

O Sole Mio

ISSUE 08

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

Parasol unit
foundation for contemporary art

Light, Rhythm, Colours and Harmony

The first issue of *O Sole Mio* went online on 15 April 2020, but had, of course, been in planning from the time Parasol unit closed its London galleries on 14 March to protect both its staff and the public from the rapidly spreading Covid-19 coronavirus. As I write these lines for issue 08 of our weekly publication, we are more than two months down the line from that initial shock, but London is still in lockdown and we don't yet know when or if people will be able to move about again with their accustomed freedom, nor when or how it will be possible to interact safely with other humans. In this singular situation, what keeps us somewhat in good humour is simply our instinctive impulse to *live* our future meaningfully.

What a coincidence then to read on Bloomberg an excerpt from the US Chief Justice, John Roberts' speech, addressed remotely to a graduating high school class, saying that the coronavirus had 'pierced our illusion of certainty and control'. The Chief Justice counsels the

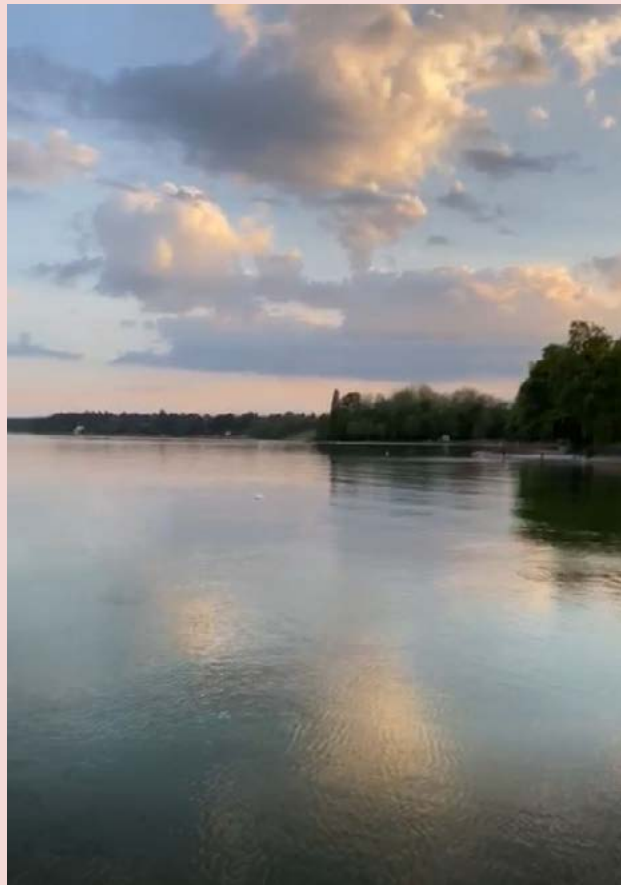
students to make their way through life 'with humility, compassion and courage in a world turned upside-down'. I always really appreciated graduation ceremonies in America, mainly because the addresses were often remarkably inspiring. I am not sure that all students, to whom many such speeches are addressed, fully grasp their importance

amid one of the most exciting moments of their life, but I always did.

In whatever form life takes after the current lockdown, I am sure that our human impulses and energy will find ways to keep the world going. I hope that the renewal of our future will stem essentially from souls nourished by harmony,

good spirits and love for others. Also, I believe that

had we not had the capacity to accept the worldwide restrictions so patiently, we would not have had this extended amount of time for reflection. So, let us at least thank our foe, Covid-19, for having given us the opportunity to rediscover our humanity.



[Click to view video](#)

I know many of us have been working in isolation and very hard, but the time regained by not having to commute or travel has let us become happier individuals. Hopefully, despite the looming pressure from all kinds of industries for us to consume ever more goods and services to keep economies alive, we will make choices that favour the survival and wellbeing of our planet and its people.

Sitting at my desk, I could not be more grateful for having received such a richness of material from artists and art professionals. Indeed, they have made me the fortunate recipient of the innovative and important thoughts that have allowed me to create themed issues of our *O Solo Mio* online publication. It is, therefore, my pleasure to devote this eighth issue to the essence of hope and joy in life, without which few of us would still be positively looking forward to the future. Please do not think that I have for one moment forgotten to feel immense gratitude to the thousands of frontline healthcare workers, doctors, nurses, and all their assistants, who are so courageously devoting themselves to the care of others, sometimes at their own peril, or that I omit paying homage to the hundreds of thousands of people across our planet, who have perished in this cruel pandemic. But, as we all know, life has to go on for future generations, and with such a train of thought, I also pay homage to the artists in this issue: Oliver Beer, Rana Begum, Shaun McDowell, and Christopher Green, along with the architect Aline Asmar d'Amman,

all of whose work and thoughts pivot around the importance of harmony and balance.

Rana Begum has graciously given time and energy to creating a new work, *No. 991*, an animation for the *O Solo Mio* project. Central to it, as in all her works, is a specific balance between light, rhythm and colour. Begum's oeuvre conveys the essence of these positive elements and, remarkably, despite the recent months of limitations with which we all live, she has been sufficiently at ease to harness positive energy and complete works that are testimony to a mind deeply at peace.

Form, colour and rhythm are the pre-eminent characteristics of Shaun McDowell's paintings, and particularly so during at least the past seven or eight years. At the beginning of this phase of his creativity one could discern faint parallels between McDowell's painterly concern with colourful forms and those of the early twentieth-century German painter, Franz Marc. But McDowell's recent paintings seem increasingly to have paint itself as the subject matter of his work, from which his *De te fabula narratur*, 2019, and *Untitled*, 2020, are two examples. Ironically, and although paint does keep building up in McDowell's works, one can also see dematerialisation taking place, along with a certain rhythm that persists in his colourful forms.

An art situated between various disciplines of visual art, music and architecture could be sophisticated, but

is also engaging and challenging. Touch, smell, hearing, sight and taste all seem to be present in disarming intensity in *Composition for Mouths*, the video piece by Oliver Beer, which led to the intriguing drawing included in this issue of *O Sole Mio*. As remarkably strong visually as it is emotionally, the drawing somewhat oddly reminds us of the physical limitations we have all been living with in recent months, while at the same time increases our awareness that we must eventually find a way out of the current impasse.

Thawed Swiss snow on watercolour paper has created three delicate works entitled *Celerina* by artist Christopher P. Green. Fittingly executed in the Swiss mountain resort of Upper Engadin, Celerina, his nuances of green, blue and red hues recall musical notes with a certain rhythm, very much in tune with the other works in this issue. Even at their very small scale, the works impress one with an immensity very like that of Helen Frankenthaler's large colour field paintings of the mid-twentieth century. Yet, like most of Christopher Green's works, these seductively delicate pieces were the result of much thinking and reflection.

In her reflection for this issue, Aline Asmar d'Amman displays as great a sensitivity to words and language as she applies to her architectural practice. She has contributed a thoughtfully graceful text, which highlights the poetic power of the 'O Sole Mio' lyrics, with her words, 'the power of the Sun', 'the Lovers' secrets', 'the mystique of Desire'

and, finally, 'the omnipresence of Death'. The truth is, along with the beauty of the song and its sense of elation, it is also quite nostalgic, all of which remind us of the dualities we face with every move we take in life. For highlighting the sensitivity inherent in the song's lyrics, I am hugely grateful to Aline Asmar d'Amman.

Our remarkable contributors here have provided us with great material to feed our intellect and above all our senses. How can we not express our gratitude to them for having helped us to once more feel human and to understand that despite the fear, sadness and limitations we have experienced during these past few months, the power and beauty of nature around us continues to shine on our lives and reassure us that to desire, to love and to cry are all part of life. I have no doubt that the harmony and sense of infinity stemming from each of these works will help us to see the world from a better angle, because a reality faced with serenity and clarity will always be a better reality.

Ziba Ardalan
Founder, Artistic and Executive Director

Rana Begum

The Mercy of Light

Rana Begum usually makes three-dimensional object-based works, but for *O Sole Mio* she has filmed a subtly complex yet gloriously straightforward animation. In her video work, *No. 991 Animation*, the harmonious interaction between light and colour is even more extreme, as the potential for colour variations in her ever-changing grid is infinitely multiplied, while any hint of 'objectness' has been abstracted.

To watch it is like looking all day at the beautiful Bay of Naples, witnessing the movement of light and the ensuing changes of colour.

The striking element in all Rana Begum's work is the apparent ease and flexibility with which she makes her works. Whereas, she is a born perfectionist who reflects and edits endlessly until she is finally satisfied with the result.

Another element that is transformed in Begum's video work is that it is no longer the role of the viewer to complete the circle of changes. Rather, with such an animation, it is the work itself that seems to be in control. By moving away from object-based work and eliminating the viewer's active role, the work tends towards being dematerialised and increasingly calls in one's senses.

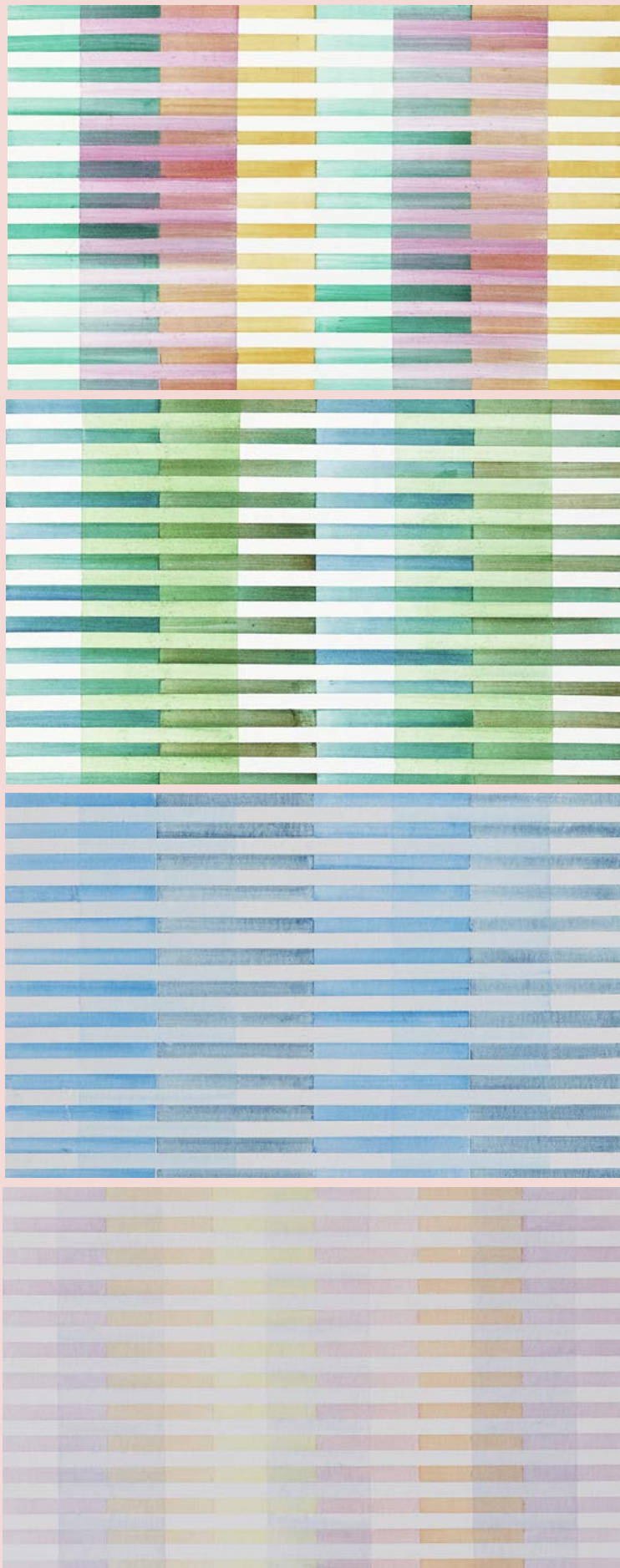
In a conversation between Rana Begum and myself, conducted for the publication

that accompanied her solo exhibition, *The Space Between*, at Parasol unit in 2016, she said that, 'For as long as I can remember, my struggle has been to capture change in my work. All around us things are in constant flux and motion and I strive to embody this transience and transformation. Light allows me to capture the change in form and colour, which it manipulates so unreservedly. More so than any other component, form and colour are at the mercy of light.'

Begum draws inspiration both from the city environment and the geometric patterns of traditional Islamic art and architecture. Thus, properties of light, colour, material, movement and form have become a hallmark of her abstract sculptures and reliefs. Often bringing a potentially infinite order to her works, Begum skilfully gives physical form to fleeting moments of aesthetic wonder.

Born in Bangladesh in 1977, Rana Begum now lives and works in London. In 2016, Parasol unit presented *The Space Between*, Rana Begum's first solo exhibition in a public institution in the UK, which brought together sculptural and wall-based works and installations, as well as paintings.

Rana Begum, *No. 991 Animation*, 2020.
Watercolour. Video duration 4'39".
Courtesy of Begum Studio.



Click images above to view *No. 991 Animation* by Rana Begum

Shaun McDowell

Sì, la luce

'Won't you be lonely?' they say as though cities can't feel like the most solitary of places.

I plan to wake early for exercise, learn Italian for at least an hour, draft the studio plans and perhaps read *Lucretius* in the evening ... although it's more likely a neighbour will call for lunch or an aperitivo at Casperia, which turns out to be a banquet or barrel of wine. Living on a hill in the Sabina can be busier than you'd expect and besides, Rome is just down the road.

I move to a property without power or running water and before long a small cat joins me. Soon, I receive a message that a dog has been born in Montasola, a *cacciatore* (hunter) having abandoned its pregnant mother. I take him to Rome the next day for a date and see that Italians adore *cuccioli* (puppies). Women are beside themselves to touch him – 'Mamma mia.' ... 'Ooh, bello! bello!' With animals and Italian hospitality, perhaps I want to feel rather more lonely than I find myself.

'Oh, but the light in Italy.' *Sì, la luce è bellissima.* Painting on a hillside, I don't resist the temptation to steal colours of the sunset and make them my own. In the light of the full moon I walk through the olive trees, cat and dog playing alongside me. I sit for some time to drink wine and smell the air. If this is

loneliness then I want some more. Sitting on my roof, I'm looking at the foothills of the central Apennines. I call artists in London, Paris, New York, Berlin. They say they're thinking of leaving the city or at least will try. I tell them I'm working on the construction of a large studio and will run a residency, they must come. They say they'd like nothing more. Perhaps one privilege of technology is that we could choose an expanded sense of space – does it make sense to message someone when they sit beside us on the Tube? If being 'connected' serves a practical purpose it should be one that is liberating.

'Are you lonely?' people ask as if romance isn't the Roman style. I take wine from the *nonna* (grandmother) on my road and meet Francesca in Fianello, a town mostly abandoned since the *terremoto di Amatrice* (Amatrice earthquake). Sitting opposite Palazzo degli Orsini, we talk about the Italian countryside and its lonely *viales* beckoning exploration. I have a sense of potential. I am cultivating something unconfined and it seems my time to paint in cities ended some while before I left them. Though I enjoy the hustle and even the grime of the metropolis, I need space. Sustainability is a word on everyone's lips. The cost is no longer practical for growth in cities, least not in a natural sense.

I invite you to visit – you know where I am. Ten minutes from my hill is the Villa di Orazio in Vacone, named after the Sabine goddess Vacuna. In another direction are the ruins of Cicero's family villa and close by is Camuccini's Palazzo. You may feel lonely by the waterfall at Rocchettine, but you might like it. It's true this area is quiet – this is not the

centre of the 'art world', nor the financial one. Yet, what is important to hear? Regardless of where I stand, I can listen to the commercial buzz of that portal in my pocket, until I switch it off. I invite you to visit, see a life among these quiet hills that inspire loud colour. You may get lonely, this might not be for you ... but, anyway, Rome is just down the road.



Shaun McDowell, *De te fabula narratur*, 2019. Oil stick and oil paint on panel, 119 x 78.5 cm (46¾ x 31 in).
Copyright the artist.

Shaun McDowell bases his paintings on his personal perception of the world around him. An accomplished colourist and mark maker, McDowell works according to his own sense of spontaneity and intuition, allowing the painting to direct itself. Using energetic brushwork he forms a language of line and colour inspired by his surroundings. Whilst making use of references in

his titles he refuses to form figures, landscapes or scenarios in a way that confines the work to a singular moment or indeed perspective.

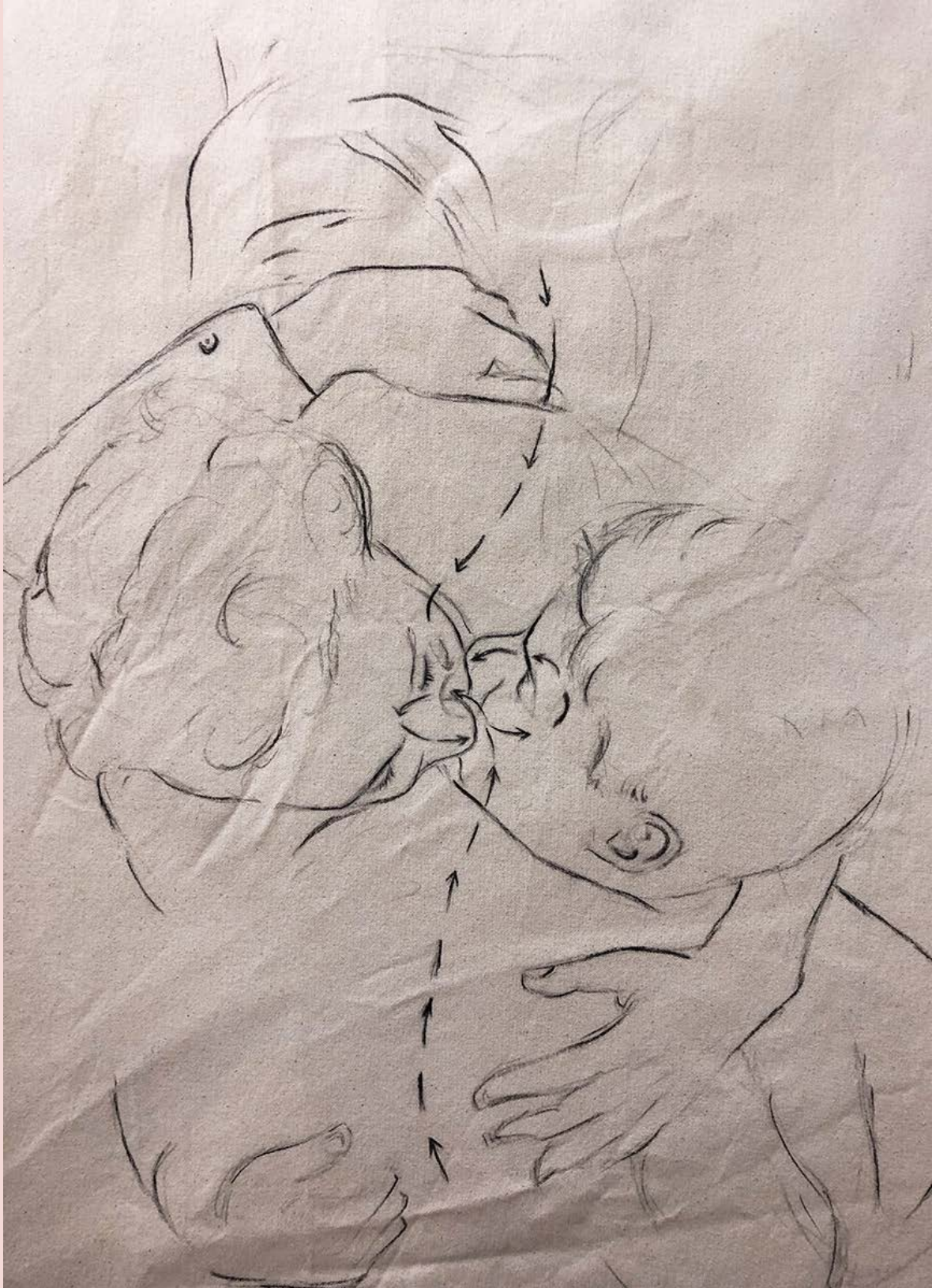
Born 1981 in Sussex, England, Shaun McDowell is now based in Torri In Sabina, Italy. In 2009, he showed in the group exhibition *Visible Invisible* at Parasol unit, London.



Shaun McDowell, *Untitled*, 2020. Oil stick and oil paint on panel, 119 x 90 cm (46¾ x 35½ in). Copyright the artist.

Oliver Beer

Musical Contagion and Exchange



This charcoal drawing by Oliver Beer, which references his original score for the performance *Composition for Mouths*, responds to the idea evoked by the *O Sole Mio* exhibition of finding one another through music. It's an image of musical contagion and exchange with an intense physicality that is antithetical to today's state of social distancing.

In the live performance and video series, *Composition for Mouths*, Oliver Beer explores ideas of transmission, cultural memory and 'inherited music'. It was created for the 2018 Sydney Biennale when Beer was artist in residence

at the Sydney Opera House. For the performance, he asked two singers to recall the earliest songs they remembered from childhood and incorporated the melodies into a new composition. During the performance the singers lock mouths and sing through each other's face. Because their lips are effectively sealed, the only way out for each singer's voice is through the other's nose. The arrows in the drawing map the path of their breath. This vocal process is unique to Beer's practice: at the meeting point of two voices a 'third' voice comes into being.



Click image to view the video *Composition for Mouths (Songs My Mother Taught Me) II*, 2018, by Oliver Beer.

Oliver Beer works at the intersection of architecture, sound and image, exploring the connections between space, objects and acoustics. Informed by his training in fine art, musical composition and film theory, his projects – often taking the form of large-scale installations, live performances, sculpture and video – are research based and use original techniques to test and manipulate the experience of sound and music. Interested in the resonant frequencies of objects and architecture he devises works that stimulate the unique ‘voice’ of empty space. His ongoing Resonance Project (2007–) has transformed the Centre Pompidou, MoMA PS1, and an Ottoman hammam (bathhouse) during the 2015 Istanbul Biennale, into

‘architectural instruments’ producing audible compositions born from their inherent notes. In 2019, he developed these ideas in a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Met Breuer in New York.

Not all of Beer’s artworks that explore sound actually make it. His ‘two-dimensional sculptures’, installations and films, splice through recognisable objects and narratives and encourage a re-assessment of sensory perception. His ‘two-dimensional sculptures’ describe solids and voids, mapping the air passages within them. As he has said of his sculptures, they ‘are a way of *hearing with our eyes* – or *seeing with our ears*.’

Page 10: Oliver Beer, *Composition for Mouths (Jayde and Kiran)*, 2020. Charcoal on canvas.

90 x 60 cm (35½ x 23¾ in).

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac.

Oliver Beer, *Composition for Mouths (Songs My Mother Taught Me) II*, 2018. Single-channel video with sound. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney and the Sydney Opera House with generous assistance from the British Council. Image courtesy the artist; Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London; and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.

Christopher P. Green

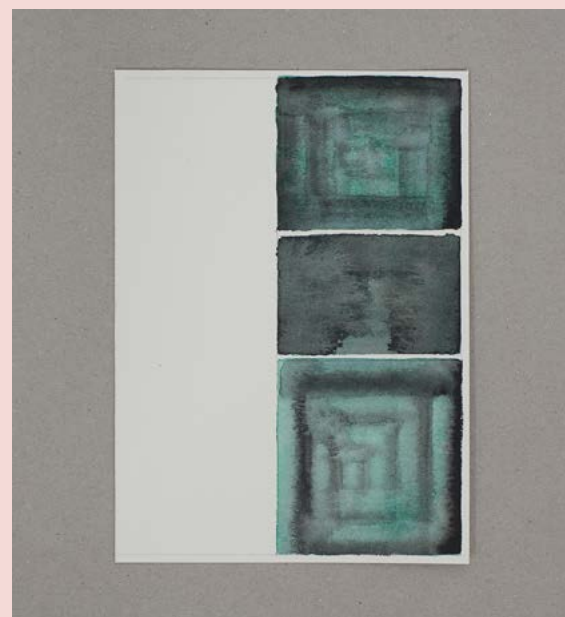
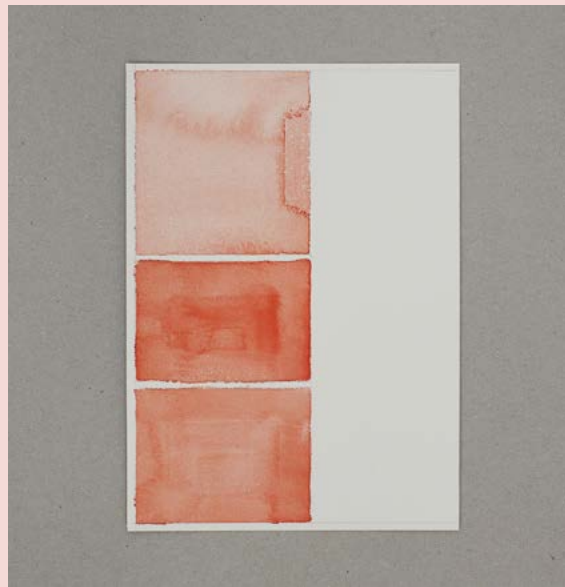
I feel that ice is slowly melting. Here comes the sun

Arriving in Celerina, Switzerland, in December 2019, I was met with so much frozen water, laying still all around. In Cornwall, on the peninsula where I live, I'm surrounded by seawater, to the north, south and west. The water there is fluid. I thought, 'if I bring the Swiss snow to the table, it will melt, and I can use it to make my paint. This way, the watercolours become truly Swiss, because the dry pigments have been activated by the mountains and lakes!'

For the *Celerina* paintings I used the dry block variety of watercolour, the kind that is activated only when water is added. Unlike 'wet' paint from a tube, the colour of a watercolour block is never the same as the paint it becomes once water is added. H₂O is the active ingredient. Water is also required to erase, but that is difficult when the colours have washed into one another.

The three paintings shown here have a clear structure to them – a framework reminiscent of but not depicting that of a window. The size of their partitions is approximated, the sheet split in half from side to side, and into three top to bottom, with gaps of roughly the same width as those demarcating the perimeter of the sheet. The divided space is then painted, around and around – consecutive circular movements within the right-angled framework. They are all painted using the same brush. Such partitions can also be seen at work in most of my paintings on panels.

The colours are mixed before being picked up by the brush, and in some cases, mixed by layering. The colours are encouraged to mix with one another on the surface rather than just on the palette, which uses the potential of watercolours to be reactivated.



Produced on a residency in the Engadin Valley in the Swiss Alps, a region known for its sunny climate, these watercolours offer an intricate unification of our outer and inner worlds. Made using melted snow, literally bringing the outside environment onto the page, the resulting coloured and carefully partitioned 'windows' become more like tiny portals. A visual and material response, perhaps, to a subject that resonates with so many of us at this present moment in time, as we continue to look outside from within.
Dr Melanie S. J. Francis

Christopher P. Green (1983–) lives in west Cornwall. His recent solo exhibitions include *Christopher P. Green (& L.I.E)* at 41/42, St Ives; *Christopher P. Green* at Thames-Side Studios Gallery, London; *Vitreous Humour* at Alma Zevi, Venice; and *Works clockwise from entering studio – Part Two*, at Material, Mexico City, with Hannah Barry Gallery.

Christopher P. Green
Celerina (SWC09), 2019. *Celerina (SWC15)*, 2019. *Celerina (SWC19)*, 2019.

Each of three works: Watercolour block and thawed Swiss snow on watercolour paper, 14.8 x 10.5 cm (5¾ x 4¼ in).
Courtesy the artist and ALMA ZEVI.

Reflection by Aline Asmar d'Amman

Fragments and Poetry

I've always been an avid reader, fascinated by the power of words. They shape us, make us, carving our inner personal landscape, crystallizing momenta and emotions. A filter to reality, words define our personality, nurturing the roots of our being, the immaterial substance to our material presence.

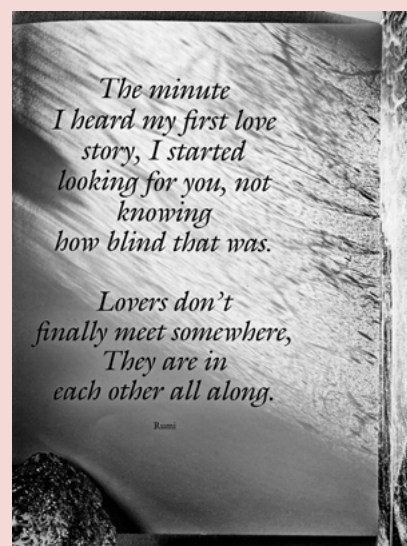
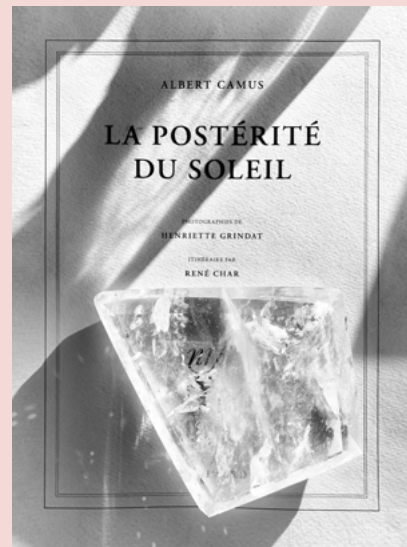
During this period of uncertainty and change, isolation and questioning, the emotional discharge of 'O Sole Mio' appeared to me like a riddle of melancholy and hope, a fresco of romantic messages unsolved, delicately suspended in the sun.

The alphabet before the rhyme.

Fragments of abstract poetry connected to the old soul of the world.

If the melody is famous worldwide for being used by Elvis Presley, Tony Martin, or through Luciano Pavarotti's historic performance in Pompei, the Italian lyrics remain a mystery despite being repeated by many.

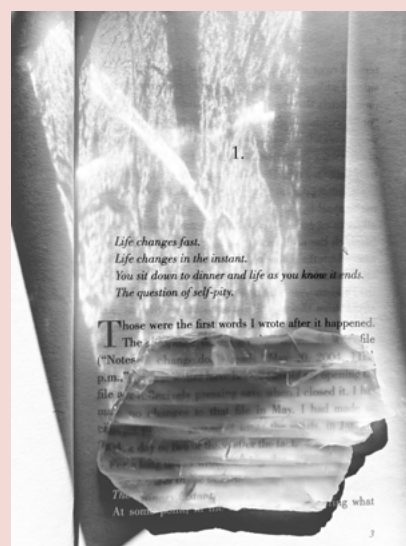
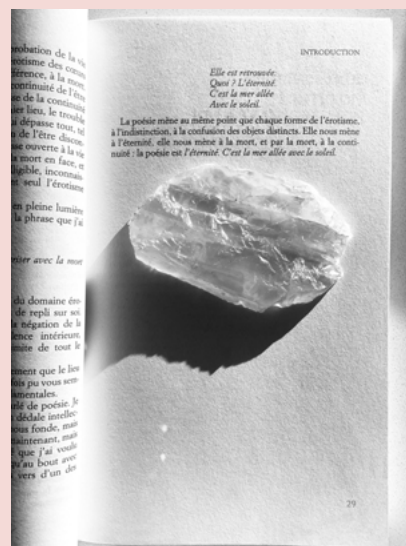
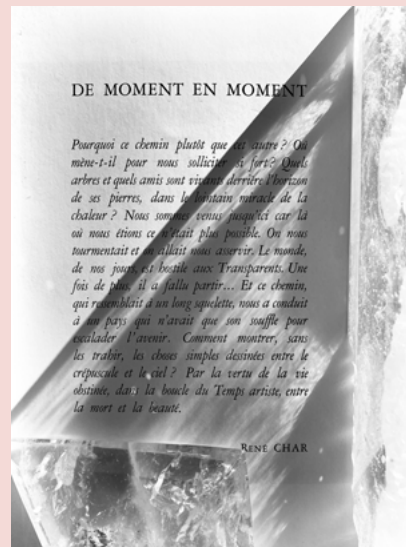
The words, magnetic and enigmatic, pulled me to their poetical substance, fossilized in the song like living traces trapped in ancestral stones. The primal language of 'O Sole Mio', often disregarded to the benefit of its celebrated musicality, sounded like unexplained yet common fables, a silent



library of unread scripts, a well of sensations not yet consumed.

Travelling through the quiet verses of the song, a subtle resonance emerged with four cherished excerpts of literature and poetry, inviting to a free-spirited correspondence with our daily fantasies: the power of the Sun, the Lovers' secrets, the mystique of Desire and the omnipresence of Death. Playing with light, stones and sunset within the pages of Albert Camus and René Char's writings in *La Postérité du soleil*, Georges Bataille's *l'Erotisme*, Rumi's moving text from *Quatrains of Love* and Joan Didion's iconic book *The Year of Magical Thinking*, I wondered about the permanent duality of our choices, torn between light and shadow, dawn and darkness, life and death, the intellectual and the instinctive.

Endlessly feeding my work as an architect, stones and poetry are a constant inspiration, guiding the balance between materiality and emotion, the physical and the abstract. The association of these photographed texts weighted down by the healing powers of crystals echo to the soothing nature of the popular music and magical universal words of 'O Sole Mio'. No matter the language, our shared dreams and passions draw on an old vocabulary of love and hope for a glorious future. As per Novalis's philosophy, 'the more poetic, the truer it is'.



Aline Asmar d'Amman (1975–) was born in Beirut. An architect and founder of *Culture in Architecture*, she lives and works between Beirut and Paris, with offices in both capitals. She has planned and executed the interior renovation of Hôtel de Crillon in Paris and Le Jules Verne restaurant on the second floor of the Eiffel Tower.

O Sole Mio, My Own Sun

What a beautiful thing is a sunny day!
The air is serene after a storm,
The air is so fresh that it already feels like a celebration.
What a beautiful thing is a sunny day!

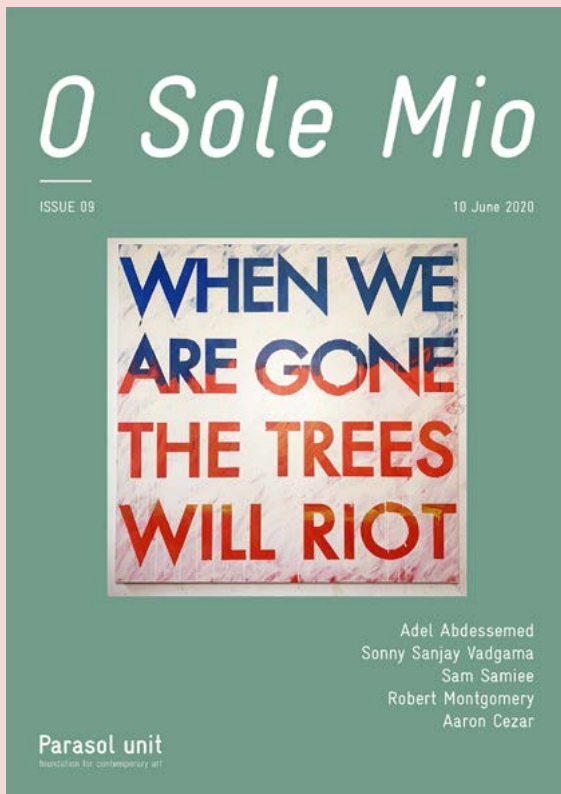
Chorus

But another sun, even more beautiful, oh my sweetheart,
My own sun, shines from your face!
This sun, my own sun,
Shines from your face; it shines from your face!

Your windowpanes shine;
A laundress is singing and boasting about it;
And while she's wringing the clothes, hanging them up to dry, and singing,
Your windowpanes shine.

When night comes and the sun has gone down,
I almost start feeling melancholy;
I'd stay below your window
When night comes and the sun has gone down.

Upcoming Issue



ISSUE 09 featuring works by

Adel Abdessemed
Sonny Sanjay Vadgama
Sam Samiee
Robert Montgomery
Reflection by Aaron Cezar

Words by Ziba Ardalán, Oliver Beer, Christopher P. Green, Shaun McDowell and Aline Asmar d'Amman. Copy edited by Helen Wire.
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