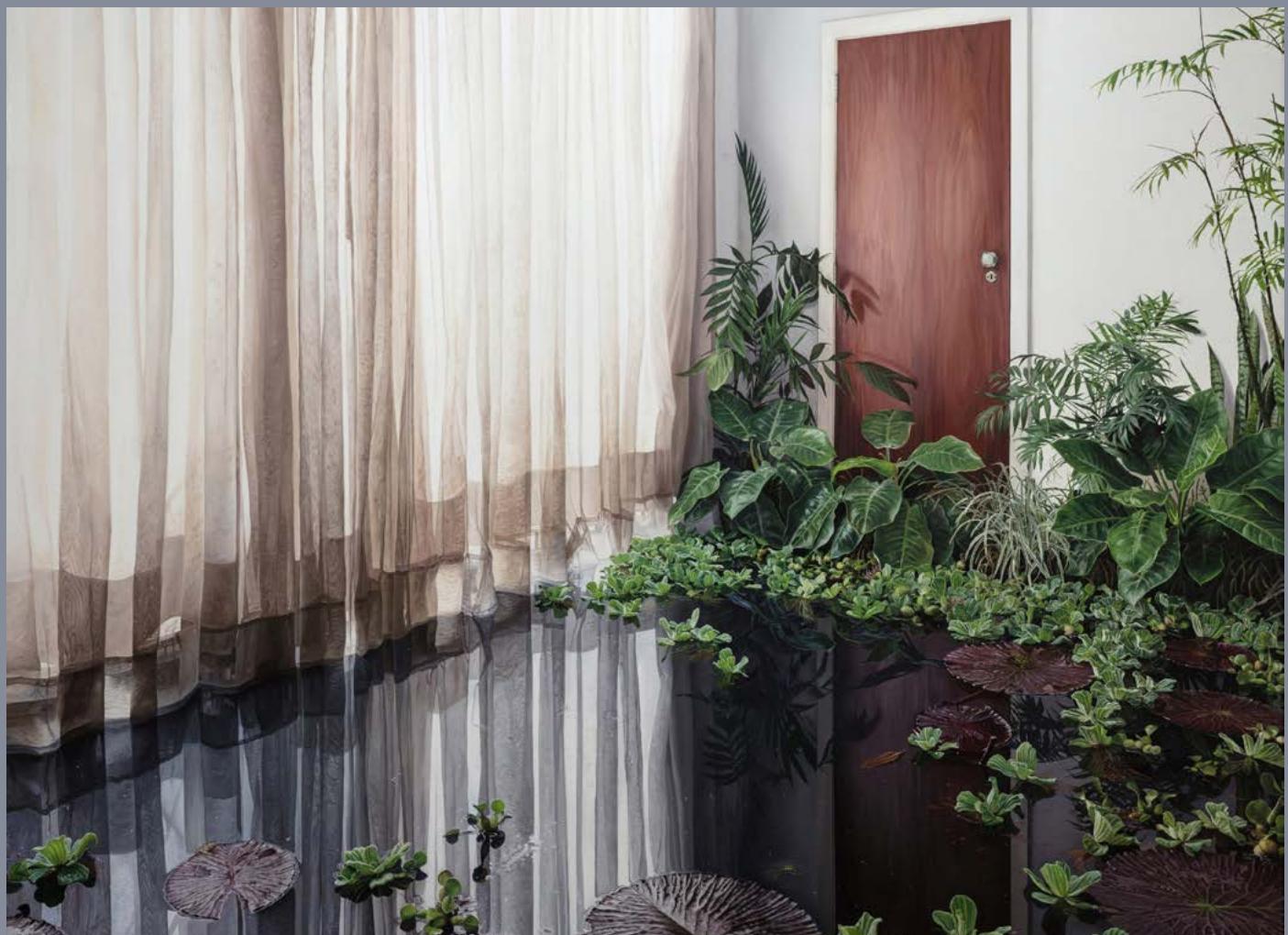


# *O Sole Mio*

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ISSUE 07

27 May 2020



Darren Almond  
Shezad Dawood  
Ana Elisa Egreja  
Ana Gallardo  
Layla Diba

**Parasol unit**

foundation for contemporary art

# Imagining the Sun

Within the context of the *O Sole Mio* digital exhibition during this period of Covid-19 lockdown, and thanks to the many artistic and intellectual contributions, we are discovering ever more about the many representations and meanings embodied by the sun. The first two online issues explored the importance of the sun, light, hope, love and optimism as embedded in the iconic song '*O Sole Mio*'. All these attitudes help us to overcome the fear and pain of the coronavirus and to work towards a better future. However, in subsequent issues we had to face up to the less positive and undesirable aspects of the pandemic: shock, fear, the importance of recognising early signs of danger and, finally, the need to reflect on what has led us into today's outrageously dramatic reality. Next, we oriented our attention towards examining our own physical and mental states of mind and being during isolation, as well as considering how they have been affected and are evolving over time. For



example, after having digested countless reports and images of devastating situations around the world and our own confinement, we may have reflected deeply on what it means when we talk about the human condition. We may have placed the whole emphasis on our senses, those incredibly important

human faculties that many of us have neglected during the busy years prior to Covid-19. Issue 06, for example, discusses our heightened sense of perception when an unseen danger brings us face to face with the reality of who and what we are. But, do our senses lead us towards truth? Much of the truth in life, according to the Greek philosopher Plato,

can be reached through philosophical reasoning, as demonstrated in his 'Allegory of the Cave' in which prisoners see as a physical reality the shadows cast by the sun or a fire.

Throughout our lives we have taken it for granted that the sun exists as part of the universe's inventory. Along with its

many actual functions, for we humans the sun also represents joy, warmth and happiness. Indeed, after cold or stormy weather, we particularly appreciate a sunny day, which is precisely the subject of the song '*O Sole Mio*'. But do we fully realise the roles and the importance of the sun? Is it a coincidence that all of Europe has basked in warm and sunny days during the period of lockdown? We hear, of course, that this particularly clement weather heralds a hot, dry and inclement summer in which, while living with Covid-19, we will surely face a vivid and heated discussion about the unresolved warming of our climate.

Like many others, I have attempted to understand the many roles played by the sun. Whenever we hear this short word of just three letters, an image of it inevitably springs to mind and our other senses come to life. We see, we hear, we smell, and we recall our taste and tactile experience of earlier events. True, a sunny day is a joyous concept in this world, but in reality it is much more than that. Thanks to the Covid-19 lockdown, this meaningful project and the numerous innovative contributions it has generated, I have learned to recognise and appreciate a wider range of meanings attributed to the sun and how vital they are in all our lives. Therefore, several future issues of *O Sole Mio* will attempt to unravel the many meanings of the word, its image, concept, and so many of its other roles. As powerful as the word 'sun' is, it is also crucial to understand its importance.

For most of us the appearance of the

sun and light are a joyous occurrence, but for others they might unleash existential considerations, such as the distinction between reality and illusion, as they did for Plato's prisoners in the cave. *Al-Ludra / A Pocket Sun*, Darren Almond's exquisite video of the sun, is not only an astute observation and interpretation of the blazing star, it is also a great starting point for this conversation. In his brief video, a glowing orb hovers within dark space. Seduced by its purity, simplicity and reductiveness, I am utterly thrilled to look at it on my handheld device. It is indeed a beautiful image that can appear and disappear with ease. In many ways, I have taken it as a welcome gift, particularly at a time when the sheer fact of our existence hangs on little more than a thin thread. In its purity and simplicity, *Al-Ludra / A Pocket Star* stands out beyond anything we could imagine. We could look at it, enjoy it, and go about our lives. Or we could take another approach and take it as a starting point for some critical learning and reflection. I encourage us to do the latter.

In my initial conversation with Darren Almond about his *Al-Ludra / A Pocket Star*, he gracefully stated, 'I think it fits rather beautifully with the title of your digital exhibition. I also really like how the footage migrates from my hand to yours as you watch it on your phone, reaffirming our collective communion with our closest star.' It meant a great deal to me to grasp Almond's state of mind. Particularly in these challenging times, the sun in this delicate work stands for and informs our collective

solidarity. Indeed, as soon as we play this brief video of the sun on the screen of our own device, it takes on its own dynamic by seeming to float in an undefined space, which in turn empowers our imagination. How magical and surreal it is to think that while there is only one sun in our solar system, any one of us can hold it in the palm of our hand, and that on a device which, ironically, over the past two decades has become a unifying element in the lives of most people.

Shezad Dawood's imagination could author an endless number of science fiction stories and be the steadfast protagonist in every single one of them. *Sunspots* is a revealing video work undertaken in collaboration with his sister and brother, Samya and Mikayl Dawood, during the Covid-19 lockdown in London. In analysing the concept of the sun, Shezad Dawood calls on the works of a number of contemporary fiction writers as well as one of the greatest philosophers in human history, Plato, in order to examine truth, but also the boundaries between the human condition and senses, which do not always reveal the truth.

In Dawood's carefully staged and orchestrated installation, a succession of intriguing images, in which an open laptop bearing various texts and images is juxtaposed with evergreen houseplants in different types of pot, and a number of books whose authors have seemingly influenced Dawood. The peach colour of the background may accentuate the domesticity of an otherwise uncanny

setting. Revealingly, Dawood's use of 'The Sun Going South', a poem by Ursula K. Le Guin, strangely echoes not only the situation in Plato's cave but also the restricted conditions of our life today. Le Guin's mere use of the word 'sun' has the power to generate a multitude of images in our mind. They in turn can engender profound feelings which hopefully prompt us to look more deeply into what they mean. Dawood assuredly reaches some enlightening thoughts, as in the text accompanying his images he references Plato's cave, a concept that directs us to distinguish the difference between reality and illusion, to disentangle any confusion for which our senses are the culprits.

In her paintings Ana Elisa Egreja, too, manifests an intriguing vision of the sun, which causes confusion between reality and illusion. The output of Egreja's imagination can seem nostalgic or even uncanny, particularly in the way she employs light to create visual tension between illusion and reality. Whether her paintings depict the quaint domestic environment of some bygone era, describe the treasured memories of a former family home, or record a vacated building destined for imminent destruction, they each have an energy capable of harnessing sensory feelings and subsequently authoring an unusual and uncanny atmosphere, as for example in *Canto da poça*, 2017, which ironically was painted three years before the Covid-19 lockdown. Egreja is one of a number of painters whose vision is very much in tune with the realities of our time. They do entertain, but above all they prompt us to think and question. As

in the allegory of Plato's cave, the realities painted in Egreja's works are only the tip of an iceberg – a greater truth it seems is submerged in the water.

While imagining the sun, Ana Gallardo sees it, above all, in relation to the land and water, because together these three generate growth and renewal. Gallardo's vision in these challenging times remains, therefore, hopefully and optimistically focused on the natural world. Recognising the flexibility of the medium of drawing, Gallardo indulges in creating elaborate and often large-scale drawings in which renewal of life is the quintessential protagonist.

In the reflection section of this issue, Iranian-born scholar of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Iranian art, Layla Diba provides some enticing images and insightful background to a totally different culture. The *Khorshid Khanum* (Maiden Sun) is one of the most enduring images in the history and culture of

Iran, which has traditionally venerated images of femininity. Apparently, images of the sun first appeared connected to the cult of the divinity Mitra in the first century CE, while the image of the Maiden Sun has evolved over time. Diba's research has brought us a 1957 reincarnation of that with a profusion of idealised modern images, painted by Jazeh Tabatabai (1931–2008). A member of the Saqqakhaneh movement, named after the water fountains that are at the heart of any traditional coffee or tea house, Tabatabai, like other Saqqakhaneh artists, created a visual language that in the main depicted genre images from Iranian cultural artefacts. In his fantasised representations of the sun and idealised women, Tabatabai's thoughts hover between the reality and illusion of his sensory feelings. How would they respond to the truth?

Ziba Ardalan  
Founder, Artistic and Executive Director

Photograph by Ziba Ardalan.

# Darren Almond

## *Our Tranquil Star*



*For a discussion of stars our language is inadequate and seems laughable, as if someone were trying to plough with a feather. It's a language that was born with us, suitable for describing objects more or less as large and as long-lasting as we are; it has our dimensions, it's human.*

Primo Levi, 'A Tranquil Star'

I have always held dear to me that elegant text, quoted here from a short story by Primo Levi. His life's work was a companion to me many years ago when I was making visits and repeat visits to the Auschwitz Museum, Oswiecim Poland. However, in his short story, Levi attempts to address the scaling of language, with particular attention drawn to its failing of relations in the measure of the night sky and beyond. I hadn't read it for a while but rereading it recently I was taken aback by how closely the opening paragraphs relate to the work I am presenting in this *O Solo Mio* online exhibition.

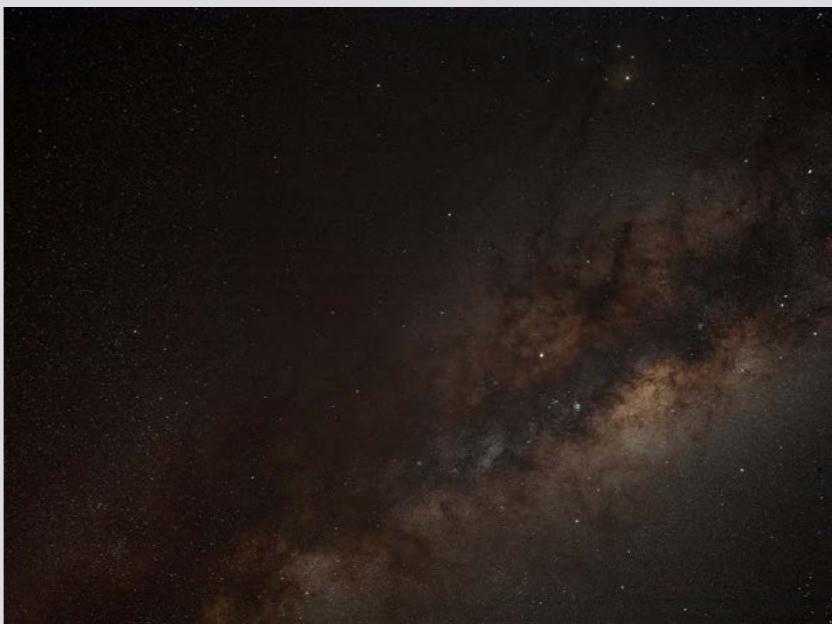
Certain details are uncanny in their relation to this piece of video as well as to our current time.

I filmed the video clip at the Griffith Observatory, Los Angeles, just as a regular visitor, with no special permit or professional after-hours access. I had happened upon their Solarscope, a telescope with all the necessary filters in place, pointing directly at and tracking our star, the Sun. Projected in real time and through a series of mirrors and lenses there appears a small white

disc or globe that reflects into view off a black mirror. At first glance it appears to be an image of our moon, but then we notice small imperfections that are distinctive as sunspots or solar bursts. This slight slip between vision and comprehension highlights the incredible position that we occupy here on Earth. How can it be that such a situation of happenstance can have such an elegance and beauty? After colliding with our planet our moon was unable to escape the Earth's gravitational pull, yet could situate itself in a position of orbit where, when alignment occurs, the moon's eclipse

is exactly the same size as our sun which lies light years away and is incomparable in terms of scale. A mathematical wonder of the natural world, bar none.

So, with my phone in hand I shot as much video as I could whilst trying to avoid all the interior reflections of the observatory. I held the camera as still as I could, just as I had done back in 1997 with my 8-mm film camera in a snowstorm at the entrance to the Auschwitz Museum. This time however



the technology had changed. I noticed that the auto-focussing mechanism within the phone's camera was struggling to read a fixed focal length and that these fluctuations added something indiscriminate but significant to the footage, a visual pulse, as though perhaps the star itself, our sun, was oscillating between huge magnitudes of difference. Indeed, and after rereading Primo's short story, this star, our star, was behaving as the capricious one, 'Al-Ludra'.

Darren Almond works across all media, including film, sculpture, painting and photography. His works often explore the symbolic and emotional capacity of objects, places and situations to produce evocative reflections on time that have both personal and historical resonance.

Darren Almond (1971-) was born in Wigan, England, and is now based in London. In 2008, Parasol unit presented his solo exhibition *Fire Under Snow* in their London gallery.

Notes: The short story by Primo Levi, 'A Tranquil Star', Penguin Books, 2007, translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein, can be read online at The New Yorker:  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/02/12/a-tranquil-star>

In his story, Primo Levi refers to an ancient Arabian observer of the sky, who named a randomly oscillating star *al-Ludra* (the capricious one).

Images: Darren Almond, *Al-Ludra / Pocket Star*, 2020. Colour video still; *Light of Time IX*, 2018. *Al-Ludra / Pocket Star*, 2020. Colour video, dur. 1 min. All three works © Darren Almond.



Click on image to view *Al-Ludra / A Pocket Star*, 2020, by Darren Almond.

# Shezad Dawood

*Sunspots*



When I think of the sun, I think of the inner spiritual sun: a concept from both Western esoteric schools and the Eastern hermetic traditions they draw from. A space where the Russian occultist and philosopher Helena Petrovna Blavatsky drew upon first Vedic and then Buddhist ideas to help articulate a singular cosmology.

The sun based on this fundamental esoteric starting point, recurs across my practice as both an externalisation of this concept and a marker directing the viewer back within.

Sitting at home in lockdown, as the weather turns ever more beautiful, and

the sun looms larger through the shadows of my partially obfuscated windows (somewhat akin to Plato's metaphor of the cave, wherein the prisoners in a cave mistake the shadows that they see for real objects, rather than projections cast by the light of a fire that is directly behind them), I yearn for the solace that my own personal or inner spiritual sun can provide. At the same time, I find myself distracted by the superficial luminosity of screens – don't worry, I'm aware of the essential contradiction of providing screen content in writing this!

Two recurring features strike a chord or infiltrate my consciousness as viral

memes – take your pick. The first, a regularly recurring set of sponsored Insta posts, pertaining to images of pot plants on 'neutral' white or pastel photographic backdrops, almost as if the mad god of memes has singled me out for the cheeriness and companionship that owning a pot plant will bring me in lockdown. The other is a constantly self-generating set of lists across various platforms, endorsed, ghost-authored or composed by a varying degree of celebrity (and in line with our distorted fascination for fame, however fleeting). These are lists of books, films, bucket lists and podcasts, as if suddenly we are all on sabbatical and therefore can't think for ourselves.

So, I decided to respond playfully to all these contexts and backdrops floating around in my consciousness by creating a set of images and one video poem using a less neutral and more 'fleshy' peach backdrop, with a screen or a set

of books and a pot plant in each one. I like this minimal series of gestures, which incorporate a set of key references (via the books and poem) to my own imaginary of the future (whether dystopian, thrilling or more nuanced), somehow deriving from all the authors on it: Doris Lessing's achingly beautiful testimony to the inhabitants of Planet 8 facing the demise of their species and their planet with elegance and grace. Julia Kristeva's analysis of the Black Sun, as a key wellspring for considering melancholia through literature, art and religion, not as pathology but as a discursive space to be inhabited. And of course Samuel R. Delany's masterpiece *Dhalgren*, which for me was a key turning point as a non-white subject with a more playful approach to gender and belonging than a lot of my generation and certainly my parents' generation (my father was very much part of the counter-culture in the 1960s – on stage at Woodstock and involved



in anti-Vietnam war protests, but each generation must of course go further than the furthest point of the previous generation, and start to see this as a necessary and regular updating).

My own work *Black Sun* featured in my show at Parasol unit in 2014, directly connecting to my own journey of research and making exhibitions, and how the themes and concepts running beneath these continue and recur. (In 2013, I had also curated an exhibition and accompanying publication entitled 'Black Sun' for the Devi Art Foundation in Delhi.) And the exploding sunspots mark the opening of Episode 1 of my *Leviathan Cycle* of films that launched in Venice in 2017, attempting to collectively imagine a future 20–50 years from now. Speaking of collectives, this project has also taken on a further family dimension: my sister Samya who lives with me has worked in the art department for films as diverse as Batman and Star Wars, and makes playfully transgressive ceramics – she has helped me art direct. And our brother Mikayl, a musician and producer, has edited the video poem so it feels as if the lonely laptop in isolation is typing itself, and for its own pleasure. He has also added his own experimental score derived from deconstructing the 'noise' generated by the sun. The video poem is one of my favourite poems by Ursula K. Le Guin, who remains (like Olivia Butler) a great humanist and influence on my visceral imagination –

who better to accompany one into and beyond lockdown? And now we are here in 2020, considering what the sun means to each one of us and to our collective unconscious and yearning.

Shezad Dawood works across the disciplines of film, performance, painting, neon, sculpture and virtual reality. Fascinated by the esoteric, otherness, the environment and architectures, both material and virtual, Dawood often mines the past to explore the future, interweaving stories, realities and symbolism to create richly layered artworks.

Shezad Dawood (1974–) was born in London, where he is now based. He studied at Central St Martin's and the Royal College of Art before undertaking a PhD at Leeds Metropolitan University. He is a Senior Research Fellow in Experimental Media at the University of Westminster.



[Click on image above to view the video poem \*Sunspots \(For Ursula\)\*, 2020, by Shezad Dawood.](#)

Shezad Dawood, *Sunspots (For Ursula)*, 2020. Digital video with sound, duration: 1'40". Art Direction: Samya Dawood | Editing and Sound: Mikayl Dawood  
Page 10: *Sunspots (Black Sun)*, 2020. Digital image, dimensions variable.  
Page 11: *Sunspots (Book Stack)*, 2020. Digital image, dimensions variable.  
Left: *Sunspots (For Ursula)*, 2020. Digital still, dimensions variable.

# Ana Elisa Egreja

## Ode to Nuance



Shaped by delicate feelings of domesticity and daylight, Ana Elisa Egreja's imagination becomes real as her hand creates life-like images in her paintings. The poetics behind Egreja's scenarios – studied, set up, photographed, filmed and depicted – evoke the artist's narrative. She illuminates her sets with hope and expectation, directing light rays in which viewers can bask.

Daylight warms thoughts, brightens

possibilities, of discovery and, above all, of hope. Images of the sun are often used to symbolise a seemingly infinite passing of time. In his book *The Parasite* the French philosopher Michel Serres refers to the star as 'an energetic horizon, fuel for a huge artistic community, which has encouraged and infused the strength and positivity of inspiration, leading the creative community to face with open arms challenges and barriers.'

In Ana Elisa Egreja's compositions, light shapes and gives body to the depicted scenarios, it illuminates what is abandoned, embellishes the very last view of a house soon to be demolished, draws the contours of reality with green and shiny reflections on the back of a leaf. The sun is simultaneously the object and subject of this dialectic, a narrative that is not exclusive to the artist's imagination but pertains also to the people and their home.

The bond between the Brazilian artist and sunlight is not just a formal interpretation of reality, but lies in the semiotics and composition. Egreja's painting *Canto da poça* (puddle corner) evinces poeticism and the feelings it conveys. The setting, though apparently surreal, pierces and probes today's societal condition during a time of isolation. The room appears to be stuck in time, in the aftermath of a once disastrous flood – the water, now, at rest.

The lively colours of nature are reminiscent of an outdoor place. The environment within the room is almost breathable by its viewers, a distorted but familiar normalcy of an everyday life that has been lost.

Ana Elisa Egreja born (1983–) lives and works in São Paulo. This Brazilian artist painter graduated from FAAP | Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, São Paulo, in 2005. Between 2014 and 2017, Egreja featured in several prestigious exhibitions in Brazil, notably her solo show *Fabulações* at MAM | Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia. Her works draw a fine line between balance and chaos, rational perspective and spontaneity. Ana Elisa Egreja's practice gravitates towards both painting and architecture. Her creative process is transformative and poetic: in the past, she constructed unexpected settings to syncopate different surroundings. At times delightfully calm or eerily devoid of human life, at others totally delirious and kitsch, each work encapsulates an atmosphere and world of its own.

Contribution from Eugenio Re Rebaudengo, Artuner and Mariolina Affatato and Ludovica Colacino.

Ana Elisa Egreja, *Canto da poça*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 190 x 240 cm (74¾ x 94½ in). Courtesy the artist and Artuner.

# Ana Gallardo

## A Landscape

*Legend has it that the beautiful Zempoatl died for love and there were so many tears shed by her family that seven beautiful lagoons were created.*

*Lagunas de Zempoala* is 90 minutes from Mexico City.

Today, it is a national park that in Nahuatl means twenty, or many, lagoons.

*... This place is very important because, in addition to the species typical of a mixed forest, an abundant combination of algae coexists in one of the lagoons. The largest lagoon is in what used to be the crater of an ancient volcano. It contains various types of algae and was considered one of the lagoons with the greatest variety of aquatic plants in all of Mexico.*

My mother died in 1965, in Rosario. She was born in Santander, Spain.

When she married my father, they started out on a trip intending to go to Mexico City, where my mother's brothers lived. They were to begin their journey from Argentina, where my father's family lived.



They would do this trip overland.

When they arrived in Argentina, their life circumstances were not favourable to their making the desired trip and after a few years, she died.

In 1990, a long time after, I threw her ashes in the Zempoala Lagoon.

Primitive man believed that if they own the symbol or the representation of something, then they possessed it.

The song 'O Sole Mio' takes me, in this period of transit through Covid-19, to an exhibition I did about landscape in 2015, Argentina.

I proposed at the time, a reflection on the possibility of a form of existence after death. I used drawing as a tool to make possible the link with hope.

Drawing as a means to exercise memory recovery, to reconquer emotions and settle in affective places, has also been used as an instrument to ensure vital needs. The caveman drew his most basic desires on cavern walls.

Deeply ingrained in our lives we have an omnipotent magical sense, with which we pretend to dominate adverse natural forces or to enhance favourable ones.

Magic is the way that man must face these natural forces and put them at his service.

Today, the cycle of the sun is what summons me.

Ana Gallardo's works stem from moments that, though forgotten, put aside or hidden, are crucial to the life of their protagonists. The regeneration of such moments – perhaps as a way of reconstructing the self – requires an emotional decision to revive memory. This is done in the form of drawings, sketches of objects, and stories, as if by drawing them, memories can be re-encountered and reposessed. Ana's work has no formal limitations nor is it restricted to a single medium. A common theme is her re-evaluation of 'home' and what constitutes it. She often uses dance

to realise her physical, socially engaged works.

In 2012, Parasol unit presented *A place to live when we are old*, an inter-generational, dance-based piece by Ana Gallardo in collaboration with Ramiro Gallardo and Mario Gomez Casas, as a Parasol Public event in Bishops Square, East London.

Ana Gallardo (1958–) was born in Rosario, Argentina, and is now based in Mexico City.

Page 16: Ana Gallardo, *Study for a Landscape Construction: Zempoala lagoon*, 2015. Charcoal on paper, 300 x 270 cm (118½ x 106½ in). Courtesy Brun-Cattaneo Collection, Buenos Aires.

## Reflection by Layla Diba

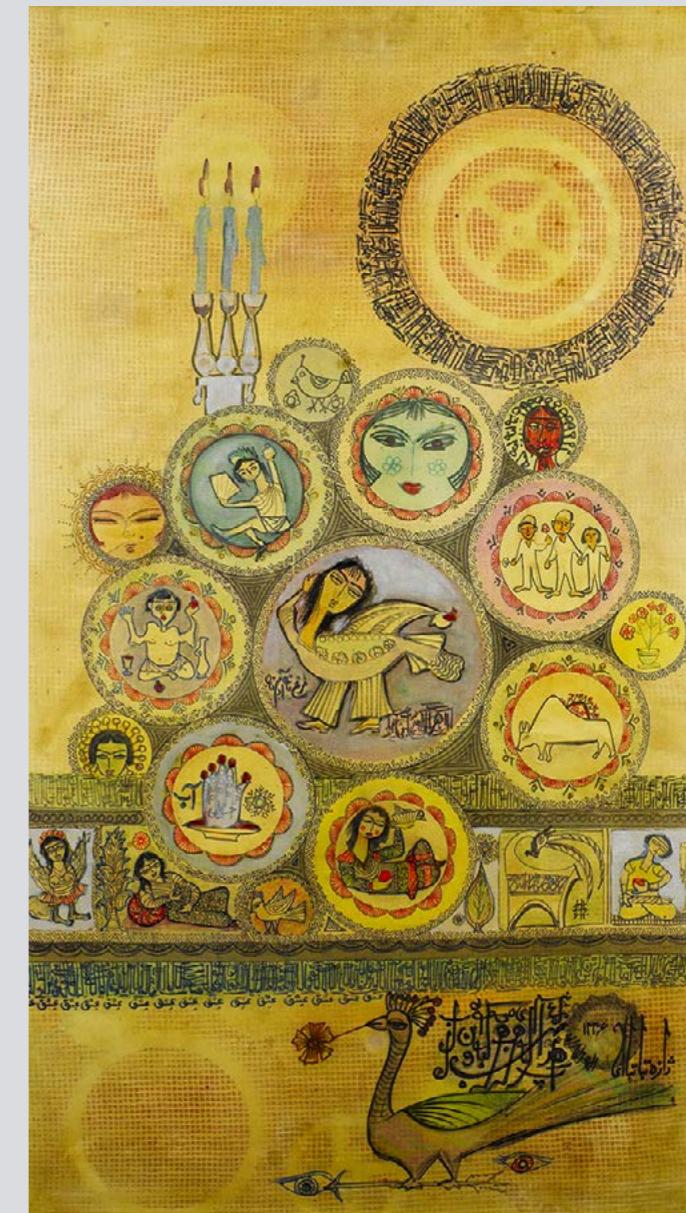
### *The Maiden Sun and the Pandemic*

On hearing the first words and notes of 'O Sole Mio' I think not of Pavarotti and the Bay of Naples, nor of lemons ripening in the sun of Amalfi or of the rippling waves of a gondola in Venice. I think of the eternal Iranian emblem of the Maiden Sun known as *Khorshid Khanum*, born of the scorched earth of deserts and verdant plains of the Caspian Sea. For if the sun is a universal symbol of hope and strength whose powerful rays bring fertility and renewal, it is also one of Iran's longest lasting and continually evolving images. The Maiden

Sun is rendered as a circular disc with emanating rays. This gendered image features the face of a young woman with conjoined eyebrows, almond shaped eyes and a rosebud mouth – the visual

expression of a feminine ideal, especially in the nineteenth century.

In this age of the Covid-19 pandemic, Iran has been one of the countries most affected by the virus – a country already reeling from international sanctions and economic recession. Images of corpses, overflowing hospital beds and mass graves were at first everywhere in the media, but eventually were succeeded by images of courage and hope in the form of song and dance, long forbidden in the Islamic



Republic of Iran. The sun has shone on the Iranian lands for thousands of years and today may again inspire hope, resilience, and solidarity in the Iranian people.

In ancient Iran, solar imagery was associated with the cult of the god Mitra and appeared on Lurestan bronzes and Sasanian metalwork. In medieval times it is found in illustrated manuscript treatises in tandem with the image of a lion as the astrological sign of Leo. The Maiden Sun appears as a decorative motif on ceramics, metalwork and on medicine bowls. The solar disc's meaning is not merely decorative or astrological but apotropaic, as are many other images and sayings of medieval Iran. From the fifteenth century onwards in the Timurid and Safavid eras, it acquires a political significance and emerges as a national emblem in the nineteenth century with the advent of the Qajar dynasty.

The Maiden Sun projected an image of imperial ambitions and royal splendour while the country was mired in poverty and corruption and was increasingly powerless in the face of European and Russian expansionism. A bleak image, which is somehow warmed by the rays of the Maiden Sun. In European Orientalist poetry and travel accounts Iran is frequently referred to as the Land of the Lion and Sun, a metaphor which ultimately becomes a universal trope.

The image is closely associated with the ruler and the nation, especially the second ruler Fath Ali Shah, a notable patron of the arts. Fath Ali Shah aimed to project an image of resplendent power with monumental paintings of himself enthroned with his many sons, elaborate court displays and his bejewelled regalia and costumes. The Maiden Sun

is the perfect symbol for this era, as she embodies the qualities of majesty and glory associated with the ruler in Iran since antiquity. In the Qajar era, she is coupled with the rampant lion on Qajar flags and standards, orders and medals are named after her, as is one of the bejewelled Qajar platform thrones the *Takht-i Khorshid*. She is depicted, sometimes in association with the dragon, in architectural decoration, furniture, carpets, playing cards, religious banners, and tilework, among many other media. The imagery is ubiquitous on both court and popular levels and proves to be remarkably resilient through the changing times.

In the twentieth century, with the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty, the Maiden Sun's power as a national symbol is retained as it is one of the images found on the Iranian national flag in the form of the Lion and Sun and gives its name to the principal medical foundation, the *Sazman-i Shir-e Khorshid*. The prevalence of the image on tribal carpets and in the accoutrements of popular religious festivals, ensured its survival in modern Iranian art. In the 1960s and 1970s, popular art became the wellspring of a new abstract local modernism known as *Saqqakhaneh* (water fountain) and the motif was appropriated by many of Iran's leading artists, such as Hossein Zenderoudi, Parviz Tanavoli, Nasser Oveissi, Jazeh Tabatabai and even political artists such as Siah Armajani and Nikzad Nodjoumi.

Under the Islamic republic, the image has virtually disappeared in official art

forms, replaced on the national flag with a calligraphic emblem in the name of Allah and by stylised imagery of the tulip referencing the blood of martyrs. However, it continues to be popular in the crafts.

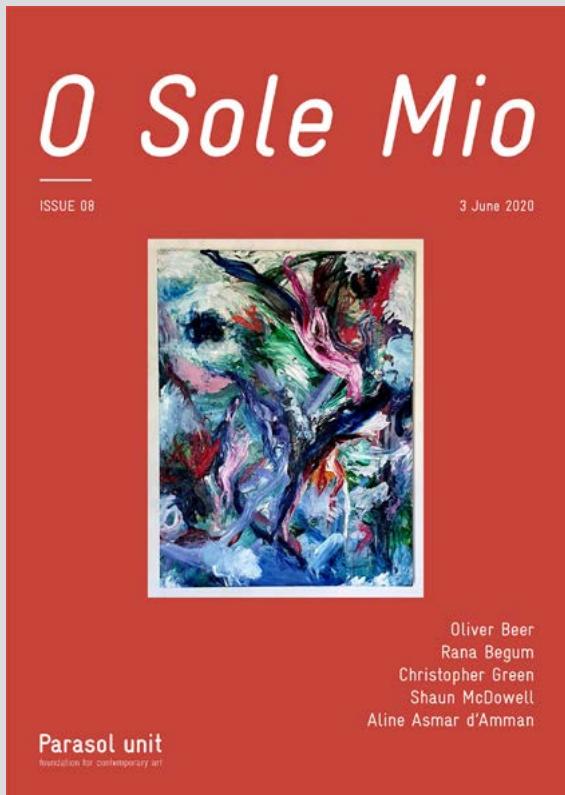
In the final analysis, the theme of the Maiden Sun is remarkably adaptable and fluid. It has evolved and survived over the centuries and will hopefully be reborn in the age of the pandemic to serve again as a resplendent symbol of renewal and optimism.

Layla Diba thanks Manoutchehr Eskandari Qajar and Massoud Nader for their assistance.

Layla Diba is an independent scholar, art advisor and curator. She was Director and Chief Curator of the Negarestan Museum in Teheran (1975–79), art advisor for the Private Secretariat of HM Queen Farah of Iran, and Hagop Kevorkian Curator of Islamic Art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. She is the author of monographic publications on Qajar art, Turkmen Jewellery and Iranian Modern Art and her articles, including over 40 essays on Iranian art, have appeared in numerous scholarly publications. Dr Diba is on the Boards of The Soudavar Memorial Foundation and The National Museum of Asian Art, Charles Lang Freer and Arthur M. Sackler Galleries.

Page 19: Jazeh Tabatabai (1931–2008), *Untitled*, 1957, from the Saqqakhane series. Ink and oil on fabric mounted on canvas. Framed, 177 x 96.8 cm (69½ x 38½ in). Photograph courtesy Bonhams. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holder. The publisher apologises for any error or omission and if notified will gladly correct them.

# Upcoming Issue



**ISSUE 08** featuring works by

Oliver Beer  
Rana Begum  
Christopher Green  
Shaun McDowell  
Aline Asmar d'Amman

Words by Ziba Ardalan, Darren Almond, Shezad Dawood, Layla Diba, Mariolina Affatato and Ludovica Colacino. Copy edited by Helen Wire. Design by Chahine Fellahi and Kirsteen Cairns.