

O Sole Mio

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Jerónimo Elespe

Paul Kneale

Dominic Palfreyman and Shiva Lynn Burgos

Ismini Samanidou

Parasol unit

foundation for contemporary art

The Sun as Personal Vision

As the tip of my pencil touches the paper to write the first sentence of this introductory text for Issue 12 of *O Sole Mio*, which also happens to be the final instalment of our online magazine and digital exhibition, I certainly feel the meaning of coming to the end of a story. Let me, though, start by saying that this meaningful project has considerably brightened my own vision of the world during the lockdown period of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet and although I remain upbeat after four months of limitation, I also



realise that by writing these lines, I am brushing on something that will never come back.

Meanwhile, in a matter of only three to four months of lockdown we have all learned a great deal. We have learned to appreciate our freedoms, to appreciate how it really feels to be human and vulnerable, to appreciate having time for one another, to appreciate listening to and learning from others and, finally, as the US Chief Justice John Roberts noted in his address to a class of high-school

graduates, Covid-19 should at least have taught us humility. During the weeks of lockdown, we have perhaps also reflected on various issues. Incidentally, as I write I am unconsciously listening to *Nisi Dominus / Without God, all is in vain*, set to the heavenly baroque music of Antonio Vivaldi. How ironic and in some ways beautiful.

As part of my own learning experience during the *O Sole Mio* project, I have hugely appreciated the efforts of numerous artists and art professionals who, at a moment of

shock and desperation, spontaneously accepted my invitation to be part of this special undertaking. Their solidarity verged on the heroic in several ways, including having to remain innovative and create from the inside while being challenged and overwhelmed by outside events. I am still in awe of their admirable commitment, our unity and our sense of mission, all of which proves that creativity, if used properly, can provide a route through many challenges in life. Since creativity comes from within, it follows that enlightenment

must be immaterial and a deeply personal vision. I am tremendously grateful for the numerous thoughtful contributions that landed on my desk and made the curating and editing of each issue of *O Sole Mio* such a privilege and, ultimately, a labour of love. I felt energised that together we could achieve wonders for our souls, our mental well-being and freedom. It is only fitting, therefore, that I offer here my deepest gratitude to everyone who participated in this project – those who contributed works and text, and the Parasol unit team, particularly Kirsteen Cairns, who worked very hard to ensure that a fresh issue would appear on your screen every Wednesday morning. It is equally fitting to express my gratefulness to Helen Wire, our fabulous and tireless copy editor. Our texts land on her desk anytime during the day, night and weekend and we surely receive them back shortly after and in perfect style. It was a joy to work with Helen during Parasol unit's London chapter and it remains a privilege to have her on board as our activities are repositioned.

Now, to Issue 12. I was intrigued to see that the contributed works have each arisen somehow directly 'from the gut', which means that each artist would have had to have sensed them in every tiny detail, otherwise the works could never have been completed. I have no doubt that in doing so, each of the artists will have journeyed far within their own thoughts and universe.

Ismini Samanidou's presentation and text in this issue remind me of my own decision some forty years ago to

change profession from science to art. Today, more than ever, I understand why I needed to change direction, to feel and to grasp every fibre of ingenuity, because one's own creativity and inner being must travel together, inseparably. Samanidou, a textile artist, is both passionate about her work and idolises her native country, Greece, which with its rich history and somewhat glorious and tumultuous past, along with its natural beauty, has inspired her work. Her sensitive and touching text, which accompanies the images and references for some potential works, bear testimony to what inspires her, to her way of seeing the world and to her work process. In her works, every fibre clearly tells a different story, while the meditative nature of her holding and feeling every thread between her fingers and remembering or imagining their stories, their past and ultimately following their journey through time, makes her devotion to the art of textile all the more worthwhile. Being totally absorbed by her work, Samanidou questions again and again, what is time? Is it the time lapsed, the time we live in now or the time that has yet to come? How could her activity be otherwise than meditative and self-absorbing, when she herself opened her eyes in a land where the echo of mythology around those wondrous islands and the depths of alternately churning and calm waters are so prominent. How could she be influenced by any other colour than blue indigo – the pure reflection of sun-saturated air and blue skies into the sea below.

Captivated by the creative power of the sun within his working environment in a large city, Paul Kneale creates seemingly sun-drenched paintings, such as *Smoking Ozone*. Historically, the medium of painting has been seen to produce an illusion of the real world, but in Kneale's hands the world created possesses its own independence without being all together disconnected from the real world. Indeed, the rays of sunlight reflecting into his studio space are an important influence and generate a whole new and constructed world on the canvas that emulates potential realities. In some ways, this confirms the importance of the natural environment to us human beings. Whether we dwell in a large metropolis or are fully sheltered in nature, the sun is a stimulator of personal and private vision.

Lumina by Jerónimo Elespe, is a small, 11.5 x 9 cm, work on paper in vibrant red, on which countless intriguing patterns and details are drawn. The medium is given as 'ink and pencil on paper', yet the most puzzling part of the work consists of a multitude of details and annotations, which lead us to wonder if they are lines of tightly handwritten words or perhaps some sort of secret diary. The imagery could be considered abstract with some hint of geometric patterns, but this becomes less certain as we observe some black bands or thick lines running throughout most of the work's surface, here and there punctuated by tiny yellow marks. We ask ourselves whether they are part of a maze or some labyrinthian structure – lines which ought to lead somewhere

but somehow stop short. While drawing these lines, could the artist's train of thought have been interrupted in favour of other ideas? Several years ago, Elena Foster introduced me to Jerónimo Elespe, a Madrid-based artist who often works on a miniature scale, making enticing and enigmatic pieces that reward our time and close attention. Despite their tiny size and private nature, these works are not wholly impenetrable. Indeed, the viewer's participation and interpretation seem to be necessary elements for the completion of these works.

For the reflection section of this issue we have the unique and immense pleasure of being given a glimpse of what Dominic Palfreyman and Shiva Lynn Burgos have experienced in a remote Kwoma village in Papua New Guinea. This ongoing artistic partnership/collaboration built there by them both since 2013 is noteworthy and described in the text that accompanies the various images they have kindly contributed. Their, or rather Shiva's 2018 collaboration entitled *Mariwai* has harnessed the effort of local painters, sculptors, weavers and musicians from the region to build and paint an incredibly beautiful canoe which reflects traditional art and their ownership of it. For those of us, who are not familiar with the art of the region, these intriguing images must at the very least reflect the primordial and inner feelings of the artists, set within the animist cosmology of the culture.

From the collective culture of ancient Greek mythology expressed in the work of artist Ismini Samanidou, to the art

and beliefs of people in remote Papua New Guinea as introduced by Dominic Palfreyman and Shiva Lynn Burgos and, finally, to the private and personal visions of the artists Jerónimo Elespe and Paul Kneale, we have certainly covered much ground and distance. Even so, the true reality is that no matter where we come from, what is most important are the values and vision we each carry within us, for no single culture can ever be superior to another. All cultures live through highs and lows, as the rise and fall of various empires have proven time and again. Essentially, it is what each one of us carries deep within our soul and person

– the creativity, innovation and resources bestowed upon each of us and the use we make of them – that differentiates one human from another. It is therefore once more with *O Sole Mio* (my own sun) that I would like to end this digital exhibition/publication, because eventually the sun and light inside each of us will carry us forward.

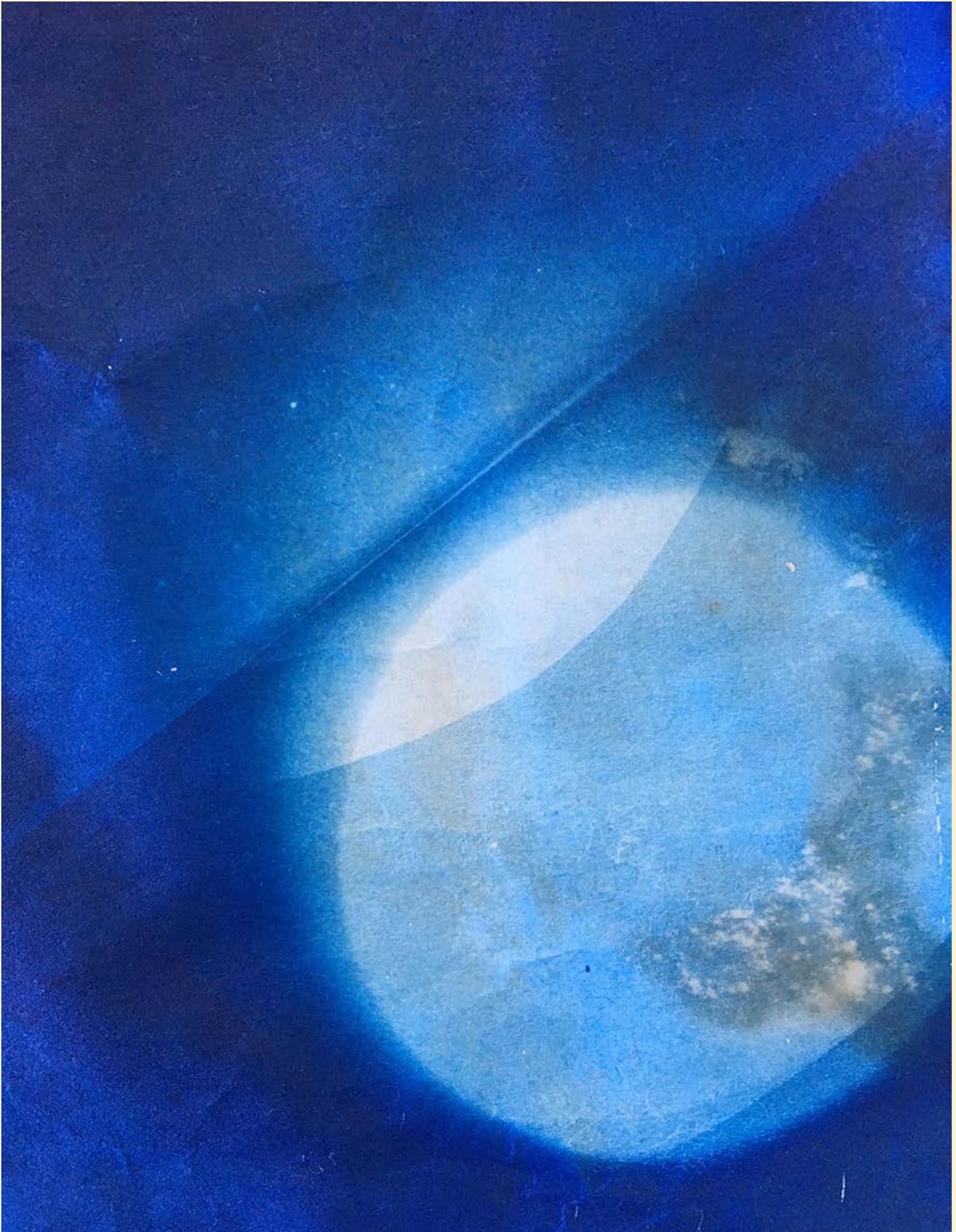
Ziba Ardalan

Founder, Artistic and Executive Director

Photograph by Ziba Ardalan.

Ismini Samanidou

Threads of Blue



Some thoughts:

I named my son after the sun.
I've never known a spring like this: so bright so warm so colourful so quiet so strange so hopeful and so sad.

Weaving makes me feel at ease in this world, connected to all its people who share this particular language and understanding of making and the many stories they hold. Weaving measures and records time, and connects the past, present and future. It is also my way of ordering and understanding, a meditative process that lets me lose myself and time in the tiniest detail and material. There is a specific methodology and boundaries I can push against. I can decide how threads make their journeys and interconnect, creating something entirely new, like a magician, a surface, a structure, two- or three-dimensional. I have always been interested in how these journeys of threads can describe our inner and outer world. The parallel worlds we live in and are within us. Material and immaterial.

Now my physical world is tiny, I drift and dive into my memories and stories. Somehow, losing my orientation opens my mind. I go back to photography, the decisive moment, my teacher for learning to look and see the world, record and understand it. It too marks time. I love the chance element, the alchemy of the making – both spontaneous and scientific. The way you don't know what the film has recorded – you can't predict the brilliance of the blue. Blue is the colour I grew up with. It is everything in Greece. It is on the doors, on the

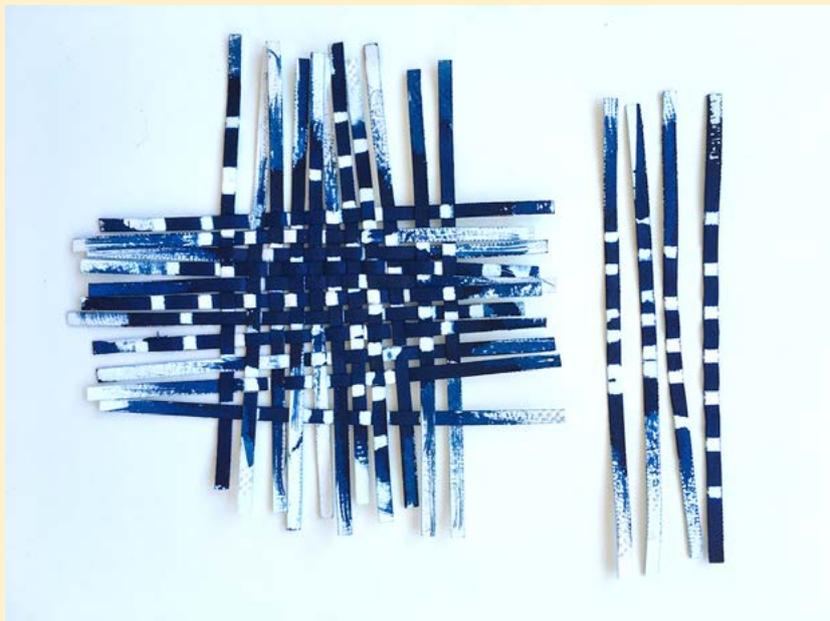
windows, on the flag. If you paint a bucket you will paint it blue.

The absence of pure and brilliant light has never made me feel entirely at home here in England. I miss the way the sun reaches in and warms your soul, the way my closed eyelids dance under the sun. I look up to the sky, to this ever-changing alternative landscape to find my sense of belonging. I named my son after the sun.

Blue is the all-pervasive colour in textiles and comes from indigo, the universal natural dye made from plants. A blue with infinite variations that relates to a particular place and its people. The alchemy with cyanotypes reminds me of indigo. You get a watery yellow green liquid and then the sun hits it and it turns blue. Like indigo in the air. Both processes measure time, turning light and air into colour. The act of marking time becomes more to the point during lockdown, when time moves at different speeds.

I am not sure where this joining of photographic techniques and threads will take me. For the minute it holds potential, a sense of freedom, something not planned or limited that can become wonderful.

Ismini Samandou, *The sun the moon the earth Phoebus*, 2020. Cyanotype on Japanese paper. Photograph courtesy the artist.



The Blue Soul

Blue Souls are exceedingly rare. This, indeed, is the only one I have ever seen. It is impossible to give any idea of the beauty of this Soul. The colour is the purest blue, it sparkles like a sapphire, and is surrounded by a sort of brilliant iridescence [...] Blue Souls are entirely without egoism or coarseness. A tinge of egoism or a fibre of coarseness would quite destroy the purity of the colour [...] St Francis of Assisi had a Blue Soul.

From Alice Murray Dew-Smith, *Soul Shapes*, 1890

... the essence of the universe resembles threads stretched into infinity. [...] luminous filaments that are conscious of themselves in ways impossible for the human being to comprehend ...

From Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, 1968.

Working across art, craft and design, Ismini Samanidou's practice encompasses weaving, drawing, photography and installation. Using digital technologies and traditional techniques, her work is led by an experimental approach to materials and processes. Samanidou has travelled the world researching textile techniques and is especially interested in the many ways that weaving exists as a common language within a great diversity of cultural and political settings.

Ismini Samanidou (1977–) was born in Athens, Greece, and now lives and works in the south of England and in Athens.

Page 8:

Ismini Samanidou, *Study 1 and 2*, 2014–2020. Carbon paper and cyanotype on Japanese paper thread and wood, hand-printed photograph, weaving, drawings.

Ismini Samanidou, *Study 3*, 2018. Woven paper cyanotype.

Cover: Ismini Samanidou, *Study 4*, 2018. Woven Japanese paper thread with cyanotype.

Photographs courtesy the artist.

Paul Kneale

Smoking Ozone



Paul Kneale is an artist whose core practice is influenced by the sun and light. The Canadian, image-based visual artist, sculptor and experimenter approaches light on a more analytical level: the artist uses scanners and materials that are often scraps, along with mixed media to enable the creation of worlds and scenarios modelled by the surrounding light conditions. He researches and studies the ways in which the sun irradiates and is reflected in his studio, an index of the light's daily, even mundane, movements. The sun surprises us in our homes as a vehicle of inspiration and warmth, a robust and impertinent strength that blows a feeling of expressive emergency, of creation, a necessary *archè* (ark).

The artwork *Smoking Ozone* describes Kneale's fascination with vision and the interconnectivity between the eye and objects – specifically intergalactic objects that are yet to be seen, other suns in distant galaxies. This element and its positive potential to inspire has led Kneale's process which captures its generative force: he manipulates, revisits, prints, exploring its daily infinite nuances.

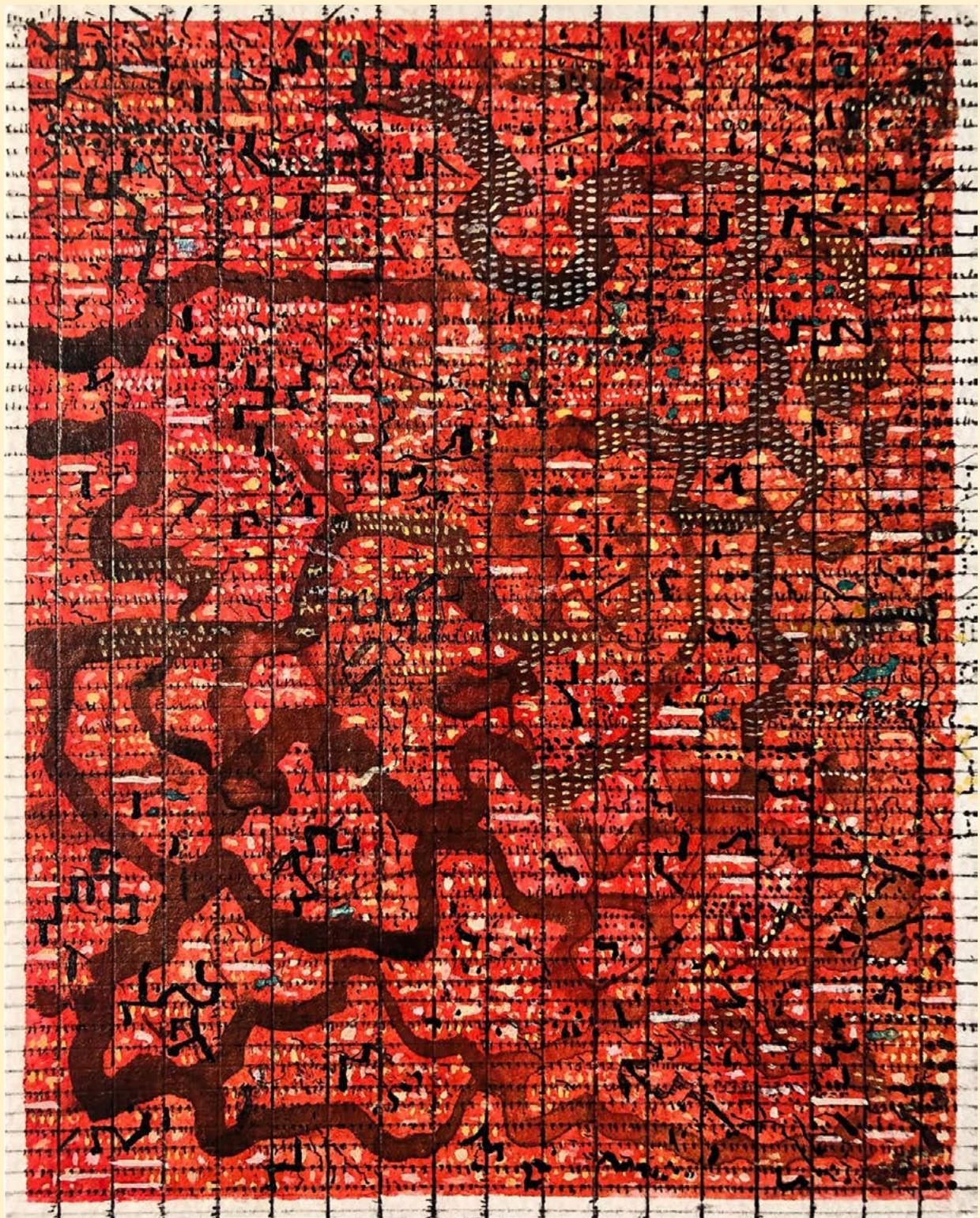
Paul Kneale (1986–) was born in Ontario, Canada and now lives and works in Toronto, Canada.

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

Paul Kneale, *Smoking Ozone*, 2019. Inkjet on canvas, 198 x 147 cm (78 x 57¾ in). Courtesy the artist.

Jerónimo Elespe

Lumina



Jerónimo Elespe's investigations of time and memory provide a rich source from which he develops his paintings, using a gradual and cumulative process of addition and subtraction. He may work on some pieces over months or even years before they are complete. Often working in very small formats, the artist explores the capacity of painting and drawing to record both reality and fiction, frequently using autobiographical references as his starting point.

Influenced by diverse literary sources, such as late nineteenth-century French symbolist literature or the novels of J.G. Ballard, his curiously enigmatic works capture fragments of ordinary daily life, yet his playful manipulations of the real and illusory function like a personal abstract journal and experimental pictorial archive of recollected narratives.

Jerónimo Elespe (1975–) was born in Madrid, Spain, where he now lives and works.

Jerónimo Elespe, *Lumina*, 2020. Ink and pencil on paper, 11.5 x 9 cm (4½ x 3½ in). Courtesy the artist.

Reflection by Dominic Palfreyman and Shiva Lynn Burgos

*Ya Mevka / The Sun, The Moon,
according to the Kwoma people of Papua New Guinea*



The sun and the moon in the indigenous Kwoma people's unique animist cosmology are a pair of opposites. The sun lives in the sky while the moon and the stars live in darkness within the earth, only revealing themselves at night. The Kwoma say that if you dig deep enough into the ground you will find the stars which carry the souls of the dead.

A constellation of secret designs contains the energies of the spirit

world. Clan members have ownership of specific designs and others are therefore forbidden from using them in carvings or paintings. Kwoma ceremonial houses display the full range of village clan symbols. The motifs of *ya* and *mevka* (sun and moon), along with the crocodile and turtle, are powerful emblems of the *Kiava* clan. This design is especially meaningful to Shiva and me, as the *Kiava* are Shiva's adopted clan and her 'sole mio'.

We long for our annual expedition to the remote Kwoma village called Mariwai. In 2013, we created The Mariwai Project, at its core an artistic collaboration with the painters, sculptors, weavers and musicians of remote Papua New Guinea. We have the rare privilege of engaging with and being engaged by traditional artists who are considering contemporary forms and influences.

In 2018, The Mariwai Project built and decorated a canoe, merging traditional techniques with contemporary ideas. Shiva, being very aware of the great importance of proprietorship, ensured that the canoe painting was divided equally and that all clans were represented fairly. Clan symbols are interspersed with legends and secret spirits and the canoe boasts flames at each end, referencing the *moai*, the Kwoma shooting star spirit, and giving a nod to the American hot-rod culture. The canoe was inaugurated as *Wasmanj*, a water spirit, and is shown here on its launch day, proudly showing its crocodile shape and motifs including the *Kiava* sun and moon.

From the perspective of lockdown in Paris, Papua New Guinea seems even more distant but we are confident that everywhere the sun will continue to shine and the light will overcome the darkness.





Dominic Palfreyman and Shiva Lynn Burgos are based in London and Paris. He is a financier and philanthropist and she is an artist, curator, photographer and filmmaker. In addition to her artistic practice and The Mariwai Project, Shiva has also created GESTE Paris, a platform for experimental photography.

Page 14: *Wasmanj (water spirit)*, 2018. Artists of The Mariwai Project, Papua New Guinea, including Shiva Lynn Burgos, George Numai, Samuel Yingot, Matthew Kuar, Ruben Manga, Simon Numai, Tim Borungai, and others. Painted wood canoe. Photograph by Shiva Lynn Burgos.

Page 15 *Untitled (Sun, Stars and Moon)*, c.1990. Djonapi Tim Borungai (Kiava Clan) (b. c.1960, Papua New Guinea). Pigment on sago palm. Courtesy the artist and now in the Collection Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, Paris.

Tokimba Spirit House, Mariwai, Papua New Guinea. View of ceiling in 2018. Photograph by Shiva Lynn Burgos.

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