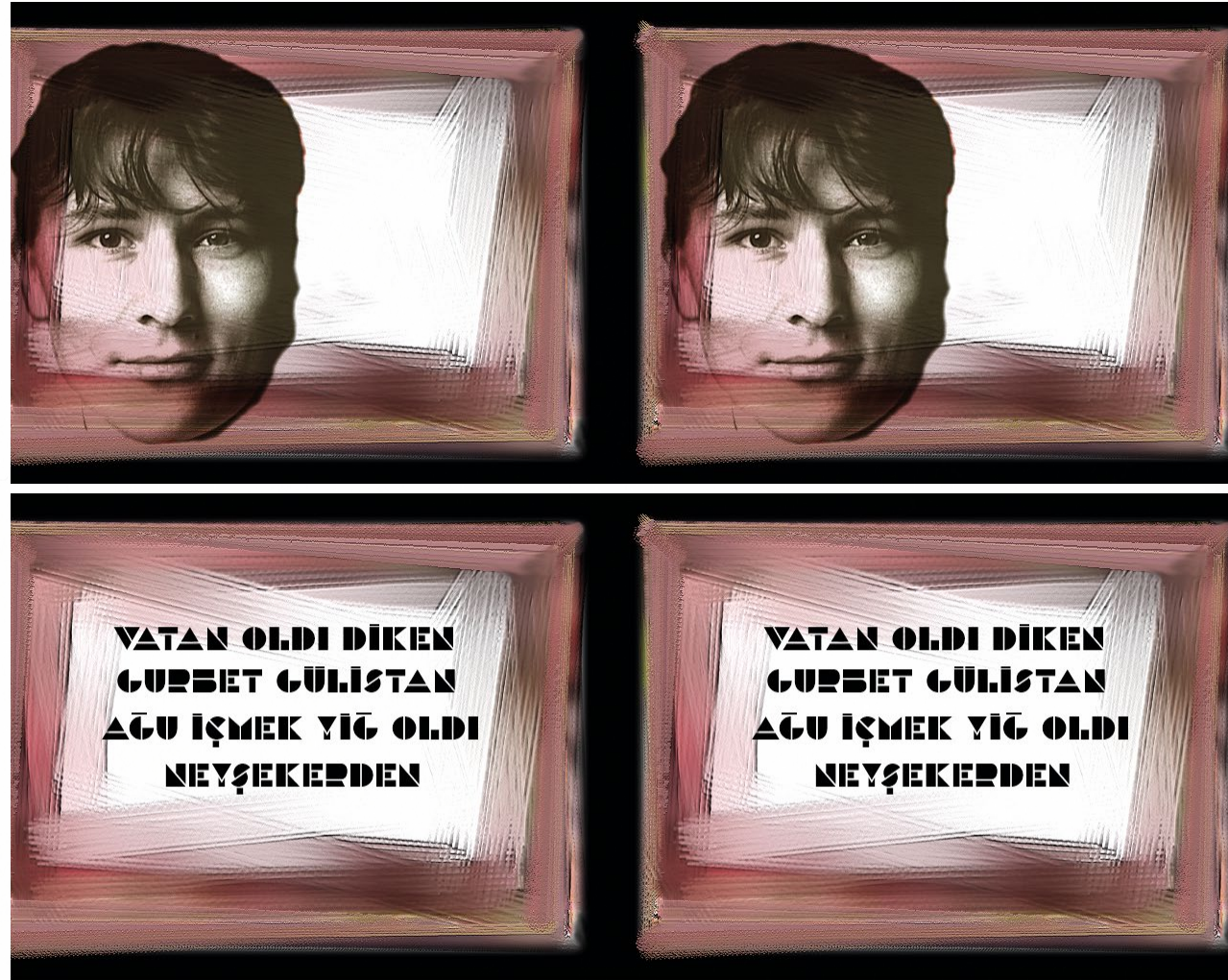
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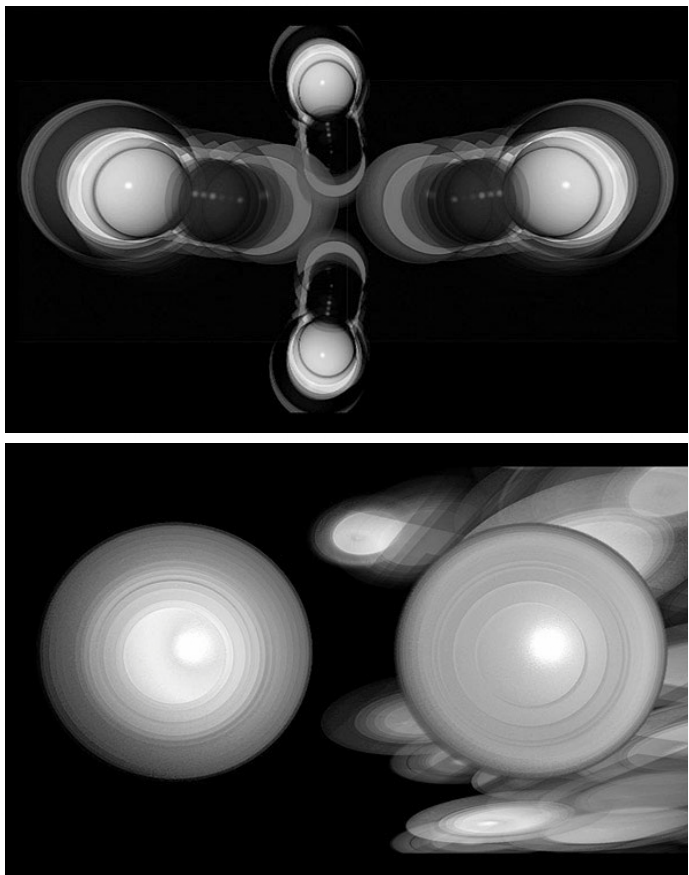






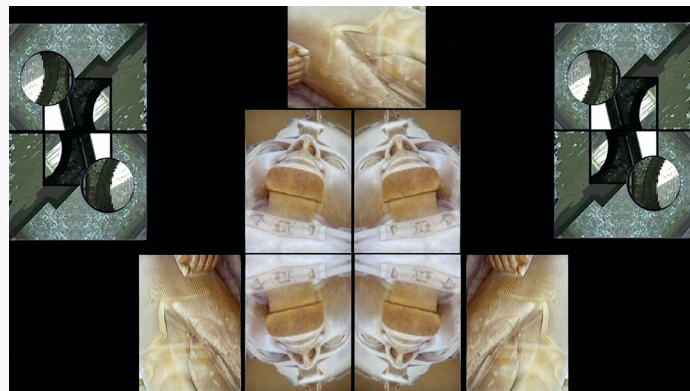
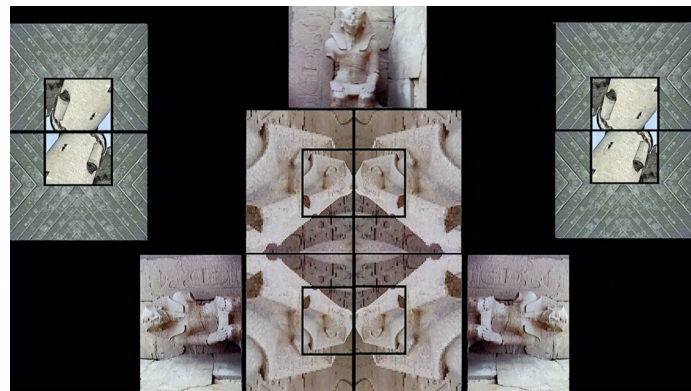
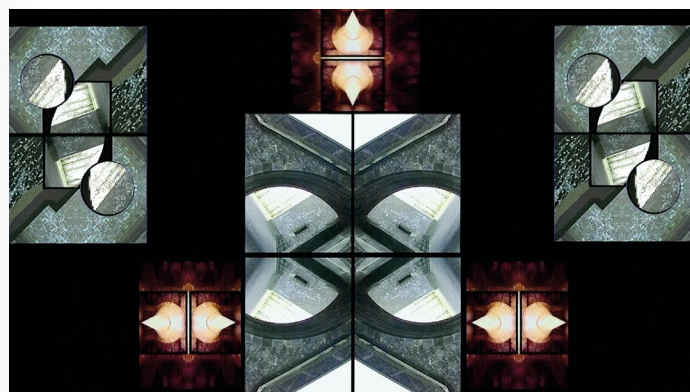
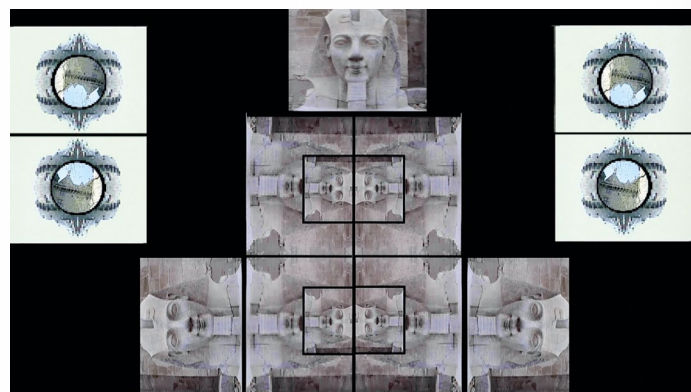
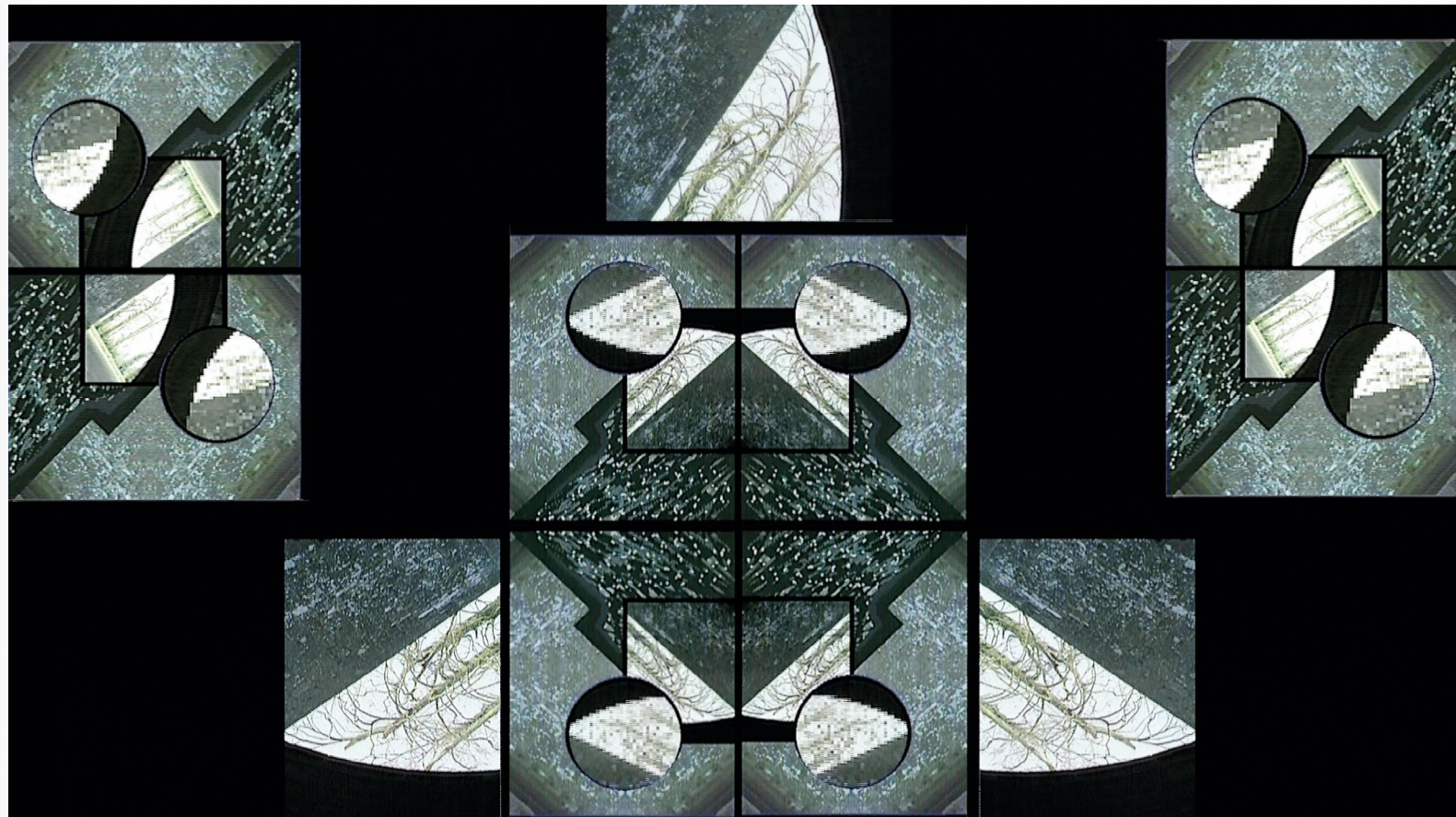
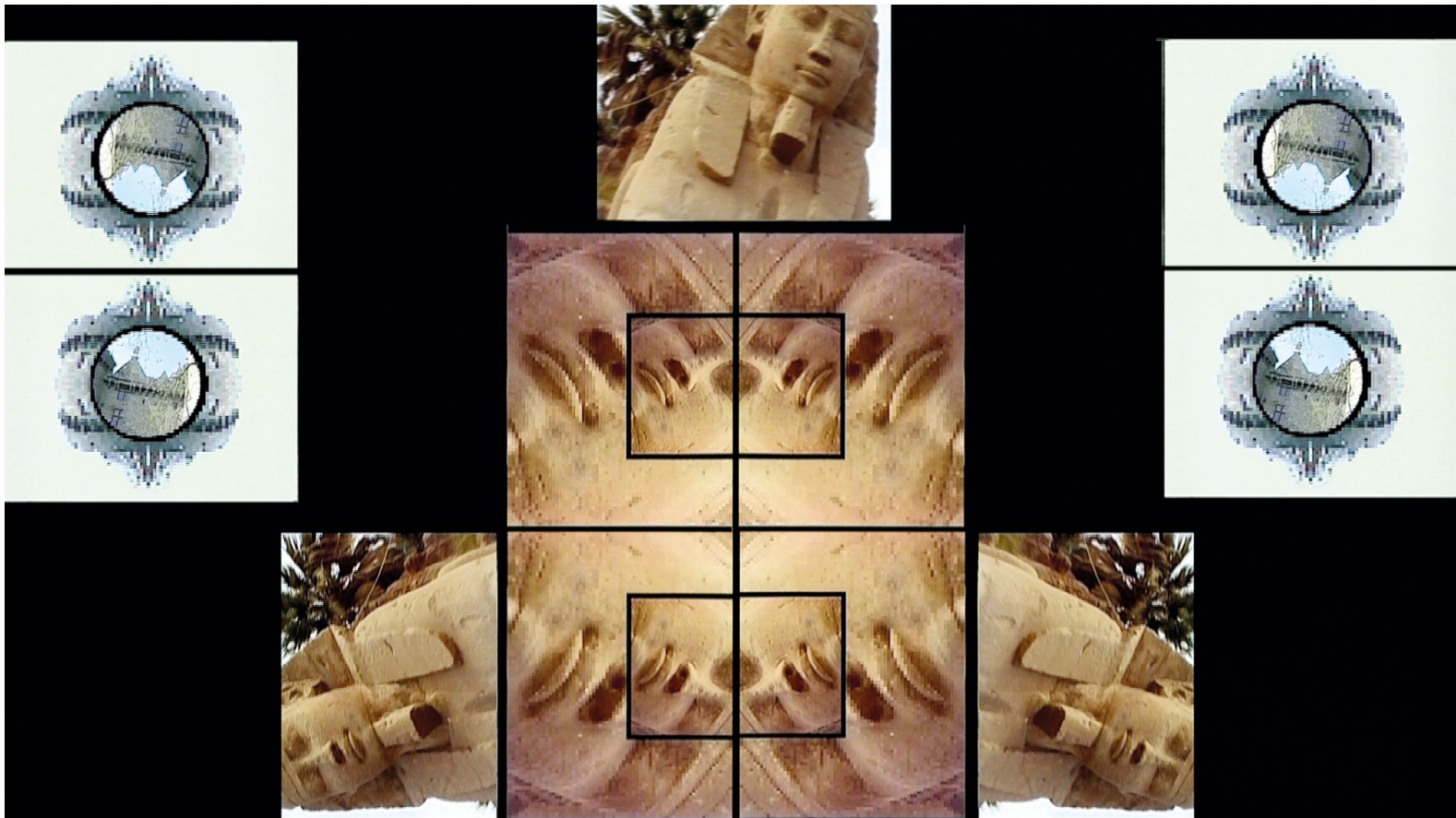
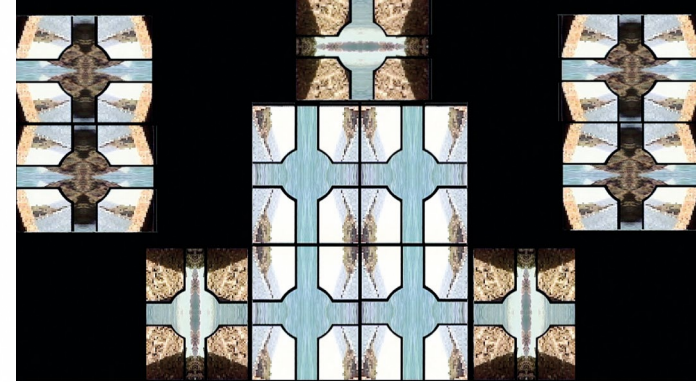
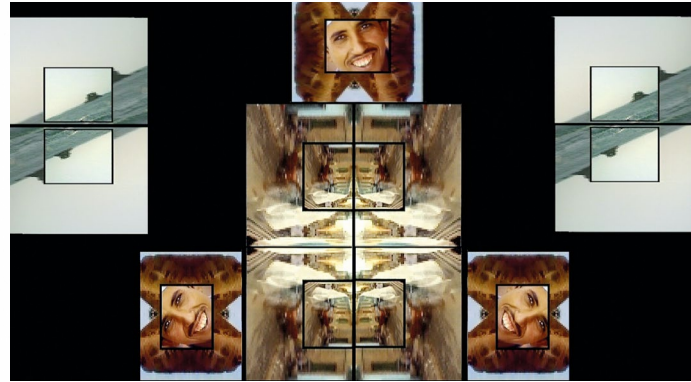


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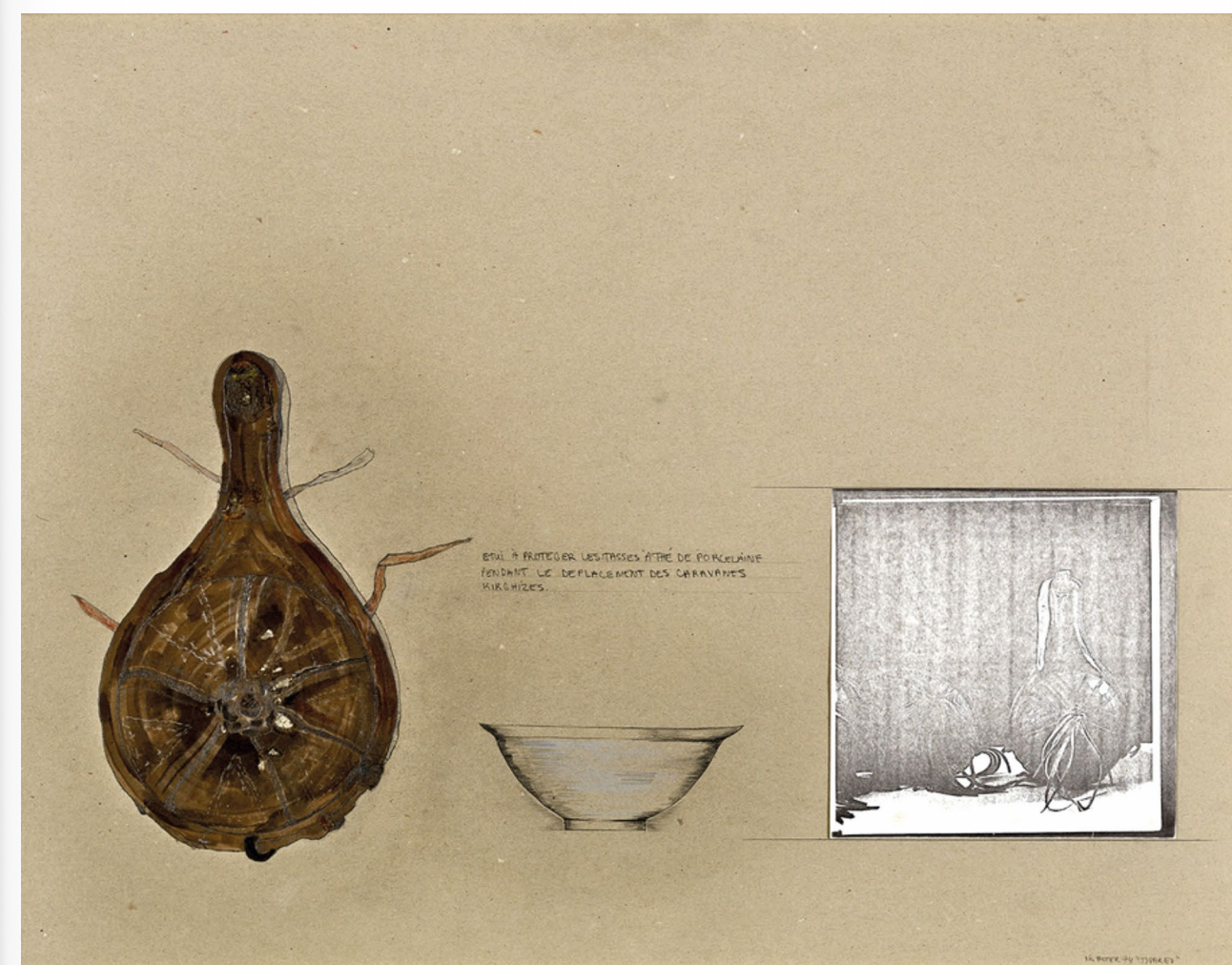
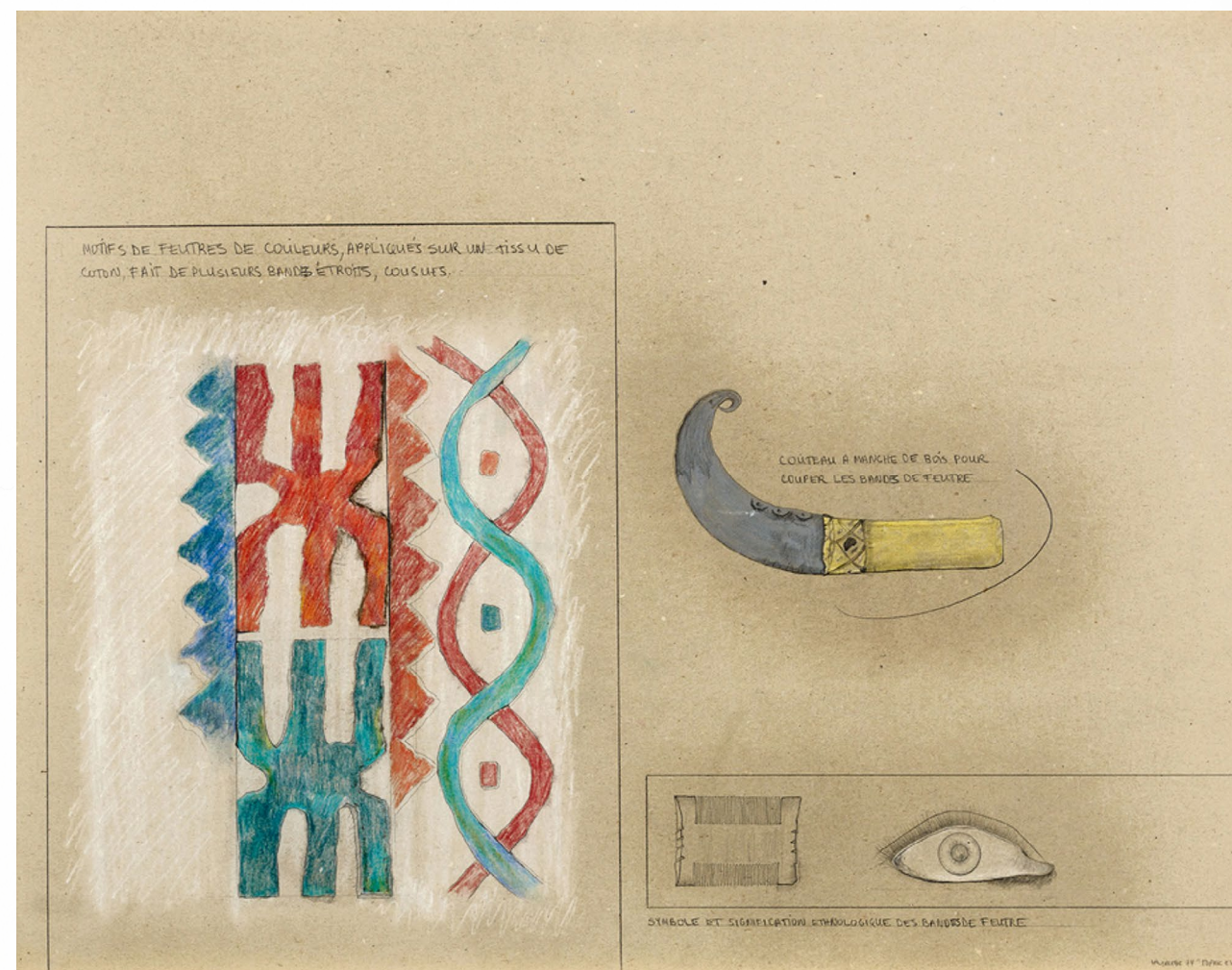




L'AVENIR DANS LE DOMAINE DE L'ARCHITECTURE. CABINES TRANSPORTABLES AVEC ANNEAUX POUR LES ZEPPELINS. LES MAISONS-GRILLES. (VÉLIMIK, KALEBNIKO)

MODIFICATION DES LOIS SUR L'HABITAT. DROIT D'ÊTRE PROPRIÉTAIRE D'UNE CHAMBRE DANS UNE ALLEE INDIVIDUELLE ET DROIT DE CHARGER CONSTRUCTION DE PLACES (D'AU L'ÉTAT)

MAÎTRE D'UN HABITAT INDIVIDUEL
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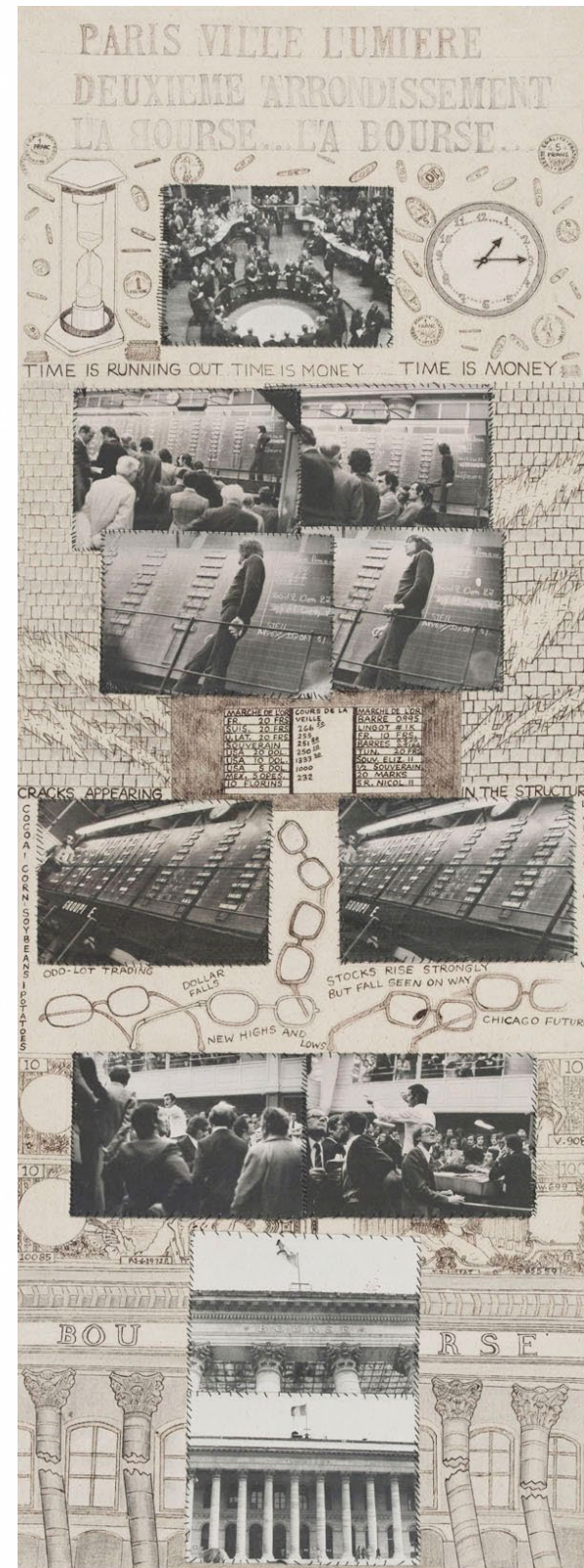
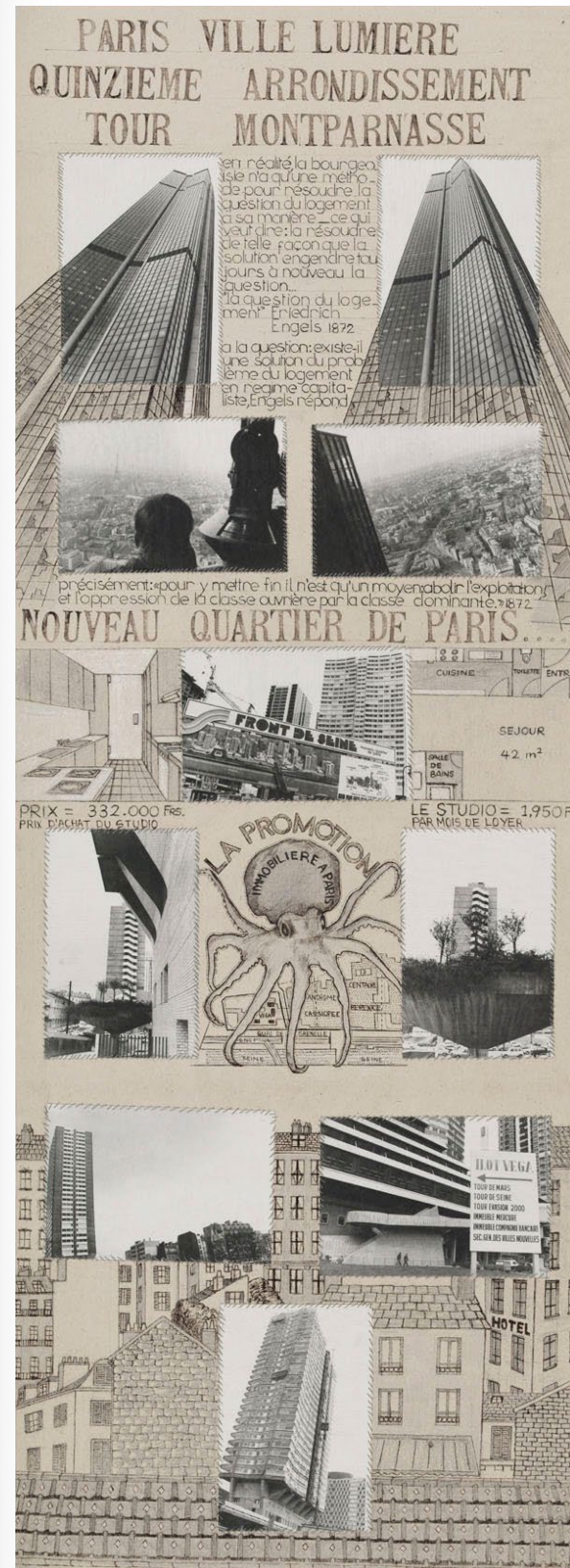
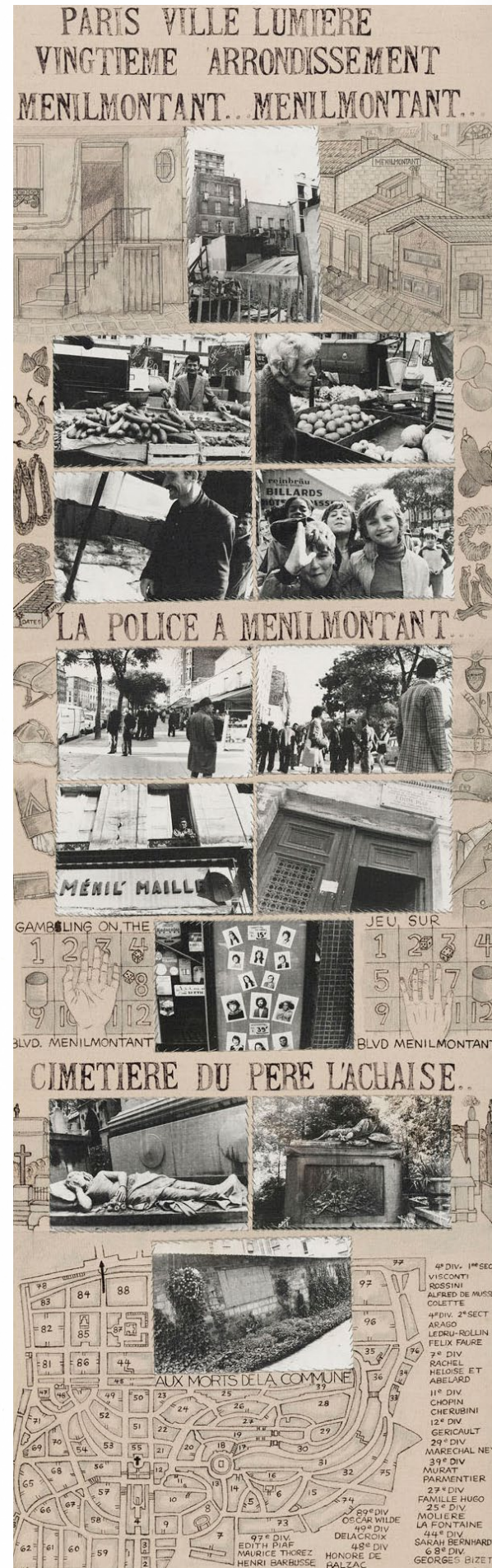
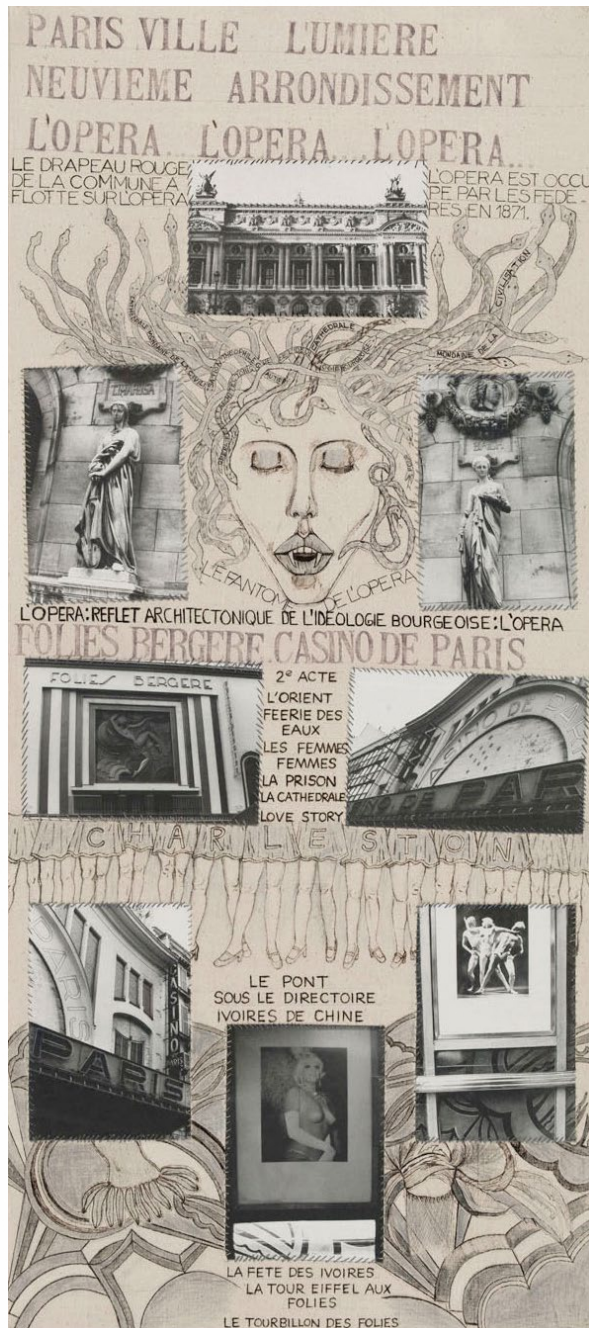


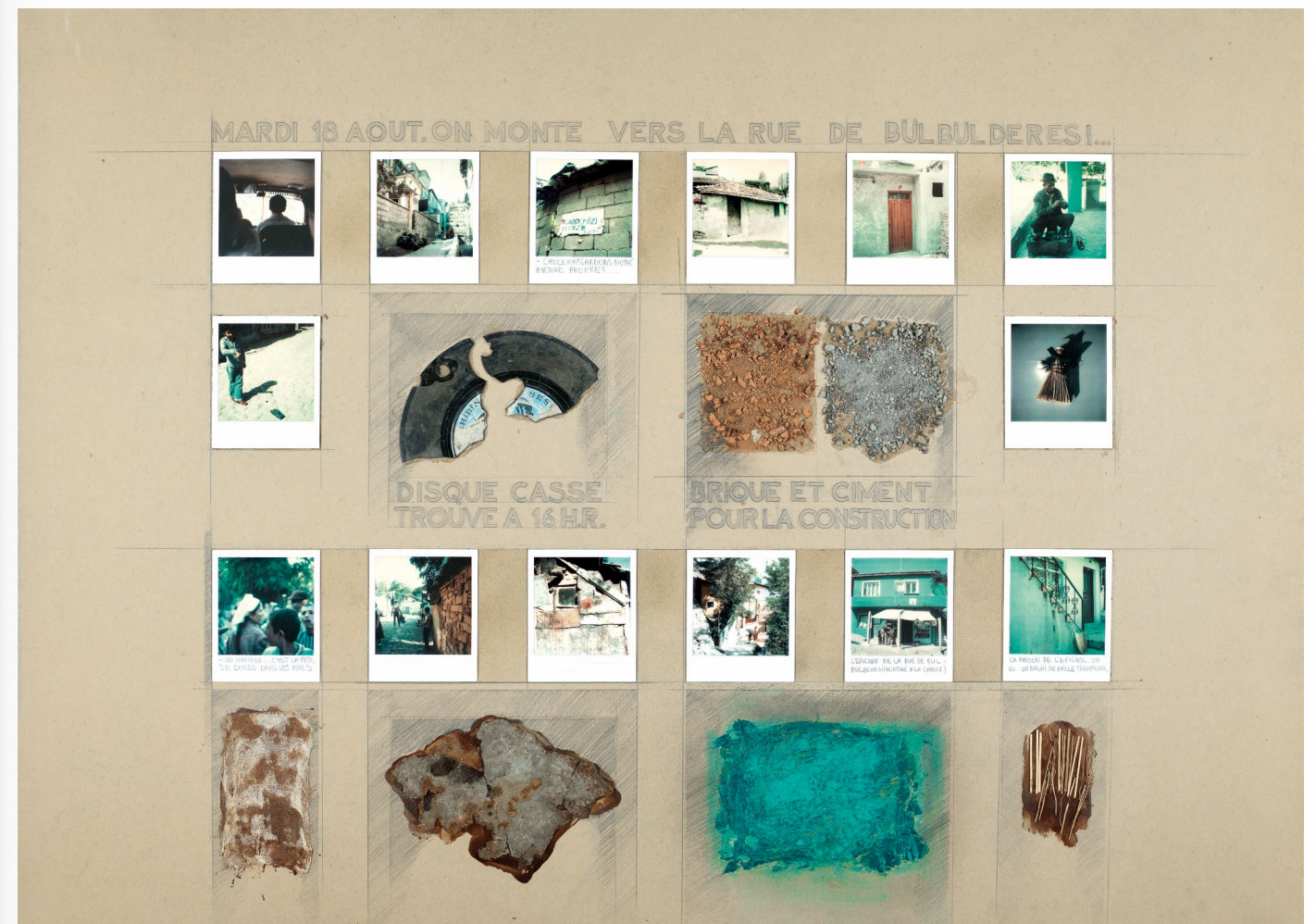
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DES JEUNES FILLES GITANES DANS UNE RUE À EYUP: QUARTIER POPULAIRE À ISTANBUL



GYPSY WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN IN THE STREETS OF EYUP: POPULAR DISTRICT OF ISTANBUL



EYUP, SOKAKLARINDA ÇİNGENE KADINLARI VE ÇOCUKLARI



PIGMENT POUR PEINTURE À LA CHAUX DES MAISONS D'EYUP



PIGMENT POUR PEINTURE À LA CHAUX DES MAISONS D'EYUP



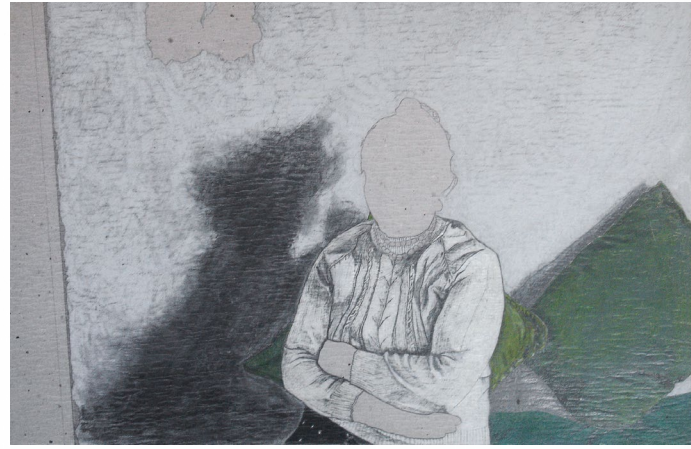
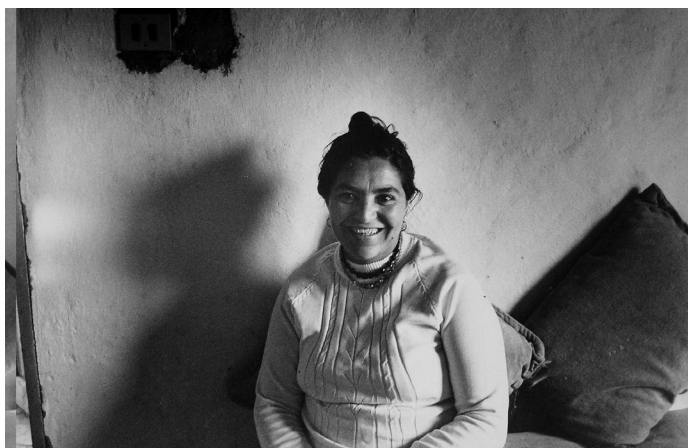
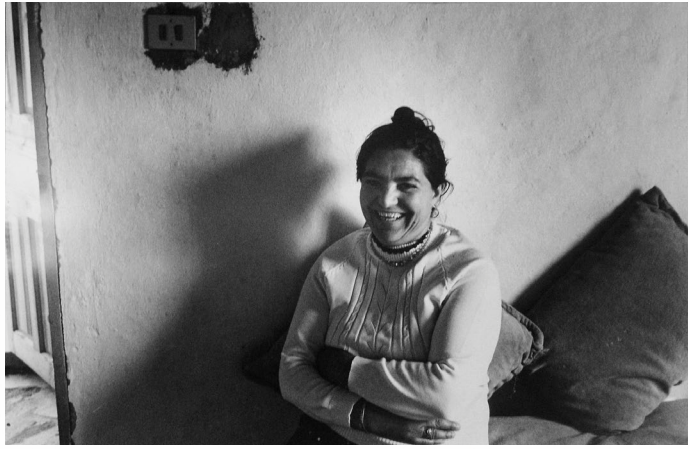
PIGMENT POUR PEINTURE À LA CHAUX DES MAISONS D'EYUP







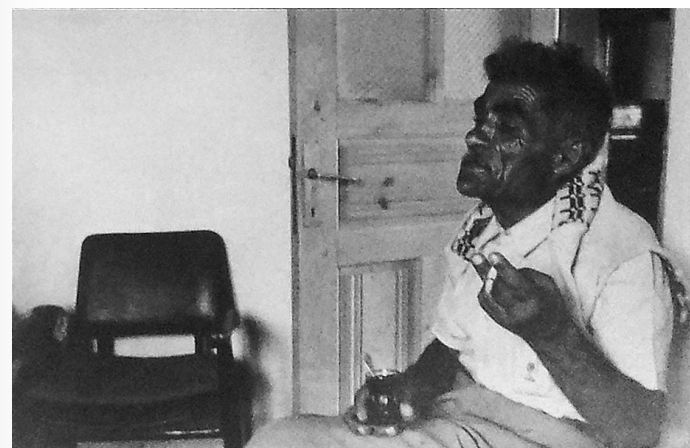
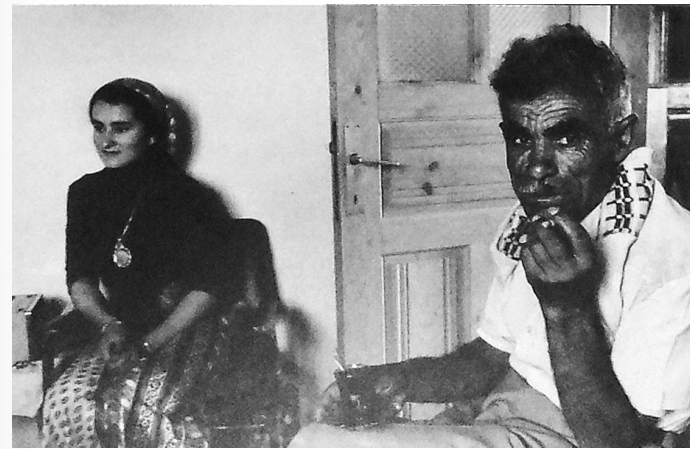
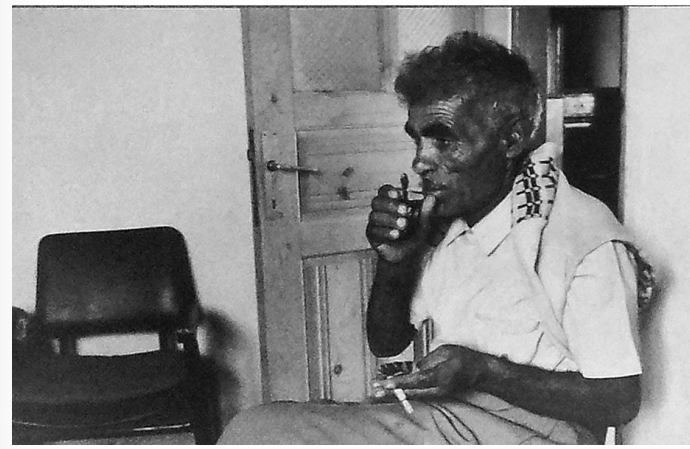




BERABER BÜYÜDÜK, BERABER
KIZIMLA ARKADAŞ OLDUK BÜYÜ
DÜK. ARTIK BANA BİR ANNE OLDU
BİR FIDAN OLDU. ÜSTÜME BİR GÖL
GE BEN ALTINDA OTURAYIM DİYE,
GÖLGESİNDE.. MAALESEF İSTE KA
DER YURDU GİTTİ.. BENDE NASILKI
BİR BALIK KUMUN ÜSTÜNDE KALIP

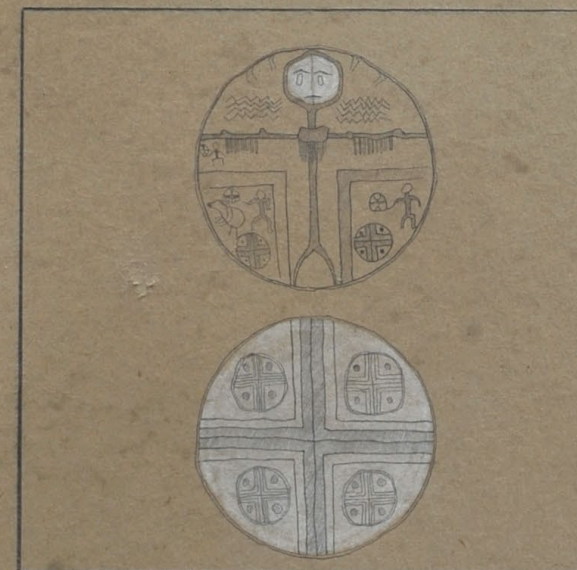
KURUR DA DENİZ ÇEKİLDİMİ, BEN
KUMDA KALDIM ÖYLEYDİ İSTE...
JE ME SUIS MARIÉE À TREIZE ANS.
À QUATORZE ANS, J'AI EU MA FILLE.
APRÈS, ELLE A GRANDI. ON EST DE
VENU AMIE, ET J'AI GRANDI AVEC
ELLE. ELLE ÉTAIT UNE MÈRE POUR
MOI, ELLE ÉTAIT COMME UN JEUNE
ARBRE SUR MOI, POUR QUE JE

PUISSE M'ASSEoir SOUS SON OMB
RE MALHEUREUSEMENT LA DESTI
NÉE LA TUEE. MOI JE SUIS COMME
UN POISSON QUI SE DESSECHÉ
SUR LE SABLE QUAND LA MER SE
RETIRE. JE SUIS RESTÉE SUR LE
SABLE.. J'AI JAMAIS SOURİ DANS LA
VIE ET JE NE SOURIRAI PLUS JA
MAIS... L'HISTOIRE DE RAHİME...





UNE FEMME CHAMANNE TDUNGOUZE NERTCHINSK.
PHOTOCOPIE D'UNE PHOTO DE LA COLLECTION DE MUSÉE DE L'HOMME.



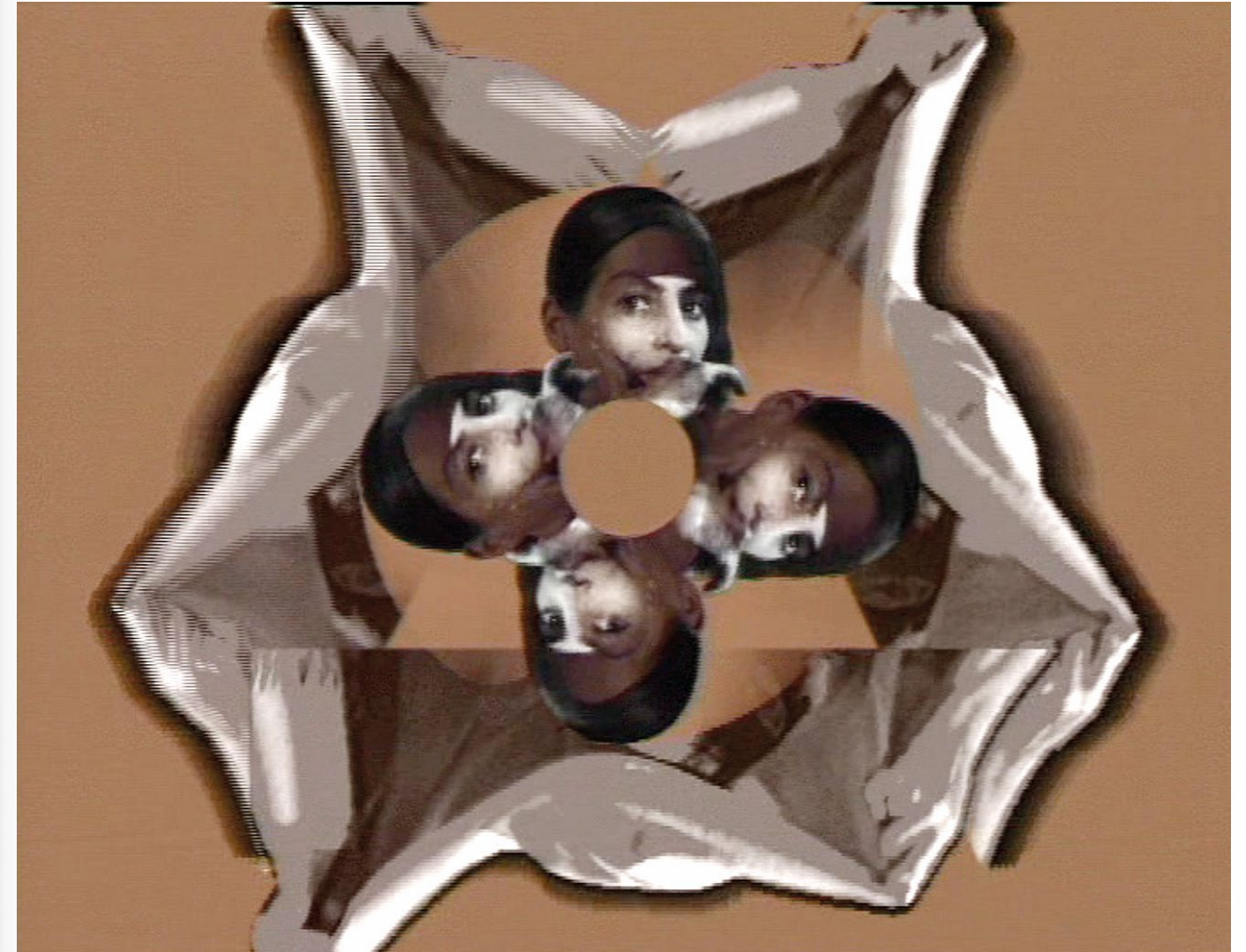
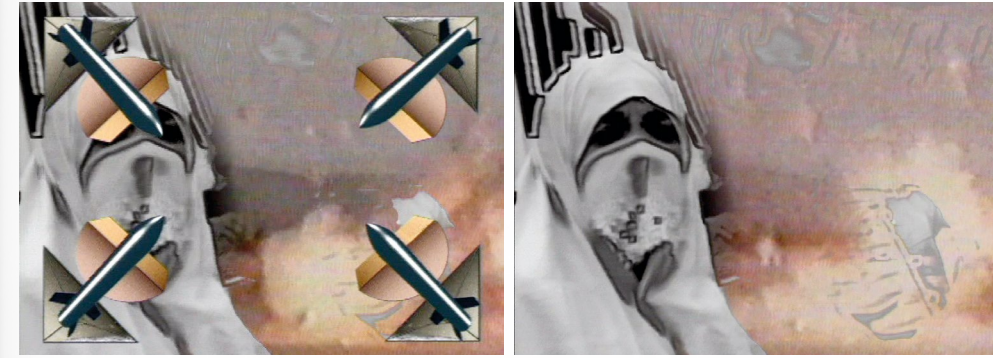
TAMBOUR DE CHAMAN ALTAÏEN, FAIT D'UNE PEAU DE MOUTON PEINTE ET TENDUE SUR UNE LAMPE DE BOIS D'ORIE.
DESSIN D'APRÈS UNE PHOTO (COLLECTION MUSÉE DE L'HOMME).



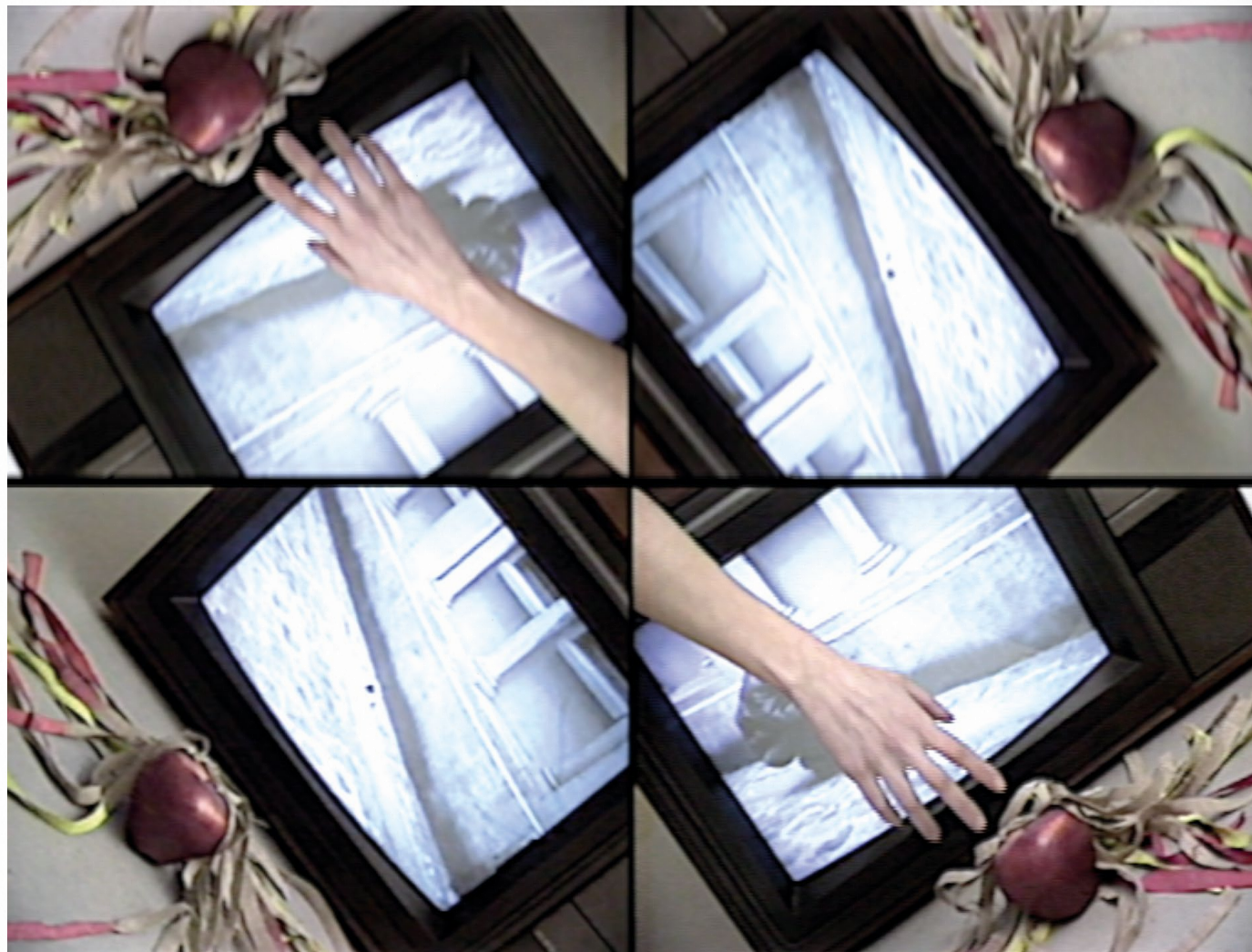
SACHET DE POUDRE
POUR GUÉRIR DES
PALAIRES (PRÈS DE NERTCHINSK).



MORCEAU DE MANDRAGORE
UTILISÉ EN SORCELLERIE



Nil Yalter: Circular Tension by Omar Kholeif



Mousse Publishing



Nil Yalter as a child in Cairo, Egypt. Date unspecified. Courtesy of the Nil Yalter archive

The year is 1936 . The world is still not quite in the realisation of the whirlwind and the turmoil that will strike it a few years later. At least life is still pleasantly sheltered affording a certain stable security for the high middle class and middle class where its members have the opportunity to receive both an academic and intellectual as well as a cultural education.

The month is October 1936 . The Basarabia is sailing from Istanbul for Alexandria. She and her sister ship the Transilvania, the two beautiful Rumanian steamers-taking turns sail from Constanza every week for Alexandria via Istanbul, Piraeus and Beirut.

A young girl gets on board from Istanbul. She is accompanied by her mother and future mother in law. She is going to Egypt to join her fiancé who has had to leave before they could get married in Turkey. The formalities were not ready and he had to leave as quickly as possible to be at the head of his job. He has been appointed general manager of the cigarette factory which the Turkish State Monopolies has opened in Cairo.

The voyage is smooth, beautifully sunny throughout the crossing except for one stormy night off the shore of Crete. The passengers are told the sea is almost always stormy off Crete.

Alexandria is finally reached. A city of wide avenues, sturdy buildings, rocky beaches with foamy waves. A very cosmopolitan city with western appearance.

And after crossing the desert they finally arrive in Cairo.

Cairo, enchanting, lovely city with its beautiful "meydans" (squares)-Meydan Ismailiye-Meydan Soliman Pasha- Cairo with its wide avenues decked with trees, its magnificent stone buildings reminiscent of old Egyptian architecture, its great luxury hotels The Shepherd, The Semiramis, its excellent restaurants like the St. James, its tea rooms like the Groppi and pastry shops L'Americaine.

Cairo the city of shopping with its stores Cicurel, Shemla, Sidnawi, its smaller boutiques, the Gategno and Rivoli, all profusely rich in what they offer. There is nothing one can't find in Cairo, the dreamland of the shopper.

Cairo, the city of great cultural activity offering a season of wonderful plays, ballets, operas, concerts. The best theatre, opera troops, top singers, dancers and musicians perform in Cairo- classical concerts and ballets to be contrasted by

2.

avant garde plays and stylised oriental dances at the foot of the sphynx performed by the then very well known Leila Bedirkhani.

First nights are always attended in evening attire with the king and queen or court members usually present giving a fairy atmosphere to the splendour.

Cairo with its rich, golden museums, its long winding river and quaint boats sailing on it. Its suburbs Heliopolis, Maadi and Helwan where there are beautiful villas surrounded by luscious gardens which flash with colours of the bougainvillias, hibiscus, mimozas and greenery everywhere. One has never seen such an abundance of roses anywhere.

Cairo, the city of Beledi (local people) where the mysterious charm and magic of the orient reigns. The narrow streets full of the fellahin, noisy street vendors selling fawa (mashed horse beans), stands over-burdened with exotic fruit and vegetables, noisy conjurors -the galli galli-

The beledi women always dressed in black, the men in long white tunics topped by a red fez or a turban.

Cairo with its covered Bazaar overflowing with everything that the orient can offer. Cairo with its mosques, its pyramids and sphynx, its vast stretch of desert.

The day is November the 5th 1936

The young couple is getting married at the Turkish consulate. The only people present are the two mothers and the two witnesses. They celebrate the occasion with a dinner party at the St. James restaurant. Later in the evening the couple will go to Mena House for a week's honeymoon. Mena House the beautiful Edwardian Hotel close to the Pyramids surrounded by a huge lovely park where the deer and the peacocks gracefully walk about. A hotel where a gracious way of life is predominant, excellent food, perfect service where people dress up for dinner and where everything spells luxury and good taste.

The couple has rented a flat in a building in the residential district of Zamalek on the island of Gheziveh. The flat overlooks the Nile and is joined to the mainland by the lean recked Kasrel Nil bridge. The famous English Sporting Club is right behind the building. The grounds of the club is beautifully kept and its ever-green shade is a joy to watch.

The year is 1937. It goes by with sight-seeing, visiting Luxor and Carnak, enjoying everything that this richly endowed city offers- along with the joy of expectancy of a child. The name has already been chosen for a girl - Nil -

Everyone finds the name enchanting and prayers go for it to be a girl.

The year is 1938 - the month January - the date the 15th. The prayers have been answered- it is a girl - Nil, the bonny child with slanting eyes is born.

The year is 1939. The world will no longer be quite the same. A certain way of life is on the verge of decline. The family returns home to Turkey sailing this time on the Transilvania, which if not on her last trip, will soon be navigating no longer between Constanza and Alexandria.

“I was born in Cairo, but I woke up in Istanbul!” professes Nil Yalter. Her arms stretch toward her face, framing it as she holds my gaze, almost as if to task.

This afternoon in Paris and London, mediated across a web platform, Yalter and I are convening for the first time in nearly a decade. Ten years of loss, grief, and subsequent resuscitation have affected us both. As with any biographical tale, origin stories help locate the reader, be they the subject of a particular truth, fiction – or, in the case of many artists, one of constant myth. Yalter was born soon after the end of the Ottoman Empire in what was once perceived to be an artistic and scientific cradle of civilization – Cairo, Egypt. Her father was an economist working under the new regime of Turkish president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and was primarily responsible for directing the nation’s monopoly of the tobacco trade. As Yalter speaks, mental sketches begin of my late grandfather, a physician and former dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Assiut, exhaling plumes of smoke in the familial living room. He would have been sixteen years old when the artist was born, the same age that I took up smoking.

40 Growing up amid the tug of celluloid dreams, smoke filled the old Cairene movie theaters that I visited as a teenager. Flooding the proscenium-like venues of El Korba Square near Heliopolis, the haze served to mask the illusion of light and sound heard at the back of the theater, where children were instructed to sit. In most instances, we sat beneath the projection booth. The smog would send me drifting, as my nails dug into the velour seats, dreaming of an elsewhere where I could be the person that I knew I could never be in Egypt itself – an elsewhere where the erotics of poetry and the sublime phenomenology of art could be seen, *felt*, lived. The metaphor of the Freudian dreamhouse that pulls from the subconscious, today, feels like an apt beginning to Yalter's opening salvo.¹ Relocating to Istanbul, aged five, she professes not to have any memories before this time.

Could it be that the Bosphorus at sunset, the whirling dervishes, the palaces, mosques, and bazaars of Istanbul,

1 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text* (1899; repr., New York: Basic Books, 2010).

41 a place still referred to by some as Constantinople, is more lurid than the picture palace of Cairo, where the Hollywood of the Nile was unfolding its intoxicating Golden Age of cinematic dreams?² Which image, I wondered, was more impressionable to the mutable brain of a child who would grow up to become one of the pioneering artists to work in video?

The air conditioning in the room where I sit pushes the plumes of smoke so that it resembles a swarm of insects – the magic of light, that constituent node in photography and video that has fueled much of Yalter's practice, is playing its trick. It is a scene of daring adventure. One city straddles the perceived notion of an "east" and a "west," the other sits at a precipice – its rivers (the "two" Niles) serving as a gateway to the south and north – to the Mediterranean Sea in the case of the latter, and to the south, to the mythologies of African life fueled by literary and cinematic imaginaries conjured in the diaspora.

2 Viola Shaik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 1998).

42 Norman M. Klein and Thom Andersen, two historians of the diagonal cityscape that is Los Angeles, come to mind. In *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003–13), Andersen unbuckles the palimpsest of memory and its function. In his collage essay film, a city converted into a stand-in for itself, a postcard of Los Angeles becomes a more credible witness than its perceived artifact. Klein's monumental treatise on the mind and urban erasure, *The History of Forgetting* (1997), expounds through luxuriant prose and critical analysis on how a city can eat itself and wipe away the anchors that distinguish it.³ Could it be that Yalter's investigations into the inner crevices of the psyche, through the embodied acts of producing performance, film, photography, and painting, serve as a means to cradle history, to unmoor the thresholds of time, to serve as a vestige for the leaking and seeping of reminiscence, to recapitulate these various facets as a means to explore a common diasporic experience?

43 "I was also born in Cairo," I interpolate. "I find it hard to believe that you cannot remember it. Your parents must have kept you locked in a room." I continue, jestingly.

My visits to Paris, where Yalter has primarily lived and worked since 1965, often involve hurried stopovers to museums to lay eyes on the drawings of the late Antonin Artaud. The French author and dramatist's pictures and sketches of interned life in an asylum reveal a cornucopia of entanglements in the mind-body continuum. Often untitled, the orbits of these intricate realms suggest propositions for how one can disentangle, interrogate, and parse one's own sense of constructed ontology. In 1988, the philosopher Jacques Derrida honed in on Artaud's reference of and to "the subjectile" to consider a theorization of madness, "the invisible quotation marks" of the subconscious that bring us to a point where we may query: Is what I say

44 an intentional duplicity?⁴ I have always interpreted this analysis as one of reclaimed agency, as a form of subjective realization for the perceived subaltern subject to craft a form of lived experience, to allow them the means to set parameters of their own visibility, one that can exist within the bounds of both narrative and visual hegemony.

Yalter's consciousness surrounding her beginnings locate us within the architecture of her present. Weeks later, when I visit the artist in the nineteenth-century apartment block where she lives, it seems from the outside that her home is housed in an exemplar of Haussmann-style architecture. The mansion-like grandiosity of the building's entrance is contrasted by the loose cable and wire found on the building's staircase.

"The builders have taken to Arte Povera," she says jokingly.

45 Her reference to the Italian art movement, translated as "poor art," gives shape to the limitless paper files, the mountain of archival boxes, the seemingly antiquated computer screens and monitors, the stacks of VHS tapes, and the exhibition catalogues, which become architectures themselves, assembled neatly in every corner. They appear akin to leviathan-like bodies, mounted in the nooks of her home – awaiting collection, or confiscation? Limbs that are to be amputated until reunion occurs.

It is only two weeks before Yalter's eighty-sixth birthday, and she has been forced to move. Necessary maintenance. That the artist who popularized the phrase "exile is a hard job" finds herself in such a state is a poignant irony that is not lost on me. Over hours that stretch back and forth across decades, I learn about so many things that require further probing. Interactive artworks produced on DVDs in the early to mid-1990s, such as *Pixelismus* (1996)⁵

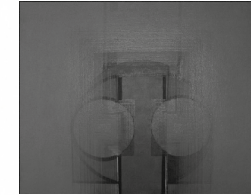


P.1

modern life. Equally, they foreshadow the testosterone-fueled imagination associated with the violent first-person shooter video games that my siblings would play in strip malls growing up in the deserts of California and Saudi Arabia. Her paintings – contracting and refracting oval forms, the “circular tensions,” sit wrapped up in her home, ready to be shipped off for exhibition. Several of these canvasses from the 1960s have been animated by Yalter into videos that present these images as living architectures. Developed in the early 2010s, they usher me back to my first encounters of the Op art of Bridget Riley and Peter Sedgley that I would encounter at what is now known as Tate Britain and the Hayward Gallery, both in London. References in shape and color to Byzantine and Ottoman motifs, such as **Oval Form (1967)**, **Circular Tension (of**

which there are several variations between 1967–69), and

Optical Cubes (1968), hint to the multidimensional field of



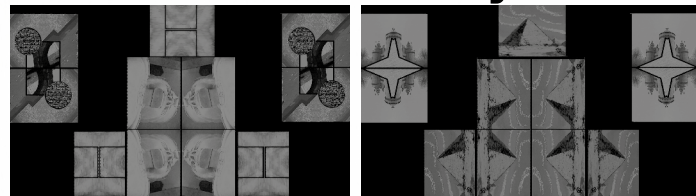
P.111

Kazimir Malevich and Serge Poliakoff, as well as Japanese metabolic architecture – womb-like constructions that protract to offer the human body its space of dwelling.⁶

As I venture further into the different rooms of this residence, a creaking footstep leads to layer upon layer of fractious history. Photo collages are hung above pictographic panoramas on the walls, revealing faces redacted and hand painted that push the folds of memory back to the migrant crisis in France in the 1970s; its ripples still linger in the Parisian city air to this moment. Here, the bodies of dispossessed individuals from Syria, Turkey, Sierra Leone, and Senegal – those whose lives have been lost in modern-day shipwrecks, gone overboard before life has

48 begun – can be heard as an echo, a resonant sound contoured to the shape of an ear.⁷

I want to return to Egypt. To the beginning. And we do, via a library of annotated first-edition volumes of dyssynchronous, fictionalized travelogues by François-René de Chateaubriand, who lent inspiration to Yalter’s video installation filmed in Egypt, *Pyramis: ou le Voyage d’Eudore* (1987). I query the desire to embody her own life,



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as a Turkish woman through that of a polemical French diplomat and historian. Was it his solitude, his exile, or was it a wish to enter the mind and body of another character that enticed the artist the most?

With Chateaubriand as her avatar, could she venture forth to disentangle her own partiality, to absorb the object of the Egyptian landscape and environment for what it was, is and could be?

49 The meandering path toward the act of quintessence that produced *Pyramis*, a work created when Yalter was half a century old, brings us back to the topography of colonial imagination.

“They see all of us from the Middle East in the same way . . .” The words flow from Yalter’s mouth into the air before they dissipate.

The fated loop of geography – an imaginary proposition that still presumes a globe as a flat entity to be bisected into borders for military expansionism – is a topic that has preoccupied Yalter’s lines of inquiry from the beginning. Her body, an animate vessel, seeks to rupture this notion, and now everyone is looking.

“Then let us not call ourselves Middle Eastern. *They* use this to perpetuate myths, and not least our sense of

⁷ In 2018, a project entitled Fortress Europe documented a list of 34,361 deaths of refugees and migrants attempting to enter Europe who died en route due to the continent’s border policies. The report is available at <https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2018/06/19/TheList.pdf>, accessed January 21, 2024.

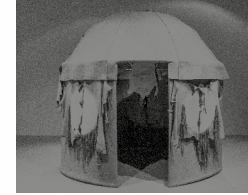
50 exile by giving us a name to embody.” I agree with her, as I search for another language through which to express our connected experiences.

Yalter, born in 1938 in the continent of Africa, raised in Istanbul, and domiciled in France since the mid 1960s, has always devoured any literature on art available to her. Some of those books – on Expressionism, for instance – still live with her, publications that she has collected since she was fourteen. Having lived in France for much of her adult life, she has circumnavigated in loops, creating a tense counterbalance to notions of cultural hegemony. For decades the French cultural scene looked upon her with skepticism despite her successes. Rather than descend into melancholy, the public’s raised eyebrows served to enable an insider-outsider perspective, nurturing a Marxist feminist who sought to convene worlds around constellations of women artists who shared similar interests in exploring

51 perceptions of common difference. Yalter’s art fashions worlds, where one’s implication in the terrain of capitalism is left looming, prodding at you, interrogating the visitor: What will you do with this life? It is the superimposition of these interleaving lives – the many Yalters of yesteryear and today – that stimulate the skeleton of our collective imagination. For it is here, at the juncture of the communal and the individual, that we begin the labor, the “hard job” of constituting life itself.

In the wake of the events often referred to as May 1968 – a period denoting weeks of civil unrest in France propelled by an economic recession and anti-capitalist protest – came the formation of the women’s liberation movement in 1970. This group associated with a branch of second wave feminism focused on the legal, social, and political rights of women. Several artists, authors, and public intellectuals became associated with the movement, but Yalter’s intersectional contemporaneous interrogation of gender, ethnicity, and migrant life existed both inside and outside of the scope of public discourses of feminist debates at the time. She found route in communal explorations into the lives of French women, who like herself existed both literally and figuratively on the fringes of the sanctioned societal sphere. In 1973, Suzanne Pagé – who would go on to become one of the most consistently recognizable figures in the nonprofit French art scene – invited Yalter to present **Topak Ev** (1973) at ARC, the contemporary arena within the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.⁸

Topak Ev, which translates from the Turkish to “round



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house,” is also known as **Nomad’s Tent** and **La Yourte**.

At first it may appear as a cover, a shell, a temporary nomadic dwelling. Linguistically, “yurt” is synonymous with diasporic exile and the term translates to “homeland” or “motherland” in Russian and Central Asian languages.⁹ The artwork itself was inspired by shamanic rituals and traditions that the artist encountered in Anatolia, a peninsula in western Asia today known as Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰ Invoking the formal composition of transient lodgings, the installation is constituted of detailed materials like soft felt placed inside a collapsible metal shell, annotated and draped in myriad ways to evoke a simulacrum of multiple possibilities.

Topak Ev is accentuated by painted sheaths of fabric and leather, inscribed with poetry and accompanied

⁸ Suzanne Pagé interviewed by Saskia Bos (2023) featured in *Museums from the Inside: 60 Years of CIMAM*. Available at <https://cimam.org/news-archive/interview-to-suzanne-pag%C3%A9-by-saskia-bos/>, accessed January 26, 2024.

⁹ A. Zhakupova, B. Suiyerkul, S. Tashimbay, and S. Berkimbayeva, “Kazakh Yurt as a Unique Creation of Nomadic Civilization Architecture,” *Innovaciencia* 10, no. 1 (2022): 1–13.
¹⁰ Nil Yalter, “The Woman’s Tent: Plot for an Imaginary Exhibiton,” *Artezine* (Spring 2016), <https://arteeast.org/quarterly/the-womans-tent-plot-for-an-imaginary-exhibition/>.

54 by multi-media drawings of semi-didactic instructions, which forge a metaphor for a conglomeration of interstitial bodies. Animal skins, stitched together via interlocking threads, are suggestive of transversal entities. The perceived instructions reveal a bodily system that delineates the various compartments of the vessel of the hold, the womb – directions authored with a suppressed irony at the anthropological gaze directed at nonwhite women, individuals who were not offered the platform afforded to those of the diaspora in France. The tent’s circular form and its detachable roof allow for a lookout. It can simultaneously be conceived as a lighthouse or, from a contemporary reflection, as a panoptical device, a camera that looks outward as much as it does inward.¹¹

The roof of the yurt may also be conceived as a retinal detachment, an abstraction of the body from the carpeted meeting space within the lodging. Speaking to Yalter

55 about this now celebrated artwork, she informs me that at the time of its first presentation, the response to her installation focused on the formal and surface-level aspects of the piece. The consequence was negative. A critical audience was unwilling to make sense of it.

“Several journalists and members of the public were asking why this was in a modern art museum and not in an anthropological museum,” she recalled.

Topak Ev exists as a metaphor of diasporic life. The col-



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laborative impulses behind its formation and dissemination laid the groundwork for one of her first collaborative artistic endeavors, *Paris Ville Lumière* (1973) with artist Judy Blum. Black-and-white photographs form an annotated collage that presents a critical discourse of Paris.

11 Nil Yalter has often referred to Topak Ev as a “semiotic system.”

56 The housing crisis, the subjugation of the female body, the spectacle of the perceived “other” are addressed in texts whose dual authorship allows for possible kinship – a referent that can be found in the apertures afforded to us through exile.

These concerns return to Topak Ev’s centrality as a moveable tent, a connective tissue in Yalter’s lived practice. It has become synonymous with a living organism. Its continued exhibition through the 1970s to the present as a vestige and arbiter of circular tensions that bind together the multiple forms of agitation that surround the socio-political context of exile, and the longing of the diasporic body for a womb to encase and suture it.

In one conversation, the artist articulates how the tent required regular housekeeping, much like any interior organ would. As it traveled, it became a place to receive offerings from visitors, such as dried cheese from nomadic communities. The gifts offered to the yurt led to

57 worms and other organic life to breed in its fabric. It became an incubator, a site for gestation.

The thought-picture constructed by Yalter of the yurt as an animate and living vessel links one to Christina Sharpe’s metaphor of the womb as a “belly,” as a place where the female experience of birth cannot be extracted from the prison industry and its machinations.¹² Writing in the “wake” of “slavery,” a framework that Sharpe argues, citing Saidiya Hartman, which continues to define “the calculus of Black life” since the perceived ends of slavery, enables a propositional mode to engage with contested histories. Specifically, Sharpe argues for the possibility of “wake work” – a form of aesthetic resistance that allows for a thriving imagining circumnavigating pasts that shall never pass.¹³ Through this lens Topak Ev could be considered a



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womb as well as a hold, a site of capture and surveillance,

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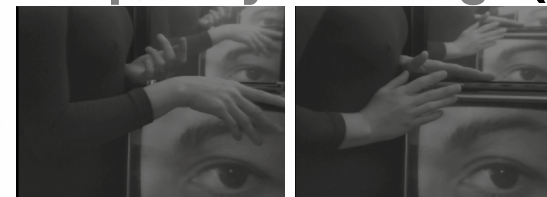
Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 42-43.
Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 54-55.

58 a metaphor for capitalism's mechanism of swallowing citizens into its machinations and subsequently spitting them out. A monument to the living and the undead, it continues a journey set forth into an orbit of its own.

In 1975, Yalter formed a different circular vestige that was dubbed Women in Struggle. The group's creation with artists Dorothee Selz and Isabelle Champion Métadier confronted the unsavory aftermath of gender protests in France, presenting histories that would neither pass nor wield to the contours of what was accepted in the public imagination. The collective sought to construct both a language and a means to negotiate work invented to create and substitute the lexicon that existed due to gender discrimination, not only within France's cultural scenography, but also globally. Constituted to reify, restore, and resuscitate narratives and aesthetic tendencies of women artists, Women in Struggle sought to turn the topographic sphere of art so that it would look inside out.¹⁴ By circumnavigating

59 local and national conditions through the ocular and affective perspectives of women – including artists working in a global, diasporic context – the political strategies deployed by Yalter and others would find new gloves, shelters, and possible outlets for visibility.

In this regard Yalter, whose name does not appear in the history books of creative endeavors related to second wave feminism, should be reconsidered not only a key actor within this movement, but also an errant pioneer – a Marxist feminist whose politics existed to decode the inequities of class, race, and ethnicity. Her gaze parses through the discordant, urban, modular experience of poverty in an installation completed during this time entitled **Temporary Dwellings** (1974–76). The work follows the



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lives of migrant communities in three major metropolitan spheres – Istanbul, where she was raised; Paris, where she

60 has worked since 1965; and New York. Conceived via close encounters with individuals living in these spaces, the resulting installation is presented across several board panels comprised of Polaroids, drawings, text, and found detritus from each locality. These reliefs are accompanied by single-channel videos, evoking an interdisciplinary province that references the archaeological and sociological. The crumbling air and patches of dirt that annotate her drawings are presented in an indexical grid-like system that resembles the study of people, movement, and planning in wayfinding grid plan drawings and illustrations, a practice that has evolved since the Indus Valley Civilization to the present day in city-planning.¹⁵

Living among the transitory routes and outskirts of sanctioned society, Yalter often collaborated with ethnographer Bernard Dupaigne, who served as an interlocutor regarding her method and approach within this expanse

15 Mohan Pant and Shjui Fumo, "The Grid and Modular Measures in the Town Planning of Mohenjodaro and Kathmandu Valley: A Study on Modular Measures in Block and Plot Divisions in the Planning of Mohenjodaro and Sirkap (Pakistan), and Thimi (Kathmandu Valley)," *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 4, no. 1 (2005): 51-59.

61 of outsized society. In these unofficial neighborhoods, Yalter negotiated relationships with immigrant women who had been subjected to physical, social, and economic desperation at a time when they were expected to "integrate" within the confines of the patriarchal societies that they had come to inhabit. The probing questions that emerged during the mid to late 1970s continue as a red thread throughout the artist's practice to the present day: *Turkish Immigrants* (1977), *Algerian Marriage in France*



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(1977), and *Rahime / Kurdish Women from Turkey* (1979) through to *Terranomade* (1997) and *Exile Is a Hard Job* (an ongoing project that documents the lives of dispossessed immigrants). The latter, staged first in Valencia, seeks to involve migrant workers in the act of staging, looking, and annotating their very life and person. Informal collages drawn from her project *Turkish Immigrants* serve as

62 a jumping-off point to engage the silenced voices of cities across the globe from Cologne and London to Sharjah and beyond. Constituted as a corporeal and ever-expanding archive, powered by a community-engaged energy, the project of documenting the diasporic body becomes a relentless pursuit.

Aesthetically, these various multidimensional works concerned with women's dispossession do not adopt a singular trope or strategy. Contrary to the anthropological, which focuses on studying the physiological and social aspects of a person over a durational period, these manifestations exist because of a contra-colonial practice of imagination. Multi-vocal and multi-modal, the dimensions of these markers of time, deploy aesthetic tactics that are conjured out of a necessity brought forth by circumstance. The first time that my eyes lingered across the faces of these women was in *Turkish Immigrants*. My gaze wandered not to the faces of the artist's subjects but to the redactions

63 that she had created. A form of erasure, often painted in gold leaf, served as a gesture not necessarily intended to conceal the identities of subjects, but to speak of the circular tension of their lives – the assumption of invisibility. Who could or could not be known? The gold hues create an efflorescing glow that has a contradictory effect – amplifying the hidden, the marked, the unsanctioned, just as the light of a camera would. I appeal here to Krista Thompson's argument that "the contrapuntal," i.e., the contrasting counterpoint – that the oppositional narrative is both simulated and stimulated by the aesthetics of light.¹⁶ The possibilities of framing sight, as Yalter does, crafts spaces where phantasmic bodies are reified through the camera's ability to both reveal and obfuscate its given subject.¹⁷

What at first might appear as an archival impulse to take inventory becomes complicated in the artist's practice through her relentless process of interpreting, revisiting,

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Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 1–18.
Thompson, *Shine*, 1–18.

64 and reimagining the frame of immigrant life. The form that these annotations often create contrasts to the images that everyday spectators would traditionally bear witness to. Intimate pictures in a domestic setting are accompanied by large, handwritten messages in capital letters, invoking the aesthetics of the political campaign poster in works such as *Paris Ville Lumière*. Yalter's materiality complicates each scene. Charcoal, graphite, ink, paint, and chalk are often used to embellish, scaffold, and conceal singular and collective bodies. Cumulatively, her scenes of trans-migrancy can be read as grids, maps, and flags, which evoke multiple forms of consciousness.¹⁸ The motor-sensory, operational, and default positions that humans assume are untethered from formal figurative convention or reproduction. Her art seeks to embody the person by pivoting toward the multidimensional possibilities of political abstraction.¹⁹

18 William Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 1–4.
19 Briony Fer, "Abstraction at war with itself," in *Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society*, ed. Iwona Blazwick (London: Prestel, 2015).

65 In *Algerian Marriage in France*, Yalter presents a series of photographs in the women's quarters of a segregated Muslim wedding ceremony. In these scenes, photographs reveal that the walls in these homes are adorned with carpets suspended precariously from ramparts, as if to create the familiar context of being at home while still subjected to the constant possibility of having to pack up and leave at any moment. These photographs are mounted within a colorful geometric pattern reminiscent of Andalusian tiles, which offer a thin, soft form of protection to her subjects like gauze – women living on thresholds, simulating a domain of their own making.



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Geometric abstraction and its attendant political connotations appear for some – me included – early in life. It first appeared to me in the sanctuary of the church at the age of six: the cruciform sword – the cross, two planks of wood that mark a site of death, a literal and figurative evocation of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. The cross stood at the end of endless empty pews, as the church was occupied only by my mother and me. This womb seemed to offer my mother respite. It sutured the unceasing longing for a home as she negotiated her state as a diasporic citizen. It served as a place where the limits of her spoken language did not matter so much. The building’s roof formed a large pyramidal skylight that still stands at the end of the street where we once lived in Glasgow, Scotland. The light was diffuse, seeping through an overcast sky that began to rain, casting shadows on the walls, floors, and our faces. More than a decade later, I returned to Glasgow to visit the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, where atop a staircase a similarly precarious sighting took place with Salvador Dalí’s *Christ of St. John of the Cross* (1951).

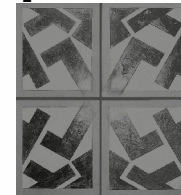
On my first encounter, I was less preoccupied by the depiction of Christ himself than the directional perspective through which the cross was painted. As if filmed from a bird’s eye view, the two abstract planks of wood resembled a dagger about to shoot into the Earth from above – or was it to ascend? The precarity of the scene filled the air with suspense, fueling a tension around the picture. In Dalí’s depiction of the crucifixion, there are no nails or blood that annotate or mark the body. The perceived notion of the Holy Trinity, invoking the Christian doctrine of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is evoked commonly, as it was here, via geometric principles that guided Dalí. Specifically, the artist connected circles through triangles – the inscribed incircle within a triangle.²⁰

The site of this painting lingers with me as I look to Yalter’s *Pixelismus*, a series of twenty-four interlocking paintings of the cross that the artist states were inspired

68 by the architecture of Greek churches. Distinct in this evocation is the fragmentation of the cross into constituent nodes, which come to form a whole when pieced together in a circular fashion. The crucifix appears. The act of deconstructing symbolism and the attendant visual histories associated with them continues in the interactive CD-ROM that Yalter developed alongside artists David Apikian and Nicole Croiset. In this depiction, a tessellating translucent form floats on screen, constituting a three-dimensional cross suspended midair. Above it in French are narrative fragments that the spectator can navigate. “The light of a metallic modernity/the sulfur candle/**The temperature** of Rubens and Rembrandt.” The eyes gaze as this spectacular object rotates. Or rather, it is that the camera inside this game is rotating – never quite at 360 degrees, concealing as much as it chooses to reveal.

The rotations in Yalter’s multidimensional works engage the author with the artist’s investigative impulse – her

69 desire to consider how the ocular is constructed. For the eyeball in and of itself is in constant rotation across three axes: horizontal, vertical, and torsional. It must find comfort to rest. The hovering abstractions and roving metaphors in *Pixelismus* seek to destabilize the phallic ver-

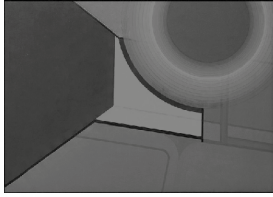


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ticity of the cross, and with it the sanctioned folds of art history evidenced through the painters whom she alludes to in her work, such as the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens, known for his compositions of Christian narrative history. Her reference to the Dutch artist Rembrandt – a member of the Dutch Reformed Church whose life and work is one of the most researched in art history – has been subject to a “light” not traditionally afforded to diasporic women artists.²¹

The domain of so-called great white men is one that offers Yalter context to intercede. Early paintings such as *Circular Tension*, *Optical Cubes* (1968), and *Temple of*

70 Apollon (1969), were produced using acrylic and mixed me-



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dia on canvas. At first these works might resemble the mechanical components of a technical apparatus. A second glance suggests the formal composition of rooms developed through the interplay of color and line, as in *Circular Tension*. These loops, conjured in *Optical Cubes*, engage



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contemporaneously. They appear to be in the process of combustion – a metaphor for the political tension that overtook the streets of France at the time as much as it references the circuitous loop of CCTV cameras. *Temple of Apollon* daubs the viewer into Yalter's realm of morphology – one where the Greek god Apollo is summoned – evidencing the artist's interest in literary mythology and the very act of mythmaking itself. She has explained time and again that these forays link back to the Supremacist visual phenomena articulated by the Russian-Ukrainian

71 artist Kazimir Malevich, who argued that objects themselves are meaningless in the world. Rather, what is of significance is the feeling that the “radical work of art can evoke.”²²

A shroud of melancholy subsumes me as I leave Yalter after dinner on this Saturday night in winter. Gusts of wind accelerate. Distracted by the light of my phone, I stumble to the ground after bumping into a bollard, spilling the contents of my half-open backpack onto the pavement. There is a hint of romance afforded by the wet street of Avenue Montaigne where I find myself, named after the French Renaissance author Michel de Montaigne and known for parties at Bal Mabilie and its luxury fashion stores. The cinematic imaginary severs me deeper from reality and into a dark sadness. A wandering scribe coughing, anxiously making their way across city grids to dingy hotel rooms, only to teleport into an elsewhere, feigning presence but always unseen. A group of passersby nearly step on my hands as I search for a pill bottle. The unconscious begins to wander back into the corridors of Yalter's apartment and into the fold of a video from 1977–78 that formed part of the installation *The AmbassaDRESS*. A chiffon wedding dress stands suspended on a round stand, a relic, a body without organs, a specter of an ambassador's wife who the artist professes to have once known.

The mythologies of the missing ambassador's wife are less significant than the stage that is set by her absence. The now-stained gown evokes a memory of a short film entitled *Prenses Model* (2018), directed by Dilan Engin. Engin's moving film explores the wedding dress as a metaphor for the impermanent state of women in modern-day Turkey. *Prenses Model*, translated as "The Model Princess," created a bridge to discuss complex acts of femicide occurring in Turkey.²³ Women gather around dresses, unpicking social mores and norms before descending into stories of hopelessness. It was after seeing this film that I was reminded of the tragic life of the Arabesque singer Bergen, who died at the age of thirty-one. I recall thinking that she, like me, had a lazy eye, which she concealed with her meticulously draped hair. In truth, her husband had thrown nitric acid in her face in a fit of rage. He was imprisoned, but

74 upon his release the fated loop continued, and he killed Bergen on August 14, 1989. The AmbassaDRESS exists in



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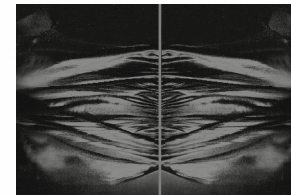
opposition to forms of phallogentric violence, an aspect that is revealed in the accompanying photographs, drawings, and video work.

Monochromatic prints are paired into diptychs. They resemble ultrasound imagery as much as they do a womb that has been bisected. A seven-and-a-half-minute video veers the viewer into the interiority of the dress' fabric and into the private domain of a womb-like structure. This witness feels as though they are gradually entering a portal, a vortex for women only, a route to a prismatic architecture – one that exists justly for invited guests. The picture, like the photographs, is carved down its center, contracting and refracting into a cellular, almost interstellar realm of abstraction. As with her circular tension paintings, the pursuit of a fourth dimension – an alterscape – is

75 choreographed using a multiplicity of media forms, and developed through a visual language that is entirely the artist's own.

The womb in this regard, abstracted and reconstituted, continues to resurface as a central theme in Yalter's art. That evening in Paris, after I'd picked up my belongings,

I was haunted by The AmbassaDRESS. The womb's em-

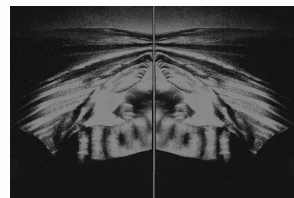


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blematic status, it could be argued, is reflective of the artist's embodied pursuit to disentangle the ocular gaze around the female body in society, as well as functioning as an allegory of gestating and nurturing. This mirrors the artist's pursuit in the 1970s of forging communities of and for women artists who were commonly excised from public narrative debates and discourses. The melancholy that had overtaken me that evening emerged from a sense of perpetual loss that has plagued me throughout life.

76 My own mother believed the womb to be a marker of functional suppression. After the birth of her fourth child, she suffered from severe postpartum depression and accused me, the firstborn, of having scarred her body, and with it the perception of herself as a working woman – a poet, an author, a journalist, and a public figure were no more. At least that is what she believed at the time.

Had she considered the metaphorical potential of the womb, had she lived in a place where modern and contemporary art enabled a different form of fluency, her feelings could have been different. Examining Yalter's work intimately can be seen as an aggressive resistance to cultural hegemony, but all the while infused with love. I look back at *The AmbassaDRESS* and its connections to the refrac-



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tive crucifixes. They ignite archives of inspired affection. I return to Simon Critchley's argument that the very crucifixion of Christ is a "quasi suicidal act performed out

77 of love."²⁴ Before long, I am reading Rainer Maria Rilke's "Requiem for a Friend" (1909), where he wrote, "We need in love, to practice only this: letting each other go. For holding on comes easily; we do not learn from it."²⁵ The works herein begin to reflect the contradictions of love and loving, a feature in Yalter's *Le Chevalier d'Eon* (1978), one of the artist's most searing artworks, a lyrical treatise on the evolution of the most embodied of forms.

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Simon Critchley, *Notes on Suicide* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016), 6.
Rainer Maria Rilke, "Requiem for a Friend," trans. Stephen Mitchell, *Paris Review*, Winter 1981, <https://www.theparisreview.org/poetry/3205/requiem-for-a-friend-rainer-maria-rilke>.

Like a bruise that changes color from red to purple, love and its infectious pangs evolve, stretching and allowing for tolerance and acceptance. But what do we see of affect? A phantasm that we have chosen to construct, or a person in all their sincerity. Love's manifestation is interminably tethered to the form of the body – its shape, contour – its ultimate form. Our bodies are rarely our own, but the subject of constant contest in the political sphere. Our bodies have become politicized vessels, entities that stand in as allegories: gendered, sexualized, racialized, and, what?

Ta-Nehisi Coates struck a public nerve in 2015 when he wrote that “the black body, its heritage [exists] to be destroyed.”²⁶ The fight or flight response that greets the body in moments of violence leaves it a bulbous and bruised vestige, a remnant that is subject to ceaseless tampering and abuse. The cultural conditions of and for the ethnic Global Majority, for women, for the LGBTQ+ society, are still governed and under the thumb of a particular kind of patriarchy. How foolish have we become as individuals? In 2022, the US Supreme Court proposed a landmark ruling that overturned Roe v. Wade (1973), a precedent that had protected a woman's right to her own body – to “choose” the context and condition of an abortion. Shock and grief devolved the woman's body in the United States to a two-tier system, subjected to the whims of individual states, private medicine, and fiscal resource.²⁷ Class and race again emerge more fully into focus. “Who can afford the right to choose?” appears as a recurring point of interrogation. Intersectional feminism's perceived failure due to its “totalizing notion of gender” comes back to the fore of public debate.²⁸ Are we *truly* here again, nearly forty years later, *totalized* subjects to another form of totalitarian politics? Surely not.

26 Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Letter to My Son,” *Atlantic*, July 4, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/tanehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me/397619/>. See also Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Random House, 2015).
27 Moira Donegan, “A Year Ago Roe v Wade Was Overturned. Grieve for the New America,” *Guardian*, June 23, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/23/roe-v-wade-overturned-abortion>.
28 Ashlee Christoffersen and Akwugo Emejulu, “Diversity Within: The Problems with ‘Intersectional’ White Feminism in Practice,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 630–53.

In his scrutiny of visual Black culture, Greg Tate's writing introduced me to the cultural appropriation of Black aesthetics – an aspect of my person that is not evidently visible to the spectator. In *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*, an edited anthology published in 2003 after the end of a captive history bookended by the events of 9/11, Tate laid bare a new analysis of embodied extraction and articulated the ongoing risk of fetishization. Here was a culture in captivity, held hostage by the whims of an elite aristocracy.²⁹ The closing stream to his edited volume, authored by artist and filmmaker Arthur Jafa titled “My Black Death,” shook me with its unrelenting argument toward the inevitable loss of self that awaited. “There is no self-determination”; “There is no self-possession.” The “double bind” of ontological existence leads us to a “good death.”³⁰ An excising of oneself

29 Greg Tate, “Introduction: Nigs R Us, or How Blackfolk Became Fetish Objects,” in *Everything But the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*, ed. Greg Tate (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 1–15.
30 Arthur Jafa, “My Black Death,” in *Everything but the Burden*, 246–57.

80 for another. Two decades pass. Online streamers with their surfeit of programming might suggest a realm of boundless inclusivity. But scratch beneath the surface and the tender skin, and the wound, is ever present.

The right to be human continues to be under threat, from here and there to everywhere. The “hysterical crowds” that ushered the streets in protest—in revolutions from Cairo to Beirut, in what was deemed a worthy celebration of and for freedom, has collapsed societies unto themselves. In the case of Cairo, where both Yalter and myself were born, the nation has once again fallen into the hands of a military dictatorship governed by a demagogue, who refuses to address social inequity, freedom of expression, or **LGBTQ+** life. Entire communities have been the subject of severe persecution.³¹

The sweep of violence extends across oceans. In one of the largest surveys of transgender individuals ever

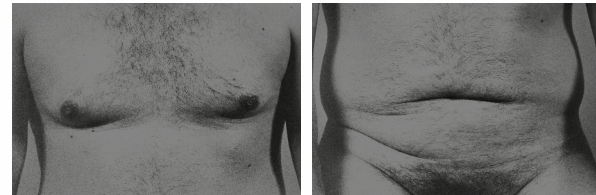
31 Naomi Klein has been a key reference point and an outspoken advocate with regard to government persecution in modern-day Egypt. See Naomi Klein, “Greenwashing a Police State: The Truth Behind Egypt’s Cop27 Masquerade,” *Guardian*, October 18, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/18/greenwashing-police-state-egypt-cop27-masquerade-naomi-klein-climate-crisis>.

81 conducted, revelations of brutal harassment and unrelenting scaremongering persist in both the physical and virtual sphere.³² In the public realm, women who endure sexual violence continue to be propelled to speak truths that fuel ideological culture wars, only to be forgotten. Applauded for their camaraderie to the cause, they themselves become marked, just like the bodies of Black humans shot and bludgeoned to death without cause.³³ When will they call them by their names? Aura, Breonna, George, Laquan, Janisha . . . ?³⁴ Can you breathe?³⁵ There is of course a “supposed” rhyme and reason for everything. Thinking of the current state of complex carceral injustice not only in the United States but also globally, one cannot help but draw parallels to the fated inevitability of the incarceration that one is afforded through the silkscreen, the border

32 Chandelis Duster, “Largest Survey of Transgender People in the US Reveals Key Insights at a Time When Trans Rights Are under Attack,” *CNN*, February 7, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/07/us/us-transgender-2022-survey-reaj/index.html>.
33 For considerations of the complex discussions that have emerged in the rise of recent feminist debates—specifically in light of the #MeToo movement—see Katherine Angel, *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again: Women and Desire in the Age of Consent* (London: Verso, 2021); Mithu Sanyal, *Rape: From Lucretia to #MeToo* (London: Verso, 2019); Amia Srinivasan, *The Right to Sex* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).
34 Alia Chughtai, “Know Their Names: Black People Killed by the US Police,” *Al Jazeera*, 2020, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2020/know-their-names/index.html>.
35 Direct reference to George Floyd’s cry that he could not breathe while being murdered by a US police officer. I discuss the visuality of this scene as well as its aftermath in the following book chapter: Omar Kholeif, “I Can’t Breathe: Black Visuality in the Metaverse,” in *I’ll Be Your Mirror: Art and the Digital Screen*, ed. Alison Hearst (New York: Delmonico Books, 2023).

82 that is one's body – the prescriptive, the assigned, the non-aligned. Is this the vestige of a slave's body, or one that resisted? Is this a vessel that can *pass*? Was I born, assigned, a gender all my own?

These circular tensions persistently present questions that seem both antiquated and deeply contemporaneous. The sketch of these multiple folds of history finds a perfectly suited outline in the cumulative light of Yalter's landmark installation *Le Chavelier d'Eon*. A side view, a



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frontal view, a bird's-eye view of a body in motion. Daily rituals accumulate. Are shaving chest hair and stretching a pair of panty hose over legs routine activities, or are they being practiced, learned? These framed black-and-white pictures sit in proximity to a pair of images surveying a body in fragments, in close-up – a chest, a torso. Although ambiguous, one's ocular sensibilities assume this to be the body of a male figure, a detail revealed as the spectator's gaze

83 wanders to a pair of Polaroids that present a striking figure in a sequined black dress, draped in fur sitting before the camera with their lips plumped and pursed, black mascara, and blush. Their gaze is not tentative but filled with a mixture of innocent excitement and whimsy, their eye summing as if to say, "Can you see me, I enjoy how *this* situation feels, to be seen like this, even if for the first time."

The form of these narrative gestures is annotated through Yalter's deployment of visual aesthetic metaphors. A blush-colored painting, almost blood red, punctures the orthography of conceived male gender with its metaphor. The painting is could be read as a direct reference to Alexander Rodchenko's *Pure Red Color* (1921), where he argued that he had "reduced painting to its logical conclusion. . . . It's all over. . . . Every plane is a plane and there is to be no representation."³⁶ By invoking this disavowal of

36

See *The Death of Painting* (1998), Museum of Modern Art, New York, https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/rodchenko/texts/death_of_painting.html, accessed February 12, 2024. Also see Arifa Akbar, "Drawing a Blank: Russian Constructivist Makes Late Tate Debut," *Independent*, January 2, 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/drawing-a-blank-russian-constructivist-makes-late-tate-debut-1516801.html>.

84 representation, and in turn the figurative reproduction of bodies, Yalter proposes that gender is not only mutable, but that sexual identity begins from a point of abstraction that is consistently reformulated around *felt* experience, tendencies that evolve through the affecting possibility of encountering one's self throughout life.

In author and philosopher Didier Eribon's blazing sociological memoir *Returning to Reims* (2009), the author – who is referred to as “openly gay” – makes a poignant and interminable reflection on constructions of the self. He notes that “the process by which you come to belong to yourself or to transform yourself” is reflective of multiple acts of constitution and reconstitution. To assume an identity, for him, is linked to “the refusal of an identity” – a woven “link” whereby the assumed and the refused are to be found “holding each other in check.”³⁷ One interpretation of Eribon's position suggests a double form

85 of exile – not only from and of one's body, but equally from their environment.

Yalter's subject, a close compatriot, unfurls the interior experience of negotiating their gender duality on screen and in pictures. In a pivotal centerpiece, one can bear witness to her subject as a deconstructed entity. A pair of breasts are draped over a television. Two feet brush across the screen, fracturing the space-time continuum. The picture before us is now split in two. In between our protagonist's legs sit two screens with protruding lips. He is still in jeans, ostensibly man's clothing. We follow him as he traverses streets, dressed in an oversized dress and a large pair of glasses, wandering through thoroughfares like a flaneur. The transitive act occurs when we see him standing in front of what appears to be a shop window filled with multiple television screens. Each of these boxes presents an anterior version of the character that we come

37 Didier Eribon, *Returning to Reims*, trans. Michael Lucy (2009; Los Angeles: Semiotext(e)/Foreign Agents, 2013), 97–98.

86 to know as the Chevalier – the knight of the round table.

In Yalter’s studio in January 2024, she thanks me for drawing attention to this work. When I first approached the artist to present this work a decade prior, she was eager to respect the privacy of the individual whose journey we come to follow. Those of us who have engaged in concerted acts of LGBTQ+ activism understand that the 1970s was notable for the **LGBTQ+** community. Same-sex relationships were decriminalized in Great Britain shortly prior in 1967, and homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s list of disorders in 1973.³⁸ In 1972, Sweden became the first country to legally allow its citizens to change their gender, abolishing identification such as “trans-,” i.e., “transvestism” and “transgenderism,” from being classified as a “disease.”³⁹ Still, cultural discord and alienation persisted – as a policy, arguably, does not alter societal attitudes. One could not mitigate

38 “The APA Ruling on Homosexuality,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1973.
39 Mikael Baaz and Mona Lilja, “I Felt a Little Homosexual Today, So I Called in Sick: The Formation of ‘Reverse Discourse’ by Swedish Gay Activists in the 1970s,” *Global Society* 36, no. 3 (2022): 330–46.

87 circumstance – being referred to as “sick” by the legal apparatus of society one moment, only to assume that communal acceptance and coherence was forthcoming, was a troubling notion.⁴⁰ The case of transgender identity in France where Yalter worked, was still a cultural taboo. Her compatriot underwent an exploratory gender transition in the mid to late 1970s. It was not until 2010 that the nation stopped violently antagonizing trans people’s right to exist, removing the term “identity disorder” from its legal and state-sanctioned attributions.⁴¹

I had not spoken with Yalter in nearly a decade when this book began. The first thing that I asked her about was the Chevalier. She shakes her head, as if to suggest that he/she/they may no longer be well or alive. Seeking to offer what comfort I can, I inform her that the work remains one of the most important political works of art ever produced. For the Chevalier is no victim here. The fragments of their

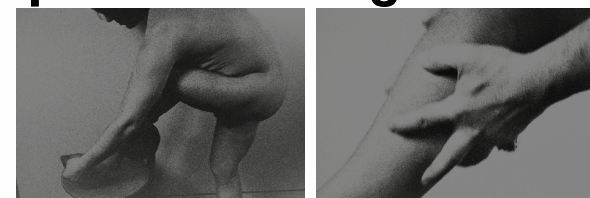
40 Baaz and Lilja, “I Felt a Little Homosexual Today,” 330–46.
41 “La transsexualité ne sera plus classée comme affection psychiatrique,” *Le Monde*, May 16, 2009.

88 body circumvent categorization, floating across screens and back, reiterating the stringent binaries assumed of gender. The Chevalier's name is naturally of great importance. It is a reference to Charles d'Éon de Beaumont (1728–1810). Based in Versailles, a place steeped in mythology and often referenced by Yalter, Beaumont was a French soldier who also dabbled in writing and spying, as well as serving as a diplomat. He often dressed as a woman stirring confusion, and his corpse was reportedly exhumed to confirm that his biological gender was indeed that of a male.⁴² According to certain accounts, Beaumont originated the term “eonism” for “transvestism.”⁴³ The notorious figure also lends Yalter's subject prophetic speech, words to renounce the previous self; we give in to the fight. The male voice professes: “After having been an honest man, a zealous citizen and a brave soldier all my life, I triumph in being a woman.”⁴⁴

42 Simon Burrows, *The Chevalier D'Eon and His Worlds: Gender, Espionage and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: A&C Black, 2010), 82–91.
43 Estelle Vallender, *Exile Is a Hard Job* (Cologne: Koening Books and Museum Ludwig; Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Hessel Museum of Art, 2019), 137.
44 Omar Kholeif, “Close-Up: Change of Subject,” *Artforum*, April 2017.

89 The artist's choice to invoke the figure of a historic French aristocrat is emblematic of her penchant for weaving together divergent temporal orders and literary references from the ancient and modern to speak back to her audience – not as an anthropologist, but as a critic of cultural hegemony. Yalter's desire to fracture the ontological construction and visual pleasures associated with the male gaze persists throughout.⁴⁵ In *Le Chavelier d'Eon*, she ap-

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proaches her subject through an empathic lens, affording them a kind of generosity that is inextricably tied to love. Her accumulating portrait of tessellating forms reveals the Chevalier's body not as a subject of sexual objectification, but as an extra-territory subject to its own situated set of aesthetics.

In Yalter's aesthetic experiment, the choice of luminous forms and her visual vocabulary are adventurous.

45 Laura Mulvey and Rachel Rose, *Laura Mulvey / Rachel Rose: Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema* (London: Afterall Books, 2016).

90 The work's mirrored, doubled, and collapsed scenes speak a language that is as audacious as that of Nam June Paik and his circuitous *TV Buddha* (1974) and the cumulative portraits that emerge in works such as *Internet Dream* (1994). Vito Acconci, Vera Molnár, and Lillian F. Schwartz are just a few of the artists who Yalter has exhibited alongside in shows staged across Europe, and Germany in particular. Her profile amid what was at one point referred to as the sphere of "media arts," "interactive art," and "new media" is in no small part due to the encouragement and support of her late partner, Joël Boutteville. Boutteville was a curator of technologically led art who was known, among other things, for cocurating media arts festivals such as *Espaces Interactifs Europe*.

To construct a life, to fuel a present despite extant pasts that will not go away, proves to be the result of an unrelenting feat of determination. No war zone, no weapon, no vestige of trauma can hold Yalter back from the throes

91 of her creative will to express not only the latent wounds of her own life, but also of those who orbit her. The grieving stranger enters the gallery to find themselves extracted from the buckle of the repressed interiority of mental images that haunt before they short circuit. Here, the fuse of energy is hollowed from its core to the base. There is nothing left here. Feelings linger, the rest of me is on the floor; I wave goodbye.

Walter Benjamin once intimated that seeking his home was one of his greatest “afflictions.”⁴⁶ We end where we began. In search of a route to a root, to a beginning that the diasporic individual shall rarely find. Expanding on the affliction of longing for home, T. J. Demos has suggested that Benjamin’s resilience throughout life was gleaned through a reclamation of exile as a form of narrative resistance, a sensibility also evident in his posthumously published memoir, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*.⁴⁷ The punitive delineation of the ostracizing term “exile” as an experience of traumatic displacement is examined by Demos as a possible lens for decoding the ocular in *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (2007). Here, the author expands how we read one of the most recognized artists of expatriation, Marcel Duchamp, using his biographical ostracization and split life across Paris, New York, and Buenos Aires, to narrate – through this – a condition of generative multiplicity assembled and developed through ostracism.⁴⁸ Exile in Duchamp’s art, from his portable museum suitcases, which assembled miniatures of his works of art, to his constructed sculptures produced for travel, use the peripatetic context of movement as a means to open up possibilities for museology and display as opposed to relying solely on configurations of identarian politics. It enabled the artist a constant mobility – a sustained physical and mental space for becoming.⁴⁹

46 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, quoted by Walter Benjamin as an epigraph for “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (1939; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 20.
47 T. J. Demos, *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
48 Demos, *Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 14–17.
49 Demos, *Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, 3.

When I began this journey, our experiences in constant exile found visuality in the streets of Sharjah, where Yalter had installed a newly imagined construction of her project



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Exile Is a Hard Job as part of Sharjah Biennial 15: *Thinking Historically in the Present*. Looking at these pictures affixed to brick and mortar, I was reminded of the imprints of memory and architecture. Chiefly, of the mutable contours of the embodied self, and how it trickles through the palimpsest of time. I continued to search for the shared vessel that linked our lives: Cairo, the city of our birth. Our first discussion began with a reflection of lived pain – of two specific losses in our lives, and the isolation that these engendered, the ruin that a ghost leaves behind. At the time, I was delivering a lecture regarding the concept of pain and its potential to serve as a vessel through which to

speak “truth to power” in the sphere of art institutions.⁵⁰

50 Paul A. Bové, “Introduction,” *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 2–8.

94 The example that I was using assumed a particular form of embodiment in the activism against the opioid crisis, principally against the Sackler Family, whose names have historically annotated the wings of several of the world's most influential museums. These efforts were visualized in filmmaker Laura Poitras's award-winning documentary with artist Nan Goldin, *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* (2022).

The film moves us through the advocacy efforts of the group PAIN (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now), as narrated through Goldin's sit-ins and protests at museums, to highlight the family's funding of cultural organizations. How could one hold the family that profited from Oxycontin accountable, if the public vessels of people's shared and collective histories were to be forever marked by the imprint of their name? A haunting that does not relent. Three-quarters of the way through the film, in one of the most dramatic scenes, a group of activists are seen taking over the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Egyptian Wing,

95 filling the skylit galleries and expanse of water that surrounds the recreated installation of the Temple of Dendur with empty prescription bottles. They fill the artificial scenography and take to the floor, staging a metaphorical "die-in." It appeared to be a very peaceful revolt.

The connotations of this act of naming were suffocating, seemingly impossible to reconcile. A connective tissue was formed to the work of artist Lubaina Himid – who I have long studied and worked with – whose landmark installation *Naming the Money* (2004) serves as a constant reminder of how language, specifically the act of naming and annotating Black bodies, functioned as a primary ideological weapon in the triangular slave trade.⁵¹

It had not occurred to me that the residues of a shared culture were annotated with the lives of contemporary slave barons – a family who profiteered from the lives of those in despair, and whose financial contributions to museums,

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See Lubaina Himid, *Meticulous Observations and Naming the Money* (2017), National Museums Liverpool, <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/whatson/walker-art-gallery/exhibition/lubaina-himid>, accessed February 14, 2024.

96 or “gifts” [tainted gifts] as they are referred to, served as tax write-offs.⁵² Throughout my doctoral study, I was unaware that I was researching fragments of my own culture in museums that bore the Sackler name. The Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard University is recognized for its collections from Egypt and what the museum refers to as the “Near East.” The Freer-Sackler Galleries (now the Freer Gallery of Art), part of the US civic museum consortium known as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, was also a key reference, as it holds one of the most expansive and known constellations of Afro-Asian art from ancient times to the present. At the Louvre, the galleries where I studied Eastern antiquities were also, at the time of my study, named after the Sackler family. If this was a marker of anything, it was of my naivety. Here, I was authoring a thesis on the decolonial possibilities of art, meanwhile, the public imagination was being colonized by a

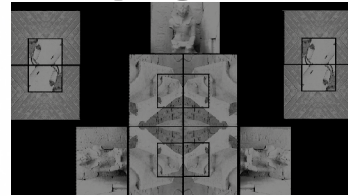
52 Tom Seymour, “Tainted Gifts: As British Museum and the Met Disavow the Sackler Name, Museums Rethink Donation Deals,” *Art Newspaper*, March 28, 2022, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/03/28/tainted-gifts-museums-rethink-donation-deals>.

97 different vision: one where people’s lives were sacrificed by US capitalism and Big Pharma to allow for – and sustain – those ghosts, the ancestors of the dispossessed, to breathe in the vaulted galleries and corridors of the world’s most storied museums.

Yalter’s work offers relief and a continued space for relearning, as Eribon intimated, the self that we reject and the one we choose or seek to claim as our own. In 1987, Yalter was commissioned to produce a new work. She used her modest budget on a plane ticket to Egypt for her and a friend, borrowing a Portapak camera and attendant resources for her journey. Rather than attempt to reconstruct details of a childhood that she could not remember, she used the writings of the eighteenth-century French author and diplomat François-René De Chateaubriand (1768–1848) to guide her journey up and down the Egyptian landscape. Traveling by foot, car, or boat, the artist used

98 Chateaubriand's literature, known for collapsing various historical orders, to guide and approach the experience.

This led to the creation of *Pyramis: ou le Voyage d'Eudore*,



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a twelve-screen, three-channel video installation that was first exhibited in Châtenay-Malabry, a suburb of Paris where Chateaubriand lived during his lifetime.

Yalter explained that the title, *Pyramis*, was inspired by a pyramid-shaped pastry sold in ancient Greece. The reference connects the viewer to narrator, Eudore, a nineteenth-century Roman officer of Greek origin who features in Chateaubriand's dyssynchronous novel *The Martyrs*, first published in 1859. In Greek mythology, it is said that Eudore or Eudora was a name given to three nymphs who presented "good gifts."⁵³ Yalter does not parse Chateaubriand's folklore but rather enters the cityscape and the country, constructing a phantasmagoric

99 dreamscape where differently located CRT monitors serve as mirrors, creating a disorientating view of space and time. Heard overhead is Yalter's voice, embodied through Chateaubriand's prose and his infamous annotations.

The abstraction of Yalter's person within the work – who is neither seen nor embodied on film but rather through an avatar – affords the artist visual possibilities that elide the conventions of the colonial tourist gaze.⁵⁴ Scenes of beaches, Pharaonic figures, and Bedouin faces are contorted in the closed-circuit loop of the video installation, withholding the ethnographic tendencies often associated with such acts of looking. Here, local gossip and the monastic life of the Egyptian countryside are suggested without being articulated. Yalter obscures. Her work is akin to a travel book that has fallen out of print – we can reference it but are unable to cite it ourselves. What Yalter can

53 Carl Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1951), 41, 64.

54 Peter Lyth, "Carry On up the Nile: The Tourist Gaze and the British Experience of Egypt, 1818-1932," in *The British Abroad Since the Eighteenth Century, Volume 1. Britain and the World*, eds. M. Farr, and X Guégan (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 176-78.

100 offer the spectator is a profound negotiation of narrative
reclamation, one that embodies the chaotic madness of a
place through an act of visual refraction; it cannot be ob-
jectively or numerically assessed. It demands its own co-
herence. Nil Yalter's work extends into multiple spheres,
ones that mandate a distinct form of labor from her audi-
ence. Convening worlds, hers is a practice that proffers
a manifesto for living – one that expands the silhouette
of exile. For her, as for us, the diaspora is the seed that,
through dispersal, finds its own logic and function in the
world – rightfully or not, on its own.⁵⁵

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Nil Yalter (b. 1938, Cairo, Egypt), lives and works in Paris. A pioneer in the French feminist art movement of the 1970s, Yalter was educated at Robert College, the prestigious American secondary school in Istanbul. While she was engaged in dance, theater, and painting during this time, she also practiced pantomime and traveled by foot to India as a pantomime artist. Yalter has lived in Paris since 1965. She participated in the French counter-culture and revolutionary political movement of the late 1960s, immersing herself in the debates around gender, migrant workers from Turkey, and other issues of the era. These social movements and ethnographic science have influenced the artist’s videos, performances, and installations from the 1970s onward in the form of idiosyncratic, pluralistic aesthetics. The influence of abstract traditions – particularly Russian Constructivism – can be observed in her paintings and digital works since her early years. Her work reflects a style that blends all these influences, along with autobiographical elements where the personal and the political intertwine.

Yalter is the recipient of the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 60th Venice Biennale in 2024. Her works are part of institutional collections such as Tate Modern, the Centre Pompidou, Museum Ludwig, and the Long Beach Museum of Art, among others, as well as private collections such as the Art Collection Telekom, colección olorVISUAL, the Reydan Weiss Collection, and Fundación Foto Colectania. She has participated in international art fairs such as Art Basel, ARCO Madrid, Art Cologne, FIAC, Frieze Masters, the Armory Show, and Frieze New York, to cite a few, as well as the 10th Gwangju Biennial in 2014, the 15th Sharjah Biennial in 2023, the 13th Istanbul Biennial in 2013, and she has been selected for the 60th Venice Biennale. Some of her most recent solo exhibitions have been held at Museum Ludwig, MAC VAL, and the Hessel Museum of Art in 2019; FRAC Lorraine and ARTER Space for Art in 2016; and the Centre Pompidou in 2012 and 2010. Her work has been part of group exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2023, Palais de Beaux-Arts in Paris in 2018, WIELS – The Absent Museum in 2017, Tate Modern in 2016, the Centre Pompidou in 2013 and 2009, the Long Beach Museum of Art in 2011, MoMA PS1 in 2008, and CGAC in 2007.



Photo: Ashkan Noroozkhani

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Prof. Dr Omar Kholeif CF FRSA was born in Cairo to Egyptian and Sudanese parents. They are a British artist, author, curator, historian, and broadcaster who has curated more than seventy exhibitions and produced over 100 commissions of film and visual art on five continents. Kholeif’s work explores vanquished archives, with a view to reanimating that which was lost.

Dr. Kholeif has worked at Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF), UAE since 2017 and from 2018 has served as director of collections and senior curator. They are the founder and codirector of artPost21, a cultural agency with a focus on art, technology, and social justice. The author or co-author of dozens of books, their writing has been translated into seventeen languages to date.

Their hybrid social history of art and technology, *Internet_Art: From the Birth of the Web to the Rise of NFTs*, was published by Phaidon in 2023.

Dr. Kholeif is a visiting professor in critical race, visual art history and the creative industries at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art Research Unit at Teesside University, Tees Valley, UK. They are the series editor of *imagine/otherwise* for Sternberg Press – the only peer-reviewed publishing book series focused on critically examining the lives of overlooked female artists.

Forthcoming volumes are focused on artists, Magda Stawarska, Lalitha Lajmi, and Simone Fattal. In summer 2024, Lisson Gallery and D.A.P. will publish Kholeif’s catalogue raisonné of Otobong Nkanga’s drawings.



Image: Caroline von Grone, Omar, *The Prophet*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and the Blake Gallacher Trust, Los Angeles

AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The story of this volume may have come about too quickly – much more so than I would have liked, but its routes were seeded a decade prior to its writing when I was privileged to present Nil Yalter’s work in an exhibition that I curated at the Armory Show in New York, which was realized in 2015. I am grateful to Galerist, Istanbul, for supporting this initial endeavor.

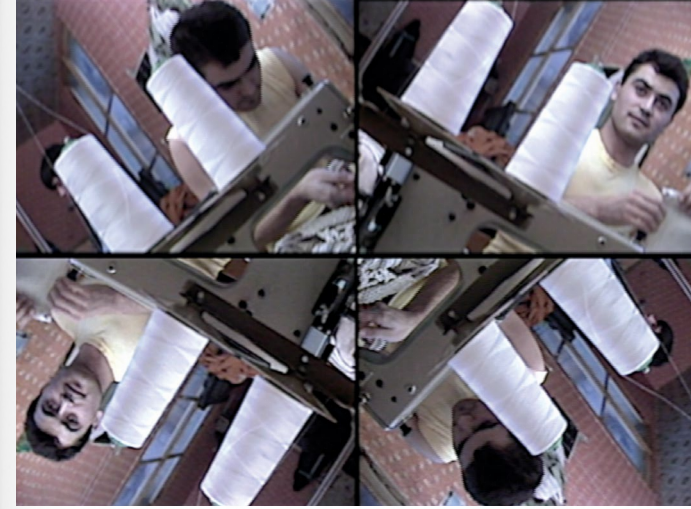
The complex task of constellating such a rich life in art in a condensed volume required the support of a small group of individuals. Thanks are due to Salman Matinfar, Azadeh Zaferini, and Mayssa Fattouh of Ab-Anbar Gallery, London, as was the support of Mia Rigo through her venture Archivorum. Special gratitude is afforded to Ilaria Bombelli, head of publishing who was unwavering in her pursuit to complete this book, and Francesco Valtolina, art director at Mousse Publishing who gave this project a home.

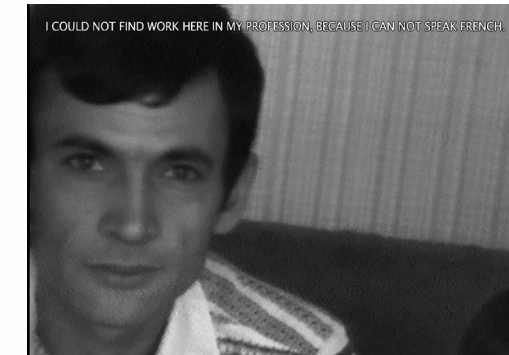
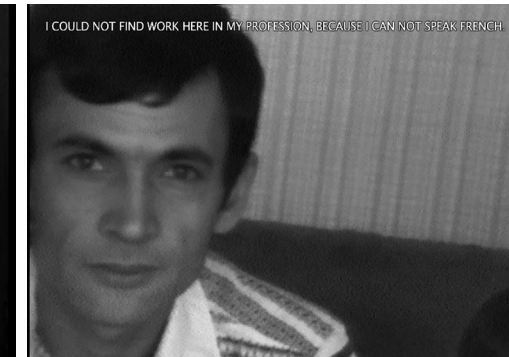
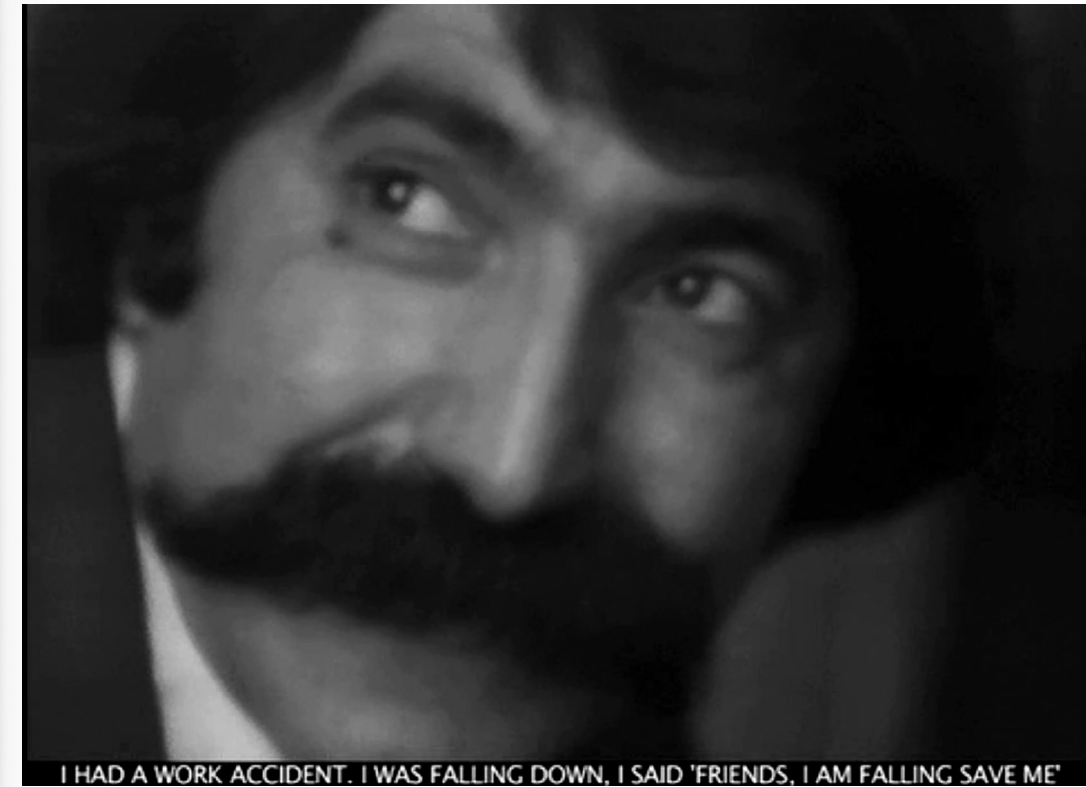
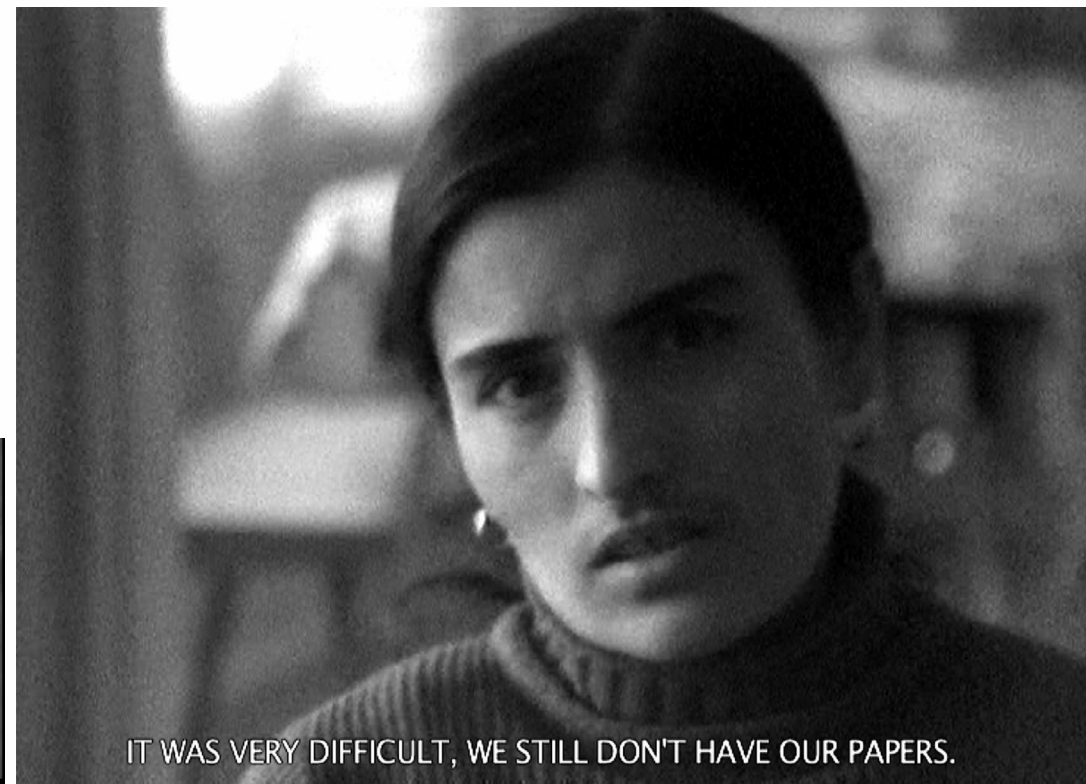
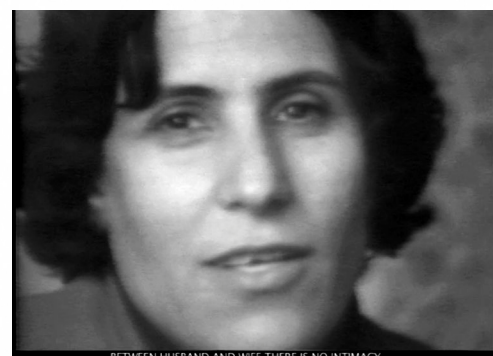
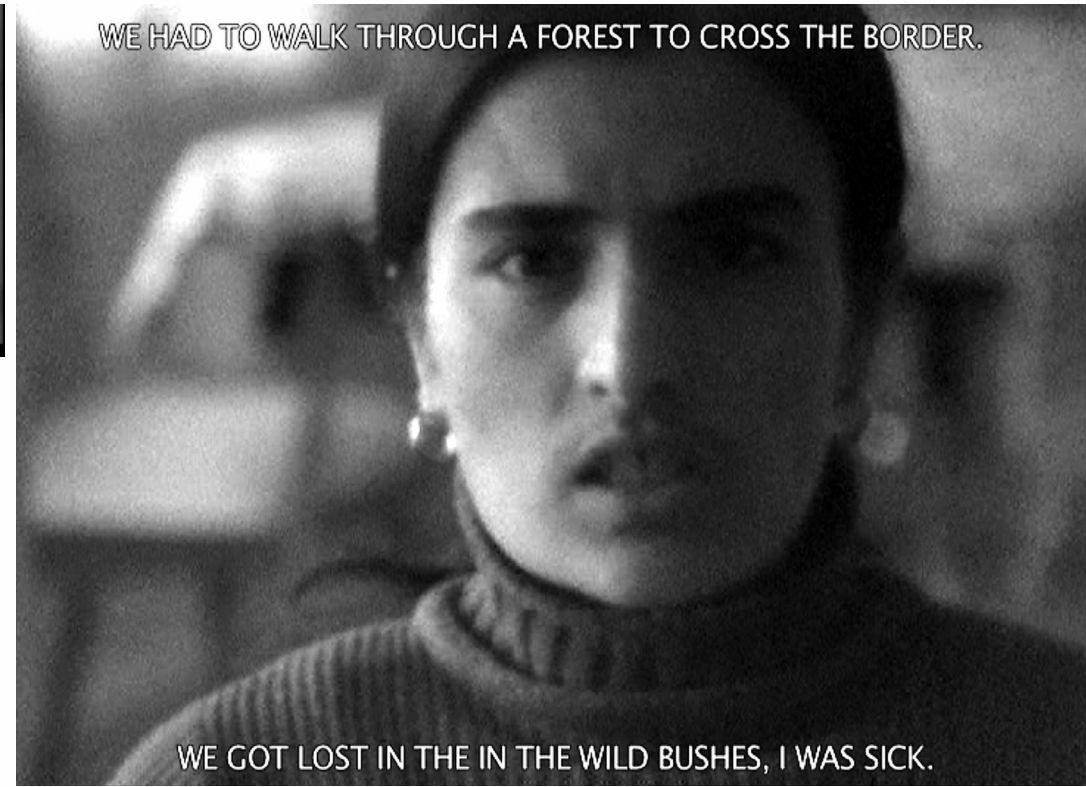
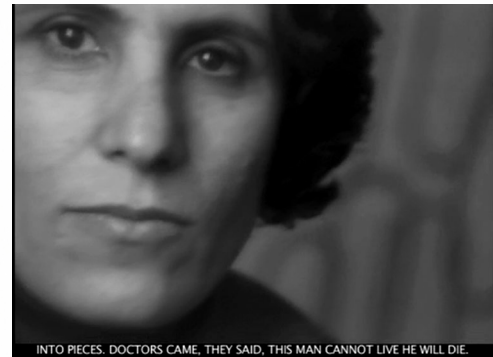
My prose would not have made its way to the page without the support of my husband, Frank Gallacher, who despite several personal hurdles oversaw and negotiated the process of our constant exile. He lovingly packed my books and artworks when we were forced to move (again) during the writing of this manuscript. I don’t say it enough: Thank you. Artists – well they don’t make them like Nil Yalter anymore. Her belief in me, her invitation to write this book is demonstrative of her faith in my voice as an author, an artist, and as a historian. It is this trust that salvages me in moments of darkness. Her invitation into her world and her caring and inquisitive nature made this project deeply rewarding.

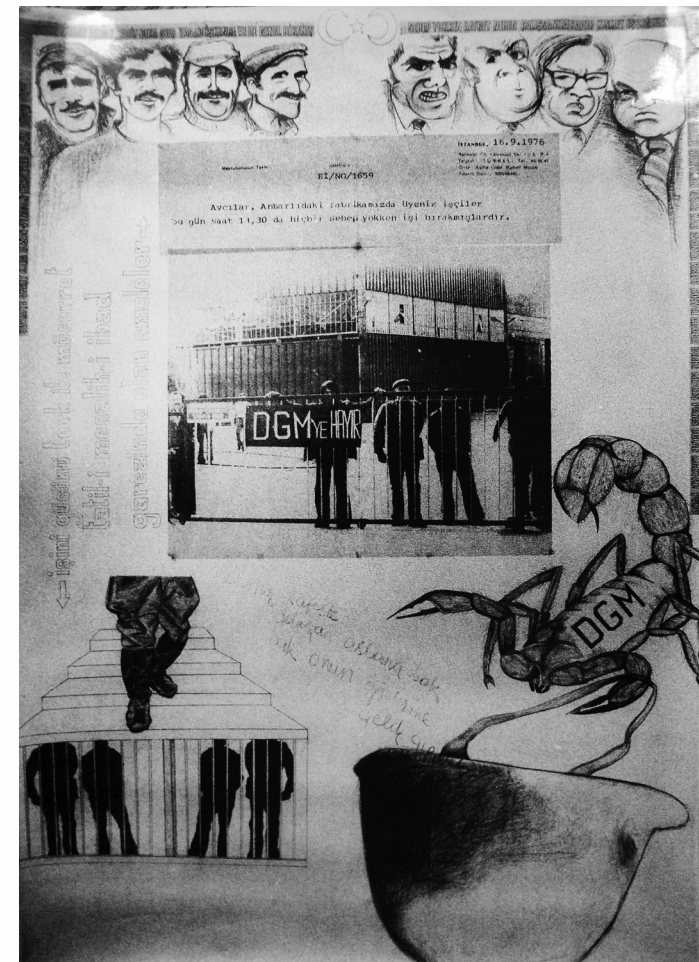
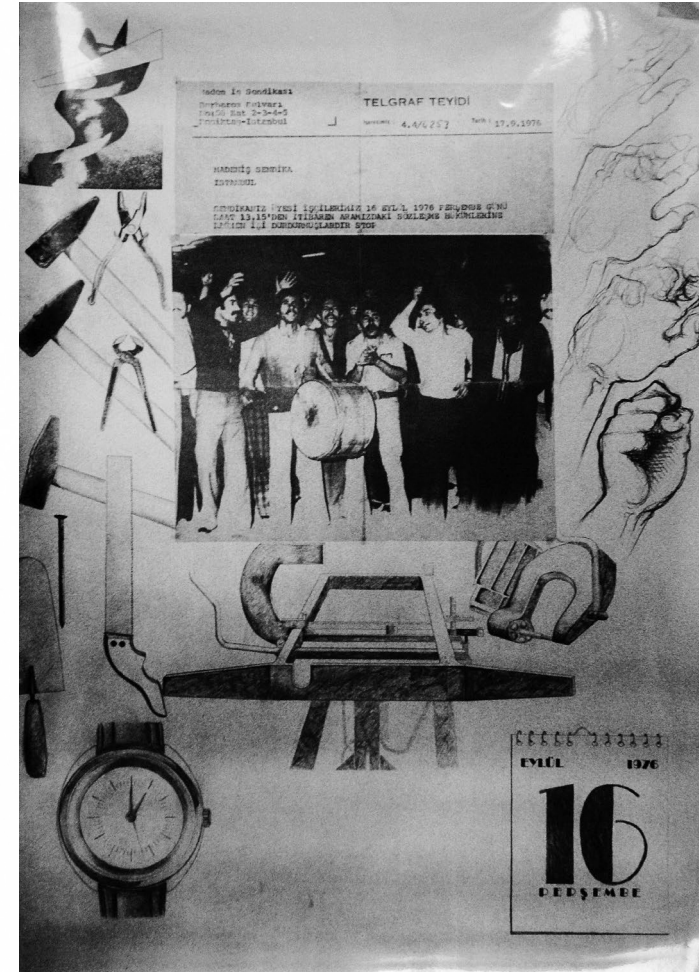
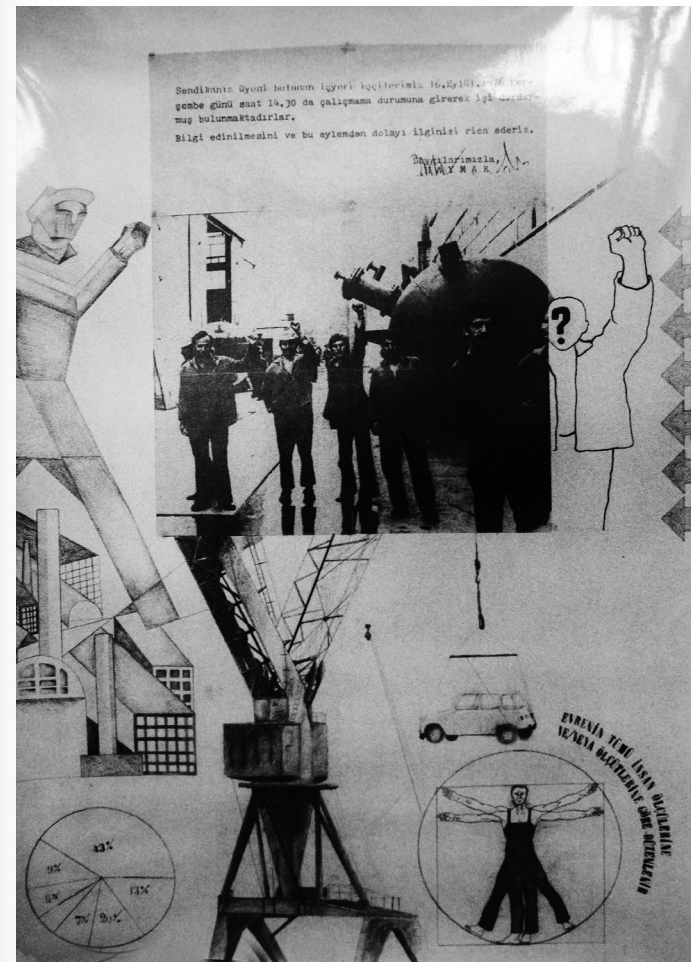
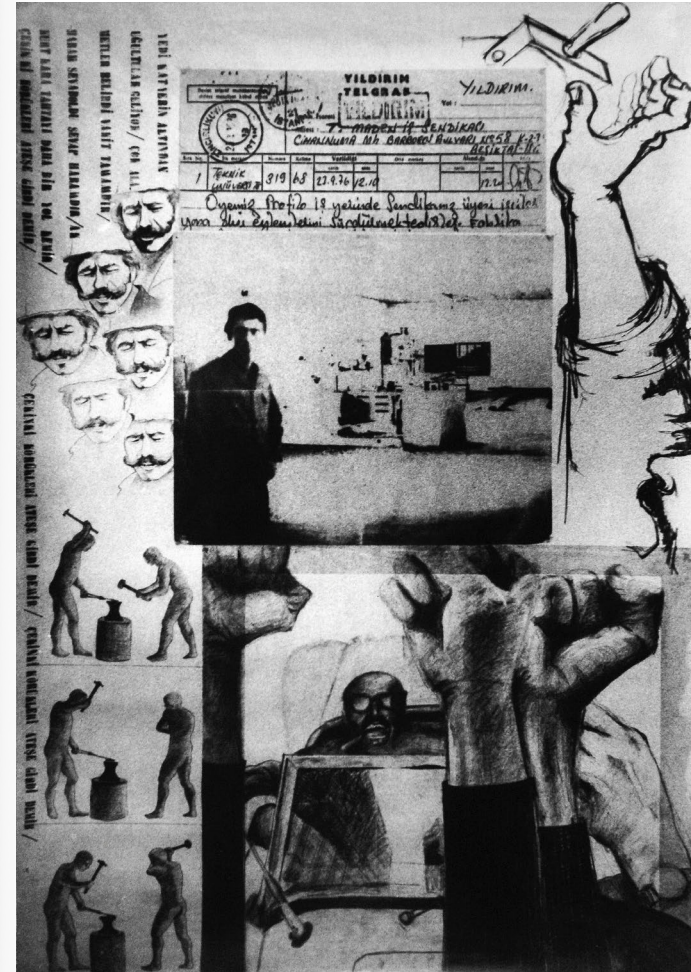
Nil: We have yet to complete our journey together, but I hope that with these kernels I have been able to offer further scope and perspective to your life’s work. I look forward to our continued conversations.

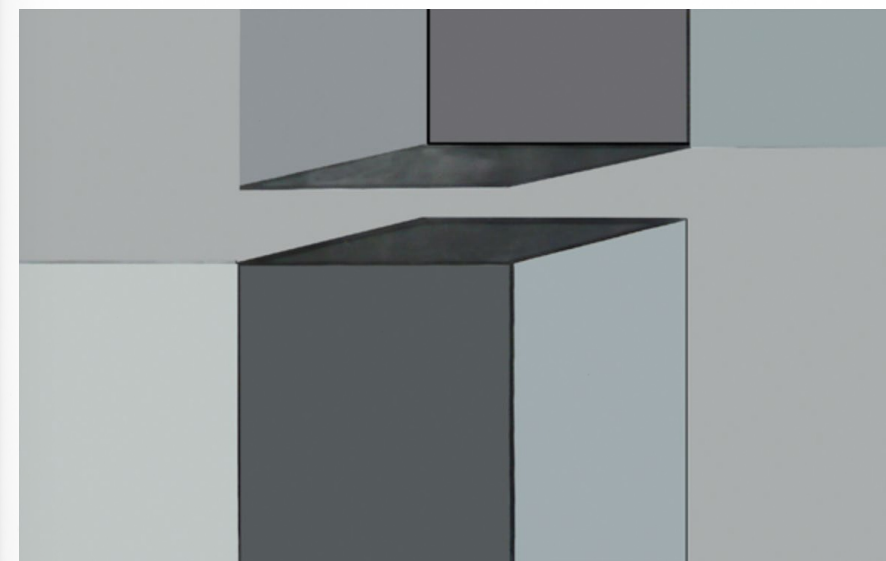
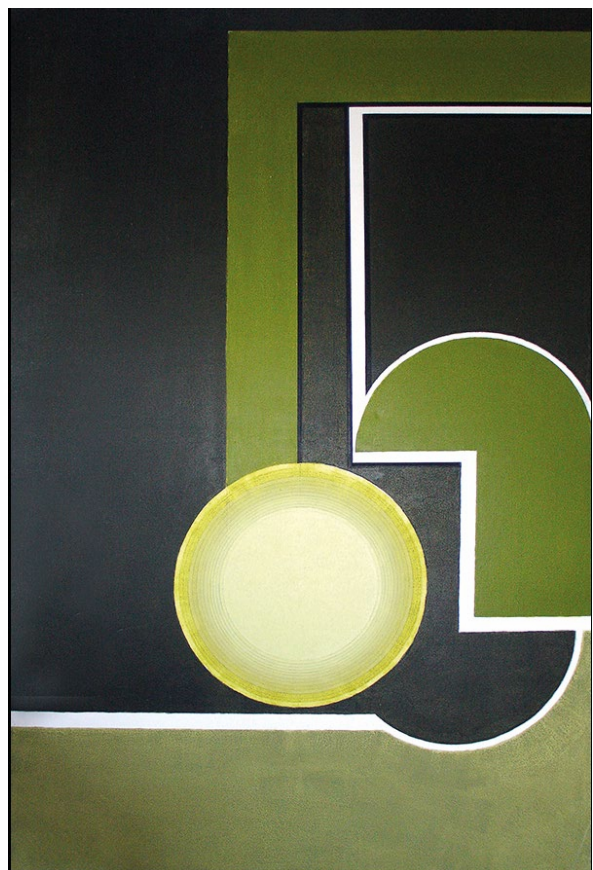
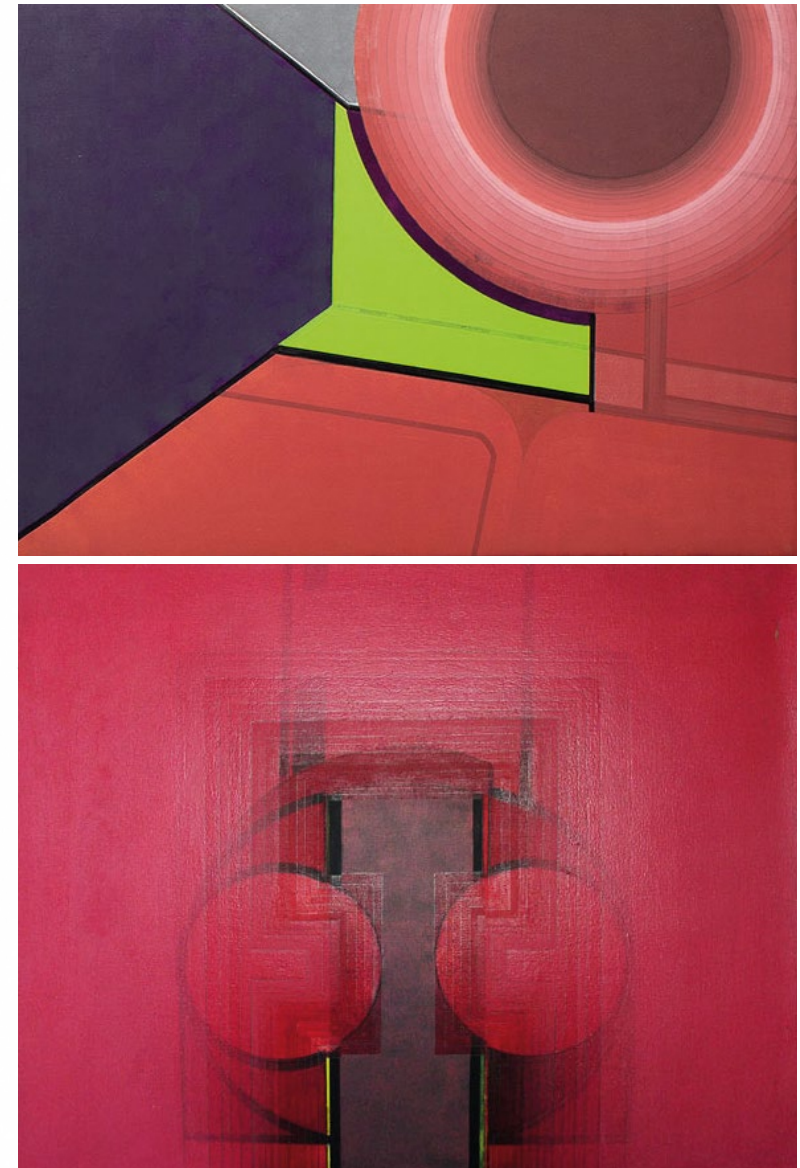
Special gratitude is afforded to Blake Karim Mitchell of artPost21 who stepped in at the 11th hour to assist with credits and captions.

This book is dedicated to the women of my life, who never cease to inspire: Lubaina Himid, Hannah Feldman, Otobong Nkanga, Sarah Perks, Magda Stawarska, and Sofia Victorino.

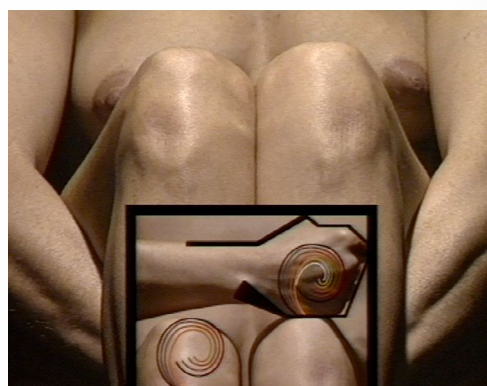
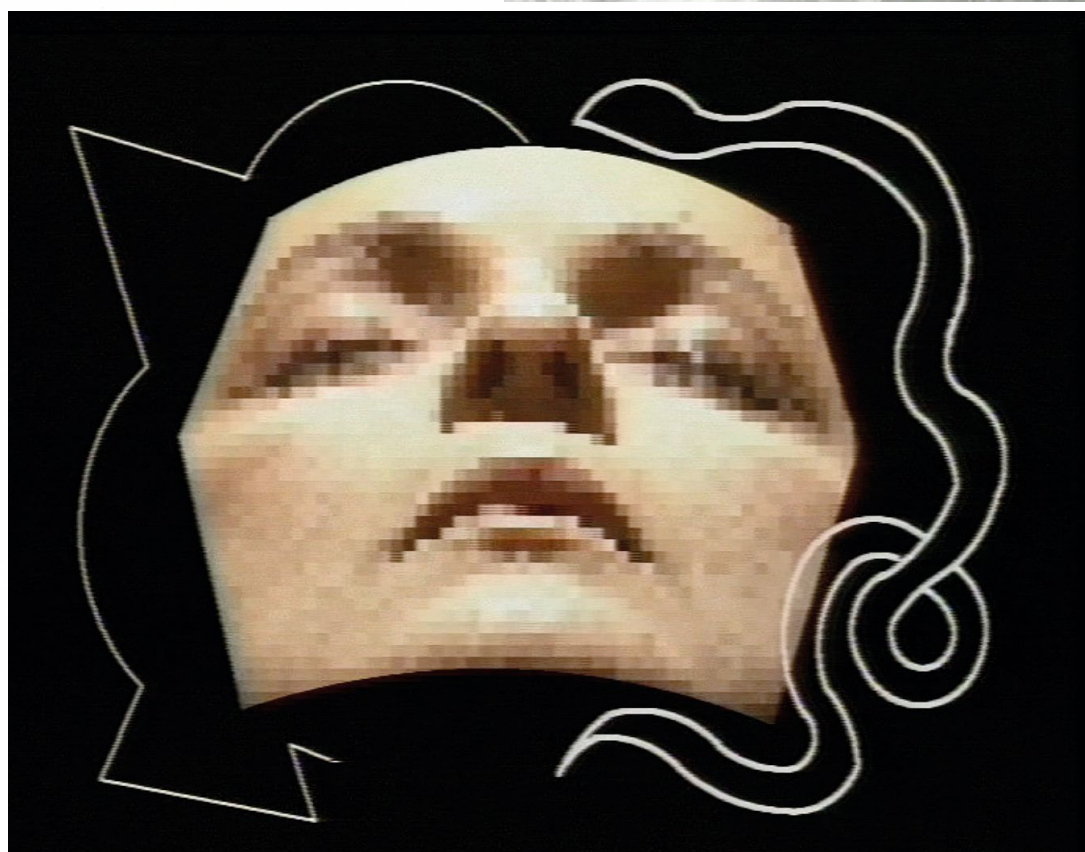
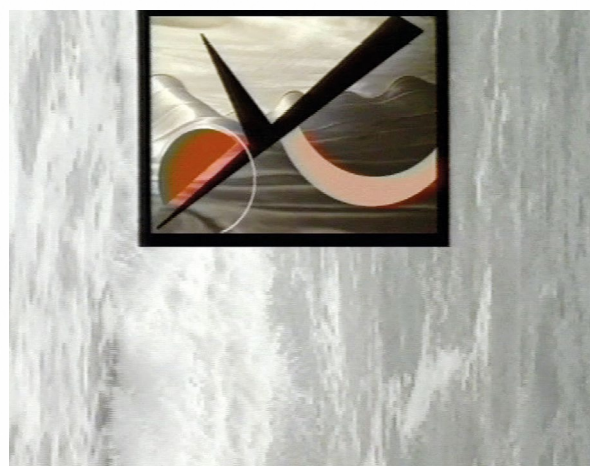
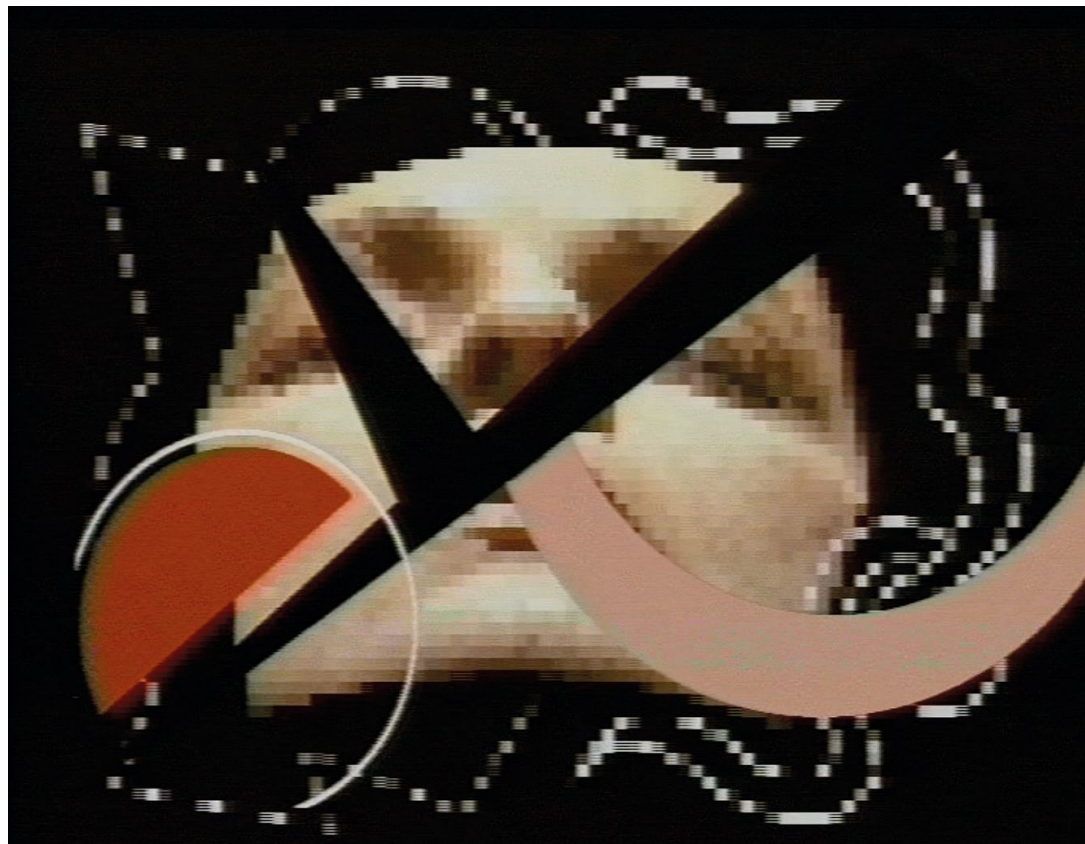




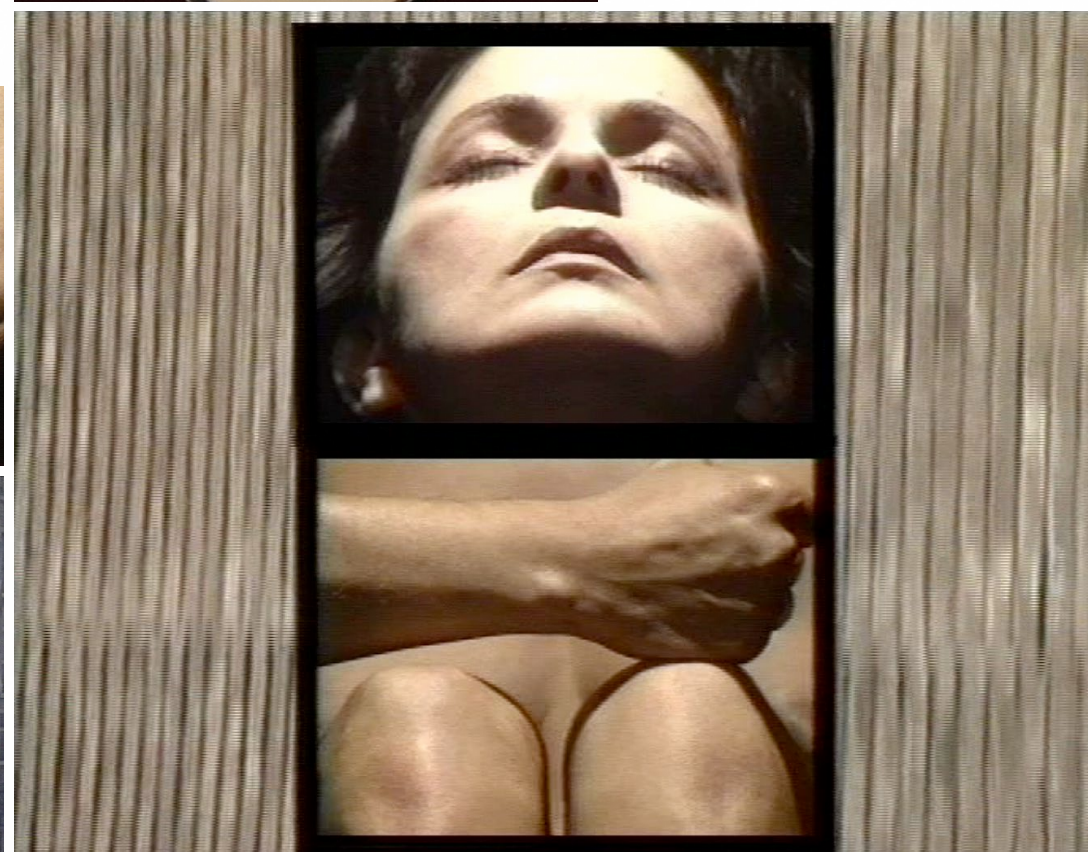
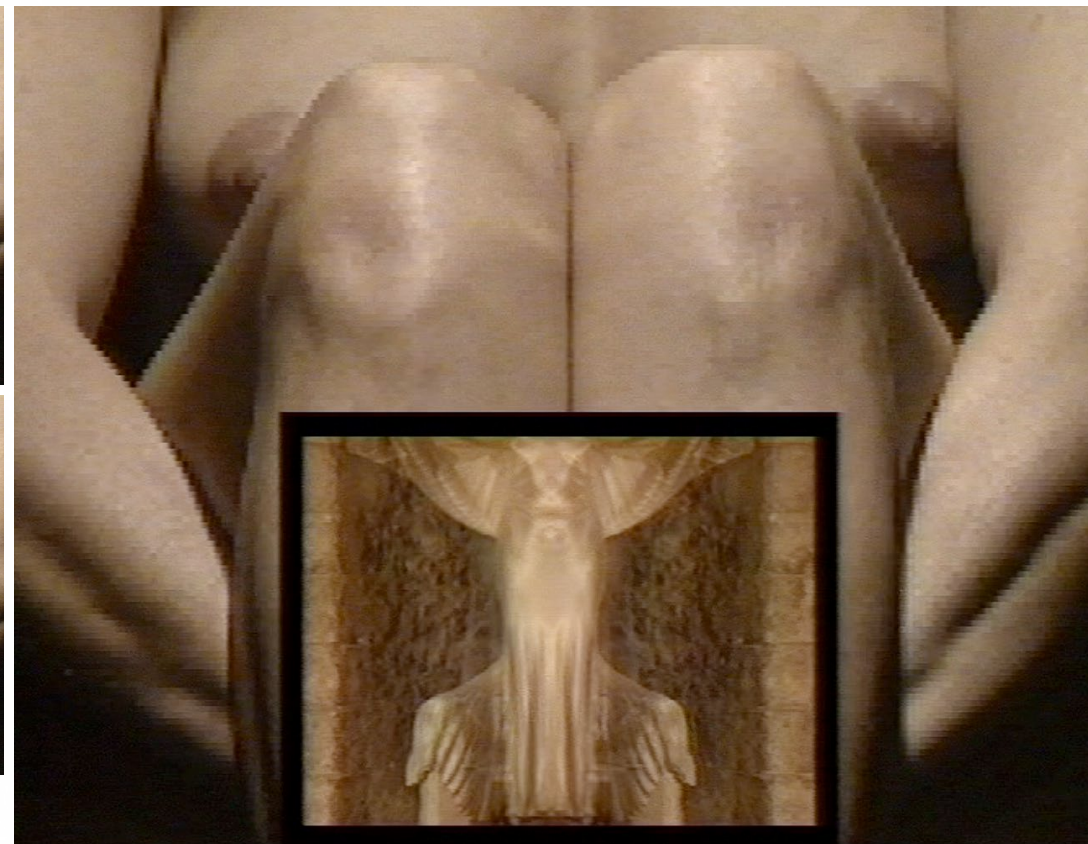
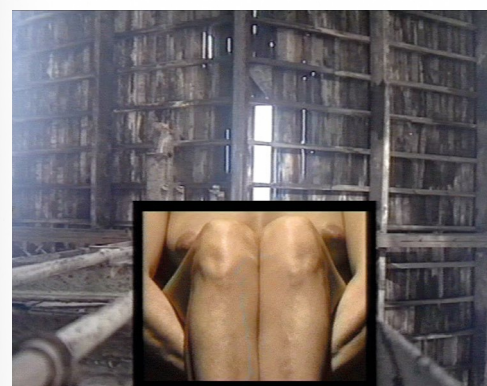
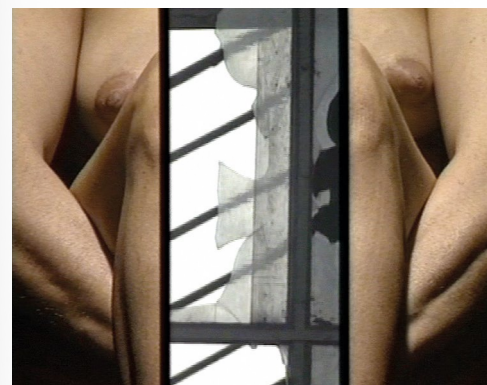
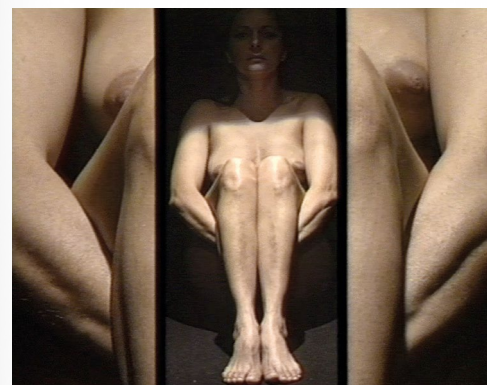
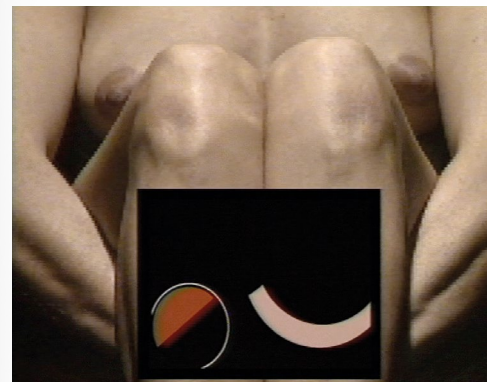


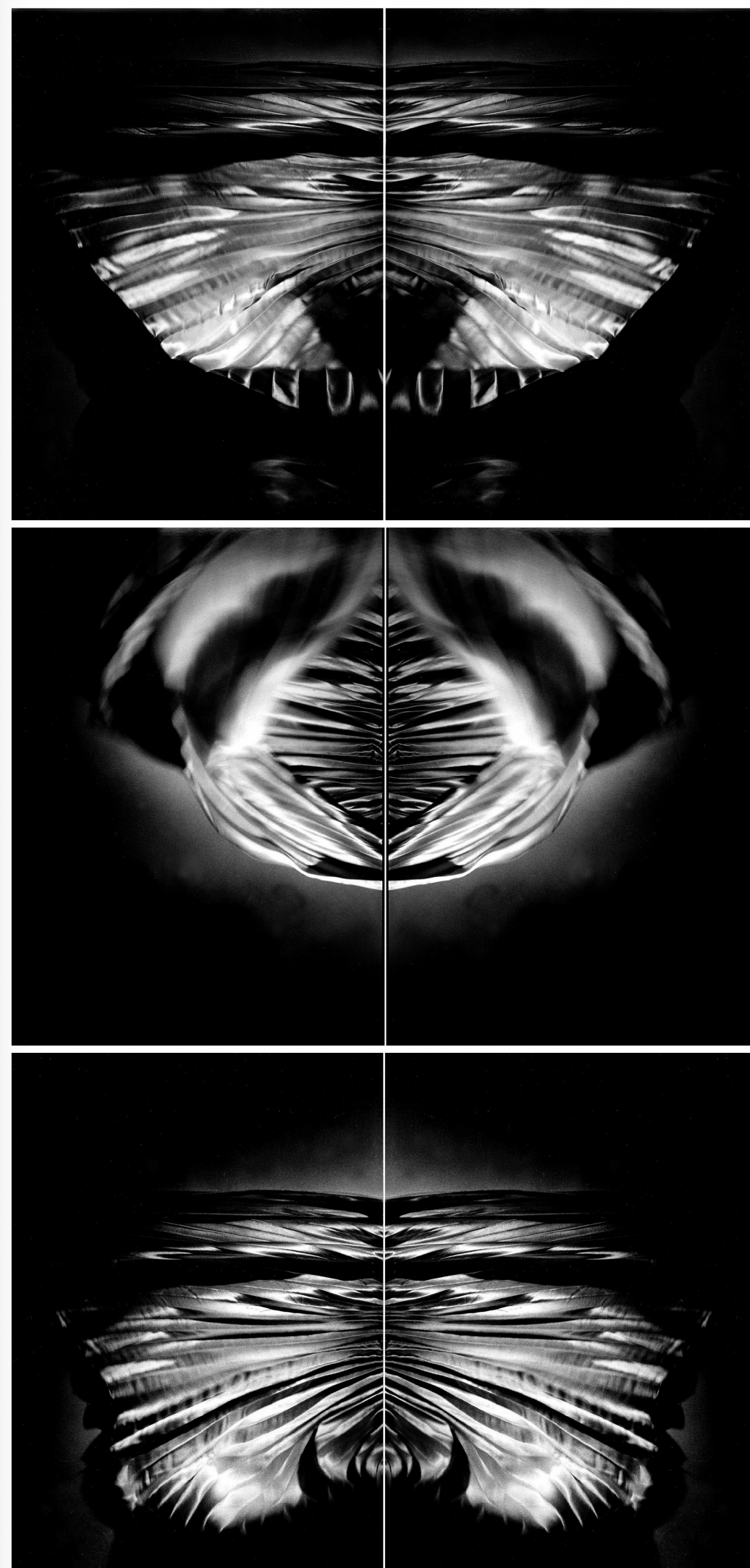
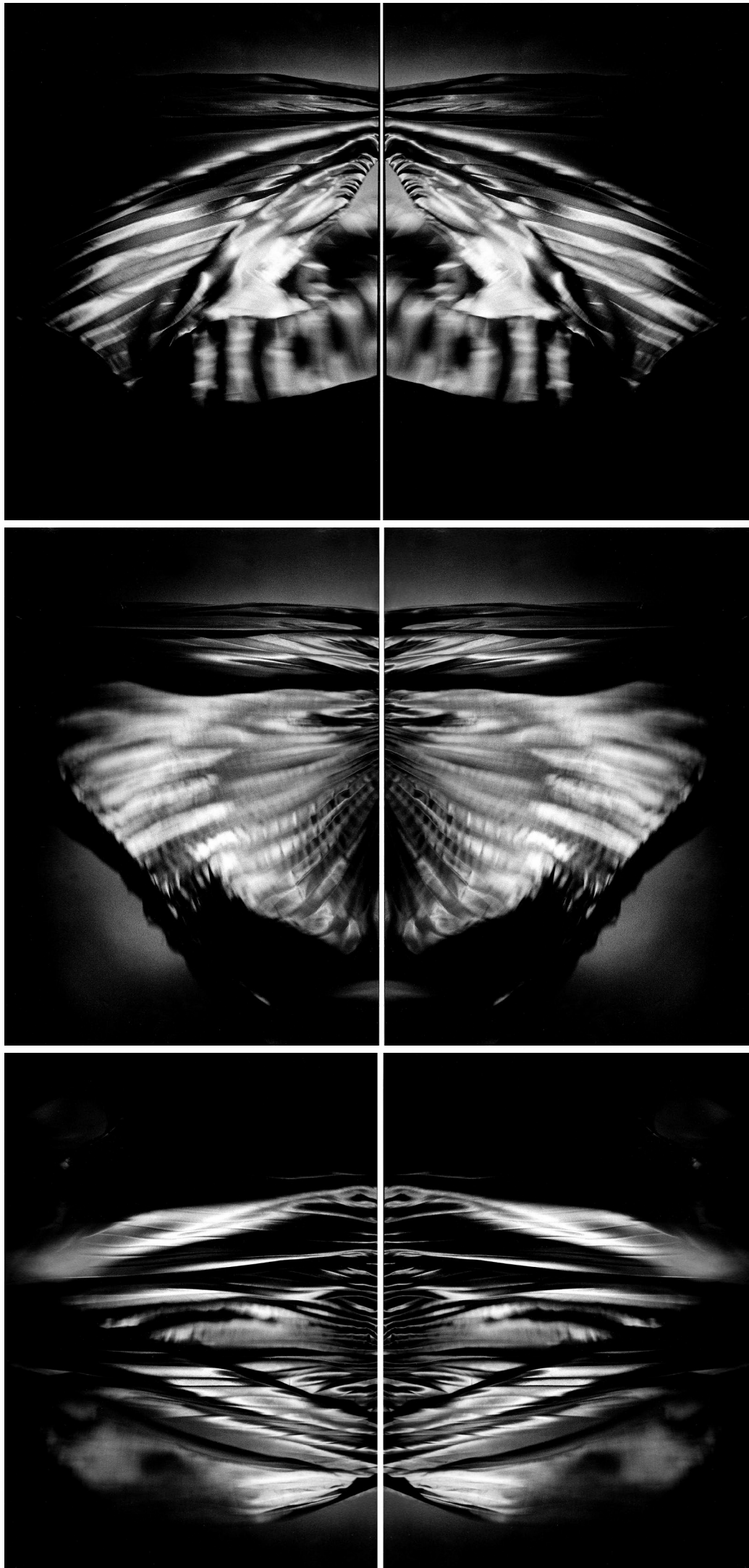


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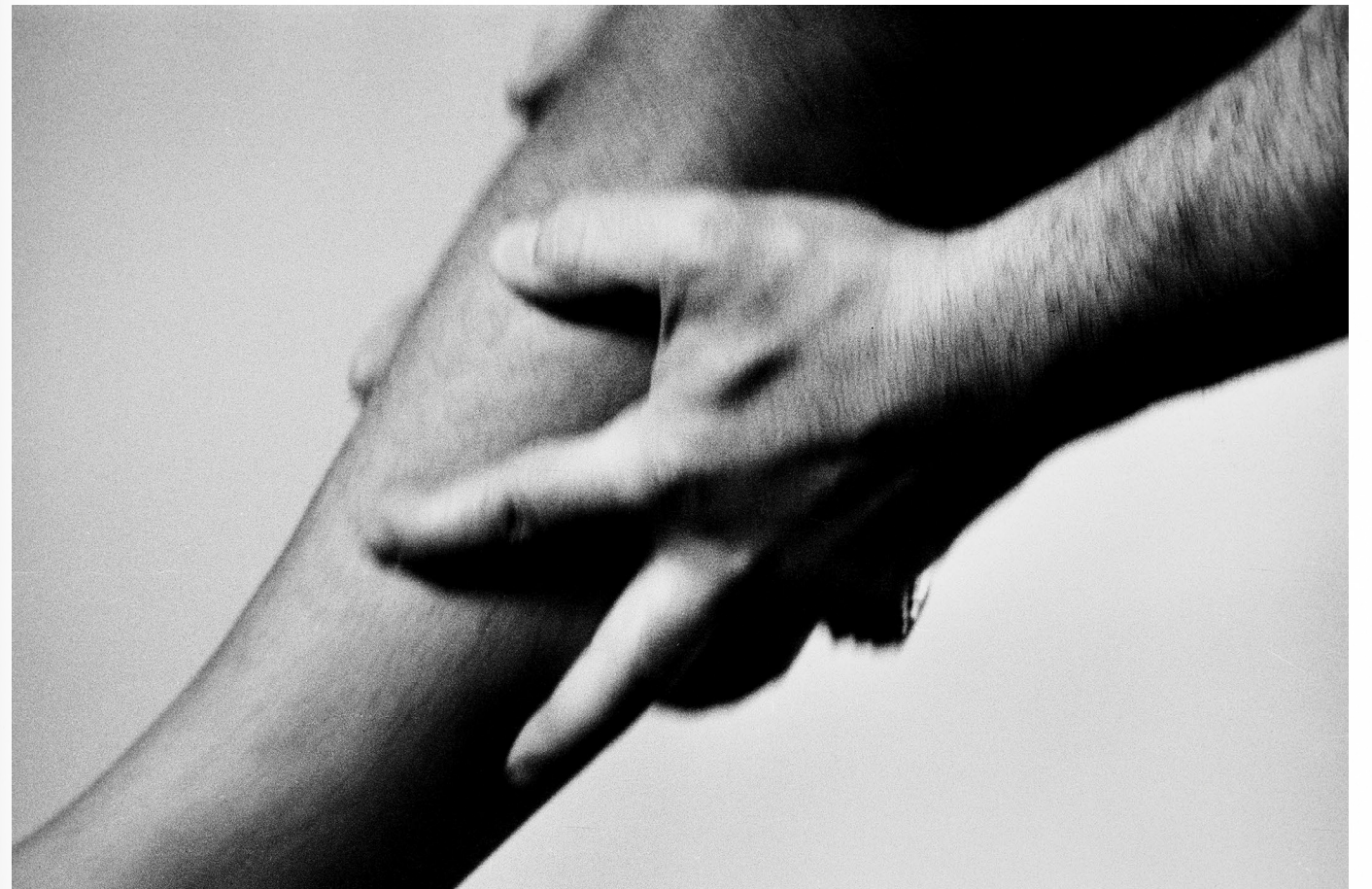


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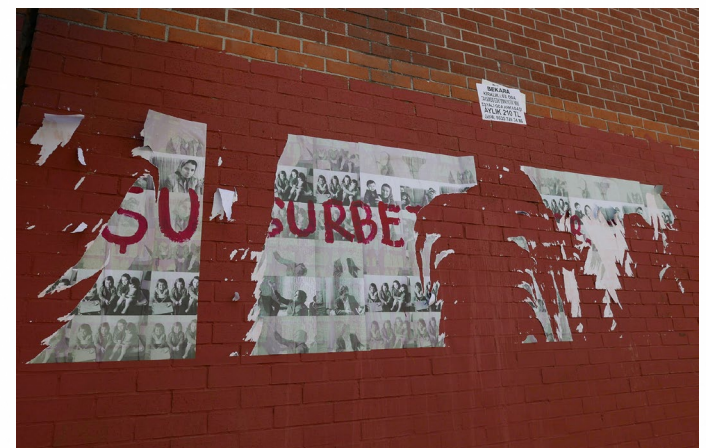




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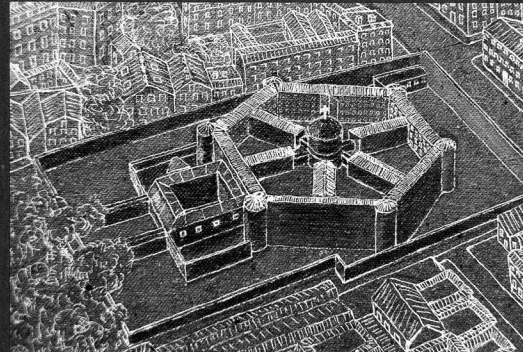
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LE CAR ENTRE DANS UNE GRANDE COUR, UN GARDIEN NOUS AMENE DANS UNE SALLE OÙ IL Y A DEUX FEMMES EN BLANC. J'AI ÉTÉ APPELÉE ET RESORTI UNE DEMI-HEURE APRÈS AVEC UNE ROBE.



LA PRISON: UNE CASERNE UN PEU STRICTE, UNE ÉCOLE SANS INDULGENCE, UN SOMBRE ATELIER, MAIS À LA LIMITE, RIEN DE QUALITATIVEMENT DIFFÉRENT. (MICHEL FOUCHAULT SURVEILLER ET ANIMÉ)



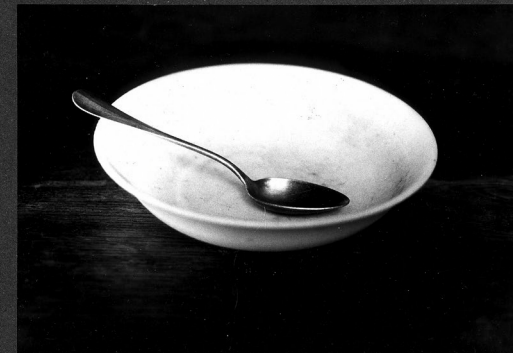
IT WAS MY TURN TO JOIN. NAME, DATE OF BIRTH, ETC. "TAKE YOUR CLOTHES OFF!" I START UNDRESSING IN FRONT OF THE TWO OLD BAGS. I WAS ALL IN BLACK, BOOTS, LEWIS, AND MY COSSACK SHIRT. AND, ON TOP OF IT ALL, I HAD THE CURSE. THEY MADE ME TAKE EVERYTHING OFF ANYWAY. "SPREAD YOUR LEGS! COUGH!" AND SO ON.... THEY SEARCHED MY CLOTHES,



AND THEY KEPT MY JEANS. PANTS WEREN'T ALLOWED IN THE PRISON. THEY MADE ME PUT ON A THING THAT LOOKED MORE LIKE A POTATO SACK THAN A DRESS. IT WAS BROWN, WITH BUTTONS IN FRONT, AND LONG SLEEVES. THEY CALLED THIS RAG A BURLAP DRESS, AND UNTIL I GOT



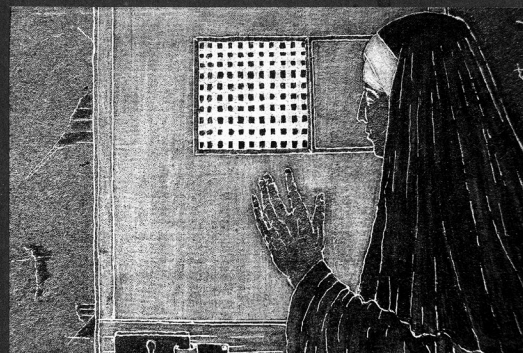
THEN SHE TOOK ME TO THE LINEN ROOM WHERE SHE GAVE ME TWO SHEETS, THREE BLANKETS, A BASIN, AND A PITCHER. FROM THERE WE WENT ON SEVERAL WALKWAYS IN THE MIDDLE OF WHICH WAS A CHAPEL. IT WAS SO DAMN COLD. IT WAS ABOUT ELEVEN AT NIGHT.



A WOMAN (CONVICT) CAME TO GET ME, AND I WALKED DOWN A LONG HALL. SHE LED ME INTO A ROOM WHERE THERE WAS A TABLE AND A BENCH. SHE ASKED ME IF I WANTED SOME SOUP. I ACCEPTED WITH PLEASURE, SEEING IT WAS COLD AS HELL; I TOOK TWO HELPINGS. THEN SHE



LES DIMANCHES ÉTAIENT DIFFÉRENTS DES AUTRES JOURS. LE MATIN CERTAINES ALLAIENT À LA MESSE, ET LES AUTRES RESTAIENT ENFERMÉES DANS LES CELLULES, MAIS ON POUVAIT ÊTRE DANS LES CELLULES DE NOS AMIES. CE JOUR-LÀ, ON NE TRAVAILAIT PAS.



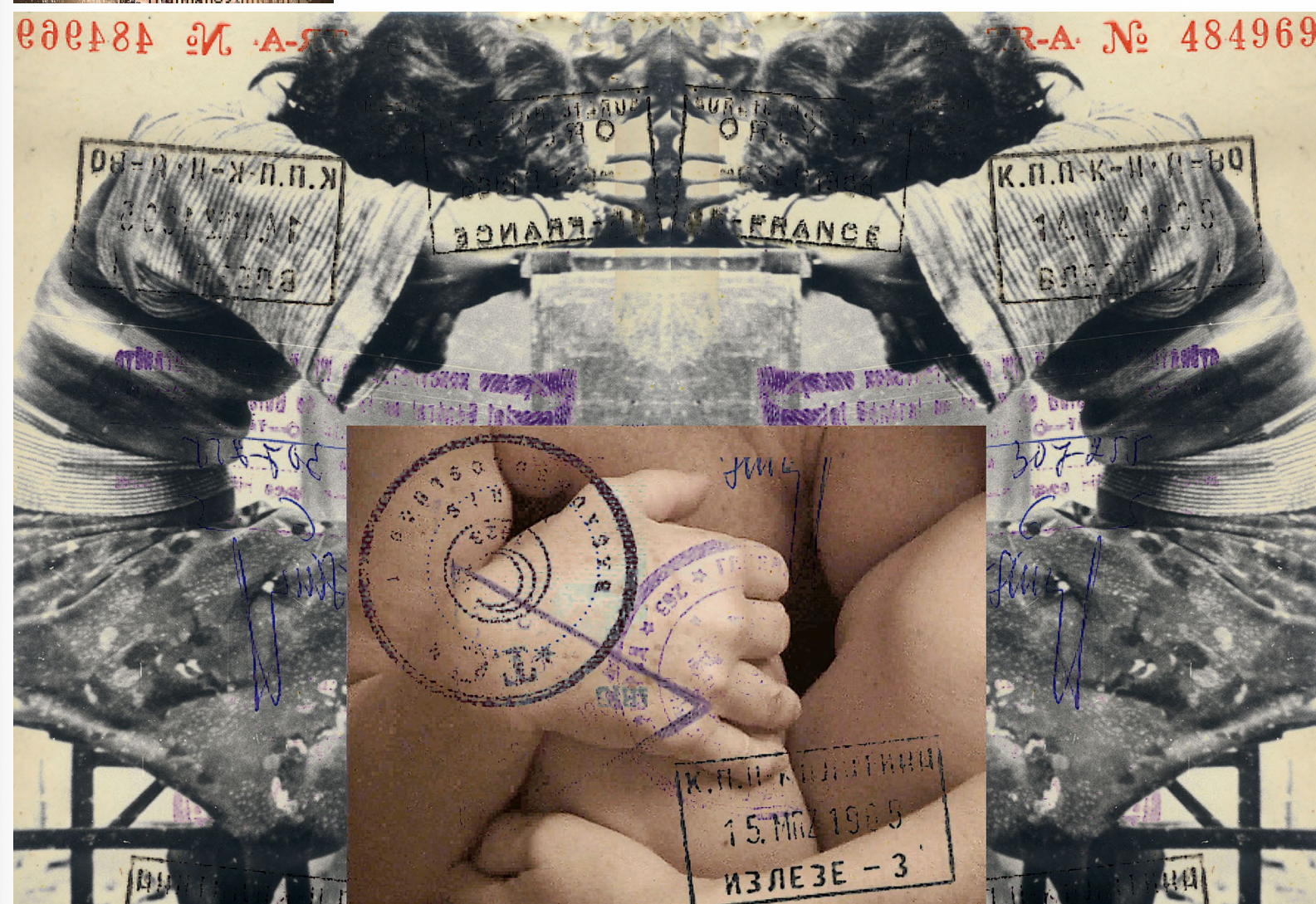
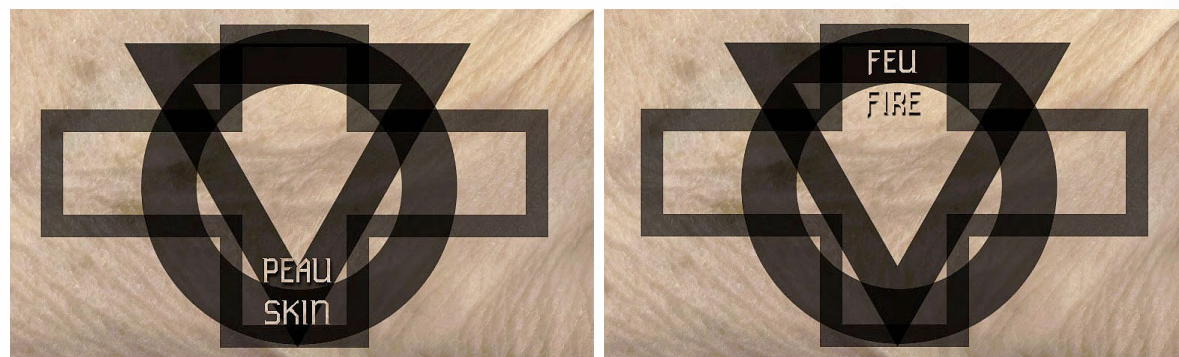
À NEUF HEURES LES SŒURS FERMÈRENT LES CELLULES. ELLES REGARDÈRENT PAR LE JUSQU'À COGNÈRENT SUR LA PORTE JUSQU'À CE QU'ON MONTRE SA TÊTE OU QU'ON BOUGE, POUR VOIR SI ON NE S'ÉTAIT PAS ÉVADÉ.



BUT I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT LONG BECAUSE THE CHICK NEXT TO ME STARTED TALKING. FIRST SHE ASKED ME FOR A SMOKE, WHICH I GAVE HER, AND SHE ADVISED ME TO KEEP THE BUTT. THEN SHE TOLD ME TO HIDE ALL MY STUFF BECAUSE MARIE-THERESE WAS A THIEF!



...BECAUSE MARIE-THERESE WAS A THIEF!.. THE OTHER ONE HEARD THIS AND THEY STARTED QUARELLING IN WHISPERS. FOR MY FIRST NIGHT THERE WAS ATMOSPHERE. FINALLY THEY SHUT UP PROMISING TO SETTLE THE FIGHT THE NEXT DAY. I FELL ASLEEP BECAUSE I WAS SO TIRED. 10 DECEMBER 66.



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by Omar Kholeif

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P. 1

Terra Nomade, 1997. Interactive CD-ROM.
Courtesy of the artist

P. 2–3

From **Circular Rituals**, 1992. Video tape accompanied by 3D images. The work has been re-imagined, and is illustrated here as **Terra Nomade**, 1997. Interactive CD-ROM. The work revolves around a journey through 17th century popular Turkish poetry. Courtesy of the artist and Ab-Anbar, London

P. 4

Paintings of **Pixelismus (La Chora)**, 1994. Mixed-media paintings on canvas. Twenty-four variations on the Byzantine Church of the Chora in Istanbul. Courtesy of the artist

P. 5

Archiforms, 1967/1970. Painting on canvas, animated here through a computer generated single-channel video, 2011. Courtesy of the artist and Ab-Anbar, London

P. 6–7

Details from **Pyramis ou le Voyage d'Eudore**, 1987. Three-channel video installation broadcast on twelve monitors. Courtesy of the artist

P. 8–9

Installation view **Topak Ev**, 1973. A nomad's tent used to examine private and public feminine spaces. Installation: tent, drawings, and photographic works. Dimensions variable. Installation view: Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, 1973. Courtesy of the artist

P. 10–11

Details from **Topak Ev**, 1973. Drawings realized on butcher paper. Courtesy of the artist and Ab-Anbar, London

P. 12–13

Nil Yalter in-situ with **Topak Ev**, 1973. Installation: nomad's tent, drawings, and photographic works. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

P. 14–15

Drawings from **Paris Ville Lumière**, 1974. An installation by Nil Yalter and Judy Blum. Installation: 12 meters high. The work is constituted of photographs, drawings, and texts focusing on twenty districts of Paris. Courtesy of the artists

P. 16–19

From **Temporary Dwellings**, 1974. Twelve collages with Polaroid pictures, objects, and drawings of temporary dwellings of immigrants in Paris, New York, and Istanbul. Courtesy of the artist

P. 20–21

Stills from **Harem**, 1980. Installation: B&W video tape, 45 minutes. Video accompanied by drawings and photographs, dimensions variable. The work is a transposition of the daily life of two women in the spaces of an Ottoman Harem. Courtesy of the artist

P. 22–23

Algerian Marriage in France, 1977. Six hand-painted photographs of an Algerian marriage in Dreux, France. Courtesy of the artist

P. 24–27

From the expanded body of work: **Temporary Dwellings**, 1974–79; featuring works: **Turkish Immigrants**, 1977, and **Rahime, Kurdish Woman From Turkey**, 1979. Installation consists of photos and drawings by Nil Yalter. Dimensions variable. Video by Nil Yalter and Nicole Croiset, 1979. Courtesy of the artists

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Stills from **Shaman**, 1979. Installation: B&W video, 7 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

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Shaman, 1974. Silver gelatin print on collage, 51 cm x 65 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Ab-Anbar, London

P. 30–31

Calligraphy, 1992. Installation: video tape with 3D images, 3 minutes. The video draws attention to the relationship between Ottoman calligraphy and to the computer environment, emphasizing the concept of “technology as a medium.” Courtesy of the artist

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Stills from **Exile Is a Hard Job III**, 2009. Installation: video tape, 20 minutes, photographs, text, and painting. Dimensions Variable. Third iteration of the project, which saw Turkish and Portuguese immigrant workers meeting in Paris. Courtesy of the artist

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From **Turkish Immigrants**, 1977–ongoing. Part of **Exile Is a Hard Job**, 1977–ongoing. Installation: multi-channel video. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and Ab-Anbar, London

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Women at Work, Women at Home, 1981. Work by Nil Yalter and Nicole Croiset. A public realm project, La Rochelle Festival. Courtesy of the artists

P. 110–111

Paintings by Nil Yalter. Clockwise:
Archiform – Pink Tension, 1969. Acrylic on canvas
Diptych, 1968. Acrylic on canvas
Circular Tension, 1969. Acrylic on canvas
UNTITLED, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 270 cm × 250 cm
Circular Tension III, 1967. Acrylic on canvas
Optical Cubes, 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 250 cm × 150 cm
Red Tension, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 150 cm × 125 cm
Green Tension, 1967. Acrylic on canvas, 220 cm × 140 cm

Images of Nil Yalter's paintings are courtesy of the artist and Ab-Anbar, London

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Stills from **Hommage à Marquis de Sade**, 1989. Installation: video with six monitors along with a text of Marquis de Sade with the quote “Nothing belongs to me; nothing originates from me.” Courtesy of the artist.

P. 114–115

Silver gelatin prints from **The AmbassaDRESS**, 1978. Installation: video, 7 minutes, large white dress, photographs, drawings. Courtesy of the artist.

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Close-up of video from: **The AmbassaDRESS**, 1978. Courtesy of the artist.

P. 118–119

Photographs from **Le Chevalier d'Eon**, 1978. Installation: B&W video, 15 minutes, seven photographs, three paintings. To quote the artist, **Le Chevalier d'Eon** is “based on the story of a ManWoman”. Courtesy of the artist

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Installation views of the public installation: **Exile Is a Hard Job** (walls), 1975/2012–ongoing. Scenes featured here include: Valencia, Metz, Mumbai, Vienna, Istanbul, Brussels, Cologne, New York, and Sharjah. Courtesy of the artist

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Turkish Immigrants, 1977. Photographs and pencil on cardboard. Courtesy of the artist

P. 124–125

La Rouquette, Prison for Women, 1974. Installation: photographs and drawings on cardboard, folder with photographs and text, B&W video. Courtesy of the artist and Ab-Anbar, London

P. 126–127

Diyarbakir/Mardin/Istanbul, 2005. Interactive DVD-ROM. Realized in partnership with ACEV early childhood illiteracy program in France. Courtesy of the artist

Front and Back Cover: Detail from **Harem**, 1980. Installation: B&W video tape, 45 minutes. Accompanied by drawings and photographs. The work revolves around an exchange between two women in the spaces of an Ottoman Harem. Image courtesy of the artist

Nil Yalter



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