



REBECCA RAUE, RECONNECT TO FEMALE POWER, FROM THE SERIES KALLILA WA DIMNA (18TH CENTURY SYRIA OR EGYPT), 2017

Wednesday Society.

Behold, You Are Beautiful, My Love: Privacy, Art, and Ancient Wisdoms in Covidian Times

In spite of the Covidian condition there is a good chance that some of the precariously surviving NGOs, tiny artist collectives, groups of local thinkers, and so on will have the upper hand. Settings that are analogue, private, intimate, local, and idiosyncratic—in a kind of ancient way—may resurge as futures in the art world, in politics and academics, and in our personal lives.¹ In his “Requiem for the Students,” Giorgio Agamben mourns the death of the university as we know it. And I assume “the university” here indicates any analogue epistemic field in which learning face-to-face and a free meandering of the intellect are essential—museums, galleries, exhibitions, and public discourse included.

“Part of the technological barbarism that we are currently living through is the cancellation from life of any experience of the senses as well as the loss of the gaze, permanently imprisoned in a spectral screen.”²

What is lost? What is coming to an end when leading universities and museums begin to systematically put entire programs online? It is the experience of being a student, a learner, a flâneur among equals, the experience of moving in-between and inside vibrant communities of *scholarii*. “Universities were born in Europe from student associations—*universitates*—and they owe their name to them.”³ Students, scholars, thinkers, art lovers, and flâneurs will miss the sensuous, communal, spontaneous, and free character of sharing knowledge in analogue settings. They will establish new *universitates*. New analogue settings of exchange will be explored, some of them marginal and tiny, exonerating the name of the university currently ruined and impoverished by official institutions.⁴ In this light, our very own undertaking, the molecular, intimate, micro-cosmopolitan spot for art and research called Wednesday Society, with its specific artists, guests, scribes, and its idiosyncratic apparatus for an *écriture féminine*, might find itself at an advantage: it is a future society that is already in full swing now. Is it a university? Was the scribe of the Wednesday Society exhibition right when she began her mural commentary on the exhibition with the words “This exhibition—is it a university?”⁵

Before delving into the contemporary and ancient layers of Wednesday Society’s psycho-poetic, psycho-political epistemic architecture, it is important to ask what the art scene does in Covidian times. I am referring to the art scene in which the body is essential, a scene of creativity in which encounters one-on-one are decisive, physical meanderings are exciting, the touch of skin, the smell of paint, and the stillness or vastness of space make all the difference—will they emerge as luxury commodities? Future rarities, expensive services for the very few?

Online viewing rooms and Zoom conferences are one kind of an answer to the current condition. Every museum and most galleries now have digital offerings. The art scene substitutes digital encounters for analogue ones to stay in touch with followers, collectors, personal fan clubs, and friends. While online auctions and online art sales are on the rise, private capacities to digest this ubiquitous flood are limited. Other scenes of intimacies follow suit, even psychotherapists readily adapt to the “new normal” by radically disembodimenting their services. Online dating, flirting, and sex brokers are in good business with amorous adventures happening online and casual sex becoming a rare thing of the past.⁶ Galleries and museums, academics and psychoanalytic settings

1 The current economic struggle for survival among independent artists collectives is more than precarious. Many vibrant places for art, activism, and free thought are existentially threatened by the Covidian condition in Istanbul, Berlin, and all over the world. A well-documented example is the Parisian independent platform La Colonie, founded by artist and theorist Kader Attia; see Alyssa Buffenstein, Kader Attia Opens Hybrid Restaurant and Art Space in Paris,” *artnet*, October 18, 2016, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kader-attia-la-colonie-paris-705002>. On the inspiring agenda of such communal place for art and theory see Kader Attia in conversation with Stéphane Renault, “Le pouvoir politique n’a aucune idée de ce qu’est être un artiste plasticien,” *The Art Newspaper*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.artnewspaper.fr/interview/kader-attia-le-pouvoir-politique-n-a-aucune-idee-de-ce-qu-est-etre-un-artiste-plasticien>.

2 Giorgio Agamben, “Requiem for the Students,” May 23, 2020, in the blog *Diario della crisi* on the website of the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, translated by D. Alan Dean, May 23, 2020, shared on Facebook. I will not enter the discussion on the position Agamben took during the crisis here.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 The psychoanalyst and scholar Birgit Meyer zum Wischen, one of Wednesday Society’s scribes, began her mural commentary in the exhibition with the words cited above (quoted by memory, inadequacies included). On Wednesday Society’s apparatus of scribes and its *écriture féminine* see our dossier “Wednesday Society,” published in *Art Unlimited* 56 (March 2020). The upcoming dossier will include some of that scribal material to be published by Wednesday Society scribe Julia Gyemant in one of the fall editions of *Art Unlimited*.

6 The overall statistics in Europe indicate that sexual performance seems to have significantly decreased, while reputable newspapers advocate masturbation techniques as part of a general program on health and sanity. Feuilleton features in leading newspapers in Europe and the United States indicate a trend in Covidian times: “How do you date without touching or kissing? How do you have sex without breathing on your partner...?” The New York Times asks this question in an essay by Tara Parker-Pope, “Masks, No Kissing and a Little Kinky”: Dating and Sex in a Pandemic,” online June 11,

are registering record web traffic. Digital art and virtual reality create a ubiquitous network of images on the move, readily available from anywhere around the globe. Despite the upsurge of new media art, the virtues of the cosmopolitan art lover, her “fluidity, mobility, illusoriness,”⁷ come under scrutiny. So does another holy matter: blockbuster exhibitions. Frances Morris, director of Tate Modern in London, feels that blockbuster shows with star loans shipped carbon-intensively from city to city might have had their day, and in a side note she adds: “Having a real conversation with real people is hugely exciting, it’s something we haven’t always done enough.”⁸

Looking at art in a shared physical space is obviously a “communal act.”⁹ The founder of Muzeum Susch, collector Grazyna Kulczyk, uses the term “slow art” to describe her resistance to the instantaneous consumption of art through social media, live streams, and the influencers’ gaze, a resistance strongly informed by feminine power.¹⁰ In a similar vein, Alison Cole, editor of the magazine *Art Newspaper*, comments on “the endless expansion, the mega-collectors, the purchasing of big trophy objects. I think we’re entering a period of less is more. I hope it’ll be less macho.”¹¹

In the immanent future, analogue settings will prove to be precious: small is sexy, intimate is beautiful. *Small Is Beautiful* (2014) was the forensic title of an exhibition shown by Istanbul curator and art critic Beral Madra in her gallery KUAD in the Maçka neighborhood in which she regularly exhibited personally associated artists and artistic research.¹² “Small is beautiful”—yes, “small, analogue, personal, communal.” How do we develop molecular, local, yet globally charismatic formats of exhibitions, and how do we turn them into long-lasting artistic research projects?¹³ Think away from mass event exhibitions—build *universitates* in your exhibitions!¹⁴

Wednesday Society is both a research society and an exhibition, and its dynamic is already in full swing. Wednesday Society accesses the power of analogue, site-specific creativity, and the power of “private capsules.”¹⁵ Wednesday Society has placed a Louis XIV green and golden love seat in the middle of her own space, a couch for one-on-one conversations, and one of the many names to call it is: a university. Indeed, the Wednesday Society exhibition—on a small scale—is in the midst of a creative transformation. Originally an exhibition with international artists in the framework of the Istanbul Biennial,¹⁶ it now calls for an agenda of collective research. Its psycho-poietic features, its poetry

2020, <https://nyti.ms/2MQ1r34>, quoting New York City guidelines suggesting methods “a little kinky” such as avoiding close contact by “having sex through holes in walls or other barriers,” and more. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* points out a similar regress in sexual liberty, cf. Florentin Schumacher, “Die Deutschen in der Sexrezession,” online May 5, 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/stil/leib-seele/die-deutschen-in-der-sexrezession-trotz-tinder-und-co-16745693.html>. At the same time, the German Parliamentarians are currently discussing a general prohibition of sex work (again), provoked by the Covidian crisis.

7 “Fluidity, mobility, illusoriness . . . the qualities that make us civilized,” as the narrator of *Flights* (2018), the prize-winning novel by Olga Tokarczuk, remarks; cited by Jason Farago, “The Merry-Go-Round Stopped: What Sort of Art Will Emerge?,” art section of the *New York Times*, March 25, 2020.

8 Andrew Dickson, “Bye Bye, Blockbusters: Can the Art World Adapt to Covid-19?” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/apr/20/art-world-coronavirus-pandemic-online-artists-galleries>.

9 New York gallerist David Zwirner cited in *ibid*.

10 Grazyna Kulczyk built her entire museum, located in the Swiss alps, on the “slow poetic reciprocity” of analogue encounters, delving into the experience of singular pieces of art. “I strongly believe that no digital presence can substitute for the actual experience of a place.” See the portrait of Muzeum Susch and its founder Grazyna Kulczyk “I Founded a Museum to Encourage Slow Looking at Art” *artnet*, May 12, 2020, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/grazyna-kulczyk-muzeum-susch-recovery-1852734>.

11 Dickson, “Bye Bye, Blockbusters.”

12 *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (1973) is the title of a monograph published by German-born British economist Ernst Friedrich Schumacher. In response to the Wall Street crisis in 2008–10, the book became an inspiration for critics of the neo-liberalist socio-economy everywhere. In this context, the KUAD gallery of Beral Madra envisioned the micro economy of an art space built around a community of collectors and artists. The book is available in Turkish: *Küçük Güzeldir* (Istanbul: Varlık Publications, 2010).

13 Such an agenda was recently hinted at by Daniel Birnbaum, curator, author, and codirector of the 53th Venice Biennale (2009). Birnbaum envisions micro-cosmopolitan formats of artistic contexts and anticipates their resourcefulness for artistic research yet to come. See Ursula Scheer’s interview with Daniel Birnbaum, “Wie sieht die Kunstwelt nach Corona aus?,” *FAZ*, May 8, 2020, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/kurator-daniel-birnbaum-ueber-ausstellungen-der-zukunft-16758908.html>. Birnbaum is currently director of Acute Art, an art space dedicated mainly to the development of the digital arts and to innovations between technology and art.

14 See also Dickson, “Bye Bye, Blockbusters.”

15 The Onassis Foundation recently started an art project called ENTER: A Series of Artworks Created at Home within 120 Hours that is dedicated to artistic creativity in “private capsules.” See www.onassis.org/enter/about.

16 Wednesday Society. With works by Meret Oppenheim, Rebecca Horn, Natela Iankoshvili, Gülçin Aksoy, Tony Chakar, Artam Antik Palace, September 18–October 18, 2019. See House of Taswir / Shulamit Bruckstein, “Wednesday Society: The Exhibition,” *Art Unlimited* 56 (March 2020), 63–73 (Turkish)



REBECCA RAUE. DREAMDROPS FALLING – THE ASCETIC FINDS HIS SON ALIVE IN HIS CRIB (FOLIO FROM A KALILA WA DIMNA, 18TH CENTURY SYRIA OR EGYPT) 2017. ACRYLIC, COAL, CRAYON, PASTEL, CARDBOARD AND PAPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON ALUMINUM COMPOSITE PANEL, 72 X 49,5 CM.



REBECCA HORN, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, 1993

thread in which an imaginary artist had assembled ancient and contemporary poetry, spells out an agenda, and our commentaries on these fragments are still at the very beginning:

“the soul’s confusing play swinging forgotten the Hebrew” (Rebecca Horn) “words wrapped in poisonous letters” (Meret Oppenheim) “a women’s speech delays death” (Fetih Benslama) “behold, you are beautiful, my love” (Song of Songs)

“a female text that overflows” (Hélène Cixous)

Forgotten ancient wisdoms, betrayal, deferral, desire, and an *écriture féminine*, these are the themes to hide in the poietic thread. Wednesday Society invented its own idiosyncratic “apparatus of scribes” to unravel the thread. Conversations à deux, female intellectuals on Wednesday Society’s green and golden couch who are producing a “female text, a text that overflows.” They read the exhibition like ancient commentators would read an ancient text. Each conversation: a university? All those scribbled mural notes: a curriculum?

House of Taswir together with Art Unlimited is transforming a public exhibition into an object of research, an object of artistic, psycho-poietic, psycho-political research to be developed publicly in a series of dossiers published in this magazine. We are interested in ancient and contemporary settings for libidinous secrets in times of persecution and surveillance. We are interested in the somehow forgotten, displaced, or hazily remembered ancient techniques of creating privacy that resurface in art, poetry, and psychoanalysis. At the heart of those ancient techniques is the lovers’ claim to opacity.

The Berlin-based artist Rebecca Raue, whose *Kalila wa Dimna* series we are proud to present, recently did a solo show in Berlin called *Notes from the Margin of Time*.¹⁷ One of the essays in that catalogue is titled “Intimacy May Be Political.”¹⁸ Yes, intimacy is political. Claiming the right to opacity is political. Scenes of analogue intimacies, private scenes of speech, and lovers’ secrets are subversive in Covidian times in which even the bathtub becomes a perfectly Instagrammable spot, in which the couch of psychoanalysts goes digital, and analogue art scenes are on retreat. In her contemporary interventions in eighteenth-century *Kalila wa Dimna* folios, Rebecca Raue retrieves the ancient layers of a medieval manuscript in technical reproduction. She then adds an original commentary of her own scribbled onto the ancient illuminated copies. The artist retrieves an ancient memory, an ancient trope, an ancient story, a whisper no longer legible, as European tradition has “forgotten” and keeps forgetting the Arabic, has “forgotten” and keeps forgetting the Persian, the Urdu, the Hebrew, and so on.¹⁹ Ancient wisdoms tend to get occupied by narrow nationalisms, provincial bigotries, institutional authorities posing as doppelgängers of what has withdrawn. Ancient wisdoms thus escape to other fields, taking rhizomatic detours, surfacing in foreign territory, and dressing up in transvestite clothes.²⁰ In Covidian times and possibly even thereafter, when intimacy, privacy, opacity are under scrutiny, and spontaneous scenes of love, wisdom, and learning are on the brink of disappearance, it seems of utmost urgency to investigate ancient tropes of intimacy and the protocols of their withdrawal, displacement, and recurrence, in order to embrace what has withdrawn in new ways.

“Behold you are beautiful my love, your eyes are doves” (Song of Songs) “I was with Him a hidden treasure . . .” (Hadith) “His fruit was sweet to my taste . . .” (Song of Songs) “a women’s speech delays death” (Fetih Benslama) “a secret garden my sister my bride” (Song of Songs) “Put me as a seal upon your heart” (Song of Songs) “the soul’s confusing play swinging forgotten the Hebrew” (Rebecca Horn) “mekudeshet-sinthom: savoir-faire in dealing with the repetition” (Ana Sontag / Geneviève Morel)

In the poetry thread of Wednesday Society’s imaginary artist, ancient tropes of bridal love are knotted up with poetry and contemporary psychoanalytic theory. Those ancient tropes from biblical, Hebrew, and rabbinic traditions on privacy and the dedication of the bride (*mekudeshet*) to her beloved is something precious in Covidian times. “Put me as a seal upon your heart,” says the bride, the *mekudeshet* to her beloved on the day of her betrothal. Could it be that these traditions have been so trivialized, so occupied by nationalism, by narrow religiosity, by male violence and domination, that these ancient tropes escaped from their “religious,” “traditional” territory long ago—into poetry, or, in this special case, into psychoanalysis?

17 Rebecca Raue, *Notizen vom Rand der Zeit: Für Rebecca Horn*, exh. cat., Berlin, Gutshaus Steglitz (Berlin: Revolver Publishing, 2019).

18 Ibid., 60–72.

19 The phenomenon of forgetfulness here applies to something that has never actually been known, an absence of knowledge that is nonetheless politically of utmost significance. In the history of European Enlightenment and its aftermath, the forgetfulness of Hebrew, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, and so on is symptomatic of the colonial condition. It would take much too much to explore this circumstance here.

20 *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Disaster* (Forthcoming Books, 2009) by Beirut thinker, filmmaker, artist, theorist Jalal Toufic is a text about political histories of forgetfulness, about the immaterial withdrawal of ancient layers of knowledge due to surpassing disasters of violence and destruction, when traditional matters get invisibly substituted by doppelgängers, institutional wannabes, and copy-pastes.

Can we be sure these precious teachings on the lovers' right to opacity, on the protection of privacy, and on the resistance to surveillance and the public gaze have survived in their new field? While psychoanalysis has long "forgotten the Hebrew"? Framed by new authorities, new institutional arrogance, new pledges to the State, new rituals of hierarchic submission? How then do retrieve these precious ancient teachings on privacy and desire, knowing that they withdrew from their very own territory, only to escape further, subject to one submissive institutional betrayal after another—a line of flight—into unknown territory. How do we find these precious teachings? How do we access a protocol for this transfer? Can we do it in the open of contemporary art? ²¹ In the midst of an Istanbul museum?²²

The ancient proclamation "I was with Him a hidden treasure" is a mythic pledge of a bride to her bridegroom.²³ "Herewith you are dedicated to me," says the bridegroom to the bride on the day of their wedding. You are dedicated to me, in the sense of: if all others may be for public gaze—this one is set apart (*mekudeshet*) for (a specific) secrecy.²⁴ In the ancient scene a promise of trust is spoken. Trust in an exchange *à deux*, in which intimacies are veiled and revealed, spoken or unspoken, and kept secret between the *mekudeshet* and her beloved/lover. "Put me as a seal upon your heart." The promise to safeguard the lovers' right to opacity—where has it gone?

There was a time when psychoanalysts still remembered the details of these bridal codes of intimacy,²⁵ but since rabbinic knowledge has vanished from psychoanalytic discourse these details have also disappeared.²⁶ Psychoanalysts today, at least in Berlin and Istanbul, for different reasons, do not remember the details of this ancient wisdom. "The soul's confusing play swinging forgotten the Hebrew" proclaims the artist Rebecca Horn in a poem titled "The Vertebra Oracle" and dedicated to Meret Oppenheim.²⁷ Wednesday Society presented fragments of this poem on its green walls²⁸ alongside private postcards that Horn had sent to collector Peter Raue on

different occasions, such as birthdays or New Year's Eve. The cards, bearing personal inscriptions such as "For Peter," are testimony of a life-long friendship between artist and collector.²⁹ In between those private communications, postcards with stunning, subtle, funny artistic interventions, never shown in public before, Wednesday Society objectified the ancient bridal promise "*Hare at mekudeshet li*—herewith you are dedicated to me . . ." in a white frame, on a green wall. There was one single visitor, not by chance the director of the Istanbul Lacan Institute, whose immediate reaction to this ancient citation was priceless: "I am a psychoanalyst. The bride—that is me." Here is the full text of citation:

21 In my essay "A Shadow's Dream: The Talmudic War Machine" (2017, taswir publishing, www.taswir.org/university) I outline two ways in which ancient wisdoms occupied by institutional doppelgängers may make their way back into free territory: via epistemic transferences of their specific architectures into foreign territory and via individual dreams of people who are sensitive to the immaterial withdrawal of the tradition in question.

22 *Wednesday Society: The Couch of Meret O.* at Artam Antik Palace, September 18–October 18, 2020. With many thanks to the Artam family and team, again.

23 This ancient saying is attributed to a rabbinic teaching of the fifth century (*Midrash Bereshit*) and to a Hadith of the thirteenth century. The subject is the bride, the female partner of the Eternal One, blessed be He, embodied as the Tora or the Holy Qur'an. The female partner, in the divine embrace, remains invisible to the world until she herself "longs to be seen": "therefore the world was created." Cf. Elliot R. Wolfson's abundant research on the use of gender in medieval mysticism, such as *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

24 The rabbinic tradition inverts the story of Socrates's wife when her husband was imprisoned. According to the Platonic anecdote in Lacanian contexts, Socrates let anyone come to visit—except Xanthippe, his wife, whose pain he could not suffer. "All except her," *mais pas ça* becomes a psychoanalytic trope for the invisibility, the hidden state of the feminine, a "non-universal" subject that "doesn't exist." In contrast, the rabbinic tradition presents the same argument just inverted: the bridegroom keeps everyone out of his private chamber—except for the bride—"all out except her"—*mais pas ça*: she enjoys his specific secrecy. Fully aware of the feminist protest against this judgment of annihilation, I read the status of the bride as a subversive act, an act contesting visibility, contesting universality, a non-phallic feminine defying the phallic categories of the universal. Cf. also Rolf Nemitz, *Lacan Entziffern*, commentary on Lacan's seminar "The Sinthom," www.lacan-entziffern.de/sinthom. The matter is complex and will be followed further.

25 Almút Sh. Bruckstein, "A Shadow's Dream: The Talmudic War Machine," www.taswir.org/university.

26 I am not talking about the fact that there are a huge number of Jewish psychoanalysts working in the field, with abundant literature about the connection between psychoanalysis and Jewish tradition readily available. I am talking specifically about what Karl Abraham called in his letters to Sigmund Freud the "talmudic way of thinking"—quite a specific way of thinking owing itself to rabbinic discourse. Cf. Almút Shulamit Bruckstein Çoruh, *House of Taswir: Doing and Undoing Things: Notes in Epistemic Architecture(s)* (Munich: Fink Verlag, 2014), and Bruckstein Çoruh, *Freud, Talmud, Taswir* (Istanbul/Berlin: taswir publishing, 2018).

27 Sean Kelly Gallery in New York dedicated a solo exhibition to this poem: *Rebecca Horn: The Vertebra Oracle* (May 10–June 21, 2014).

28 Ana Sontag, *Farewell to A* (2019), poetry thread, black and white forex (5677 x 2 cm), and thirty-three poetry fragments (10 x 15.5 cm / 15.5 x 10 cm), digital print on paper, black and white frames (29.3 x 29.3 cm).

29 From the Peter Raue Collection Berlin, with many thanks.



INSTALLATION VIEW, TONY CHAKAR, "THE DISCOURSE OF THE LAST THINGS BEFORE THE FIRST" (2017-2019) SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION, ANTIOCHIAN ICON WITH MURAL PAINTING, MURAL DRAWINGS AND PLOTTED TEXTS ON GOLDEN WALLS WITH MIRRORED CEILINGS. THIS WORK WAS FIRST PRESENTED IN BEIRUT IN THE SOLO-RETROSPECTIVE "TONY CHAKAR. ON BECOMING TWO" AT BEIRUT ART CENTER, 2017; A YEAR LATER IT WAS PART OF THE ARTIST'S SOLO EXHIBITION "AS IN A BEGINNING" AT THE VAN ABBEMUSEUM IN EINDHOVEN. THE DRAWINGS AND MURAL PAINTING IN THE 2019 ISTANBUL EDITION WERE EXECUTED BY FURKAN AKHAN. PHOTO HANNA LEHUN.

Mekudeshet [me-qu-de-šet]*

dedicated to a unique relationship, free to create a territory inaccessible to others, free from any usage, performed at designated times determined by the beloved, endowed with inalienable rights to opacity, to create conditions of privacy, secrecy, and touch

Ana Sontag

* *Hare at mekudeshet li* [Hebrew for "herewith you are dedicated to me"] is a traditional rabbinic formula spoken by the bridegroom to the bride in front of two witnesses in public matrimonial ceremony.

Wednesday Society is occupied with the withdrawal of an ancient Hebrew wisdom, an ancient bridal wisdom that resurfaced in psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century, only to withdraw from there even further. Wednesday Society would like to keep that ancient wisdom present, remember those ancient tropes of love and desire, and do justice to those spoken promises of the lovers' right to opacity. Wednesday Society would like to keep the revelation of secrets sensuous, analogue, physically perceptible, shared freely with no purpose, creative, beyond any therapeutic interest. To free those ancient bridal matters from the grip of their institutional doppelgängers,³⁰ Wednesday Society pursues them in artistic contexts, in exhibition spaces, galleries, and museums. Wednesday Society would like to set an ancient wisdom free and liberate the *mekudeshet*—her desire of secrets/secrets of desire. Imprisoned in the therapeutic apparatus, Wednesday Society creates its own apparatus for the *mekudeshet*—a new chair for her and the *psychoanalytic wisdom*

30 Theorist and psychoanalyst Sandrine Aumercier recently reminded me of the notion of transference protocols between epistemic fields. In a lecture at the Psychoanalytic Library in Berlin (June 2020), she presented the transference of fetish theories between nineteenth-century ethnology and Marxist and Freudian theories. Details of rabbinic tradition, too, became fetishes in their own field. They are off to an indeterminate line of flight—such as into psychoanalysis—only to suffer the same fate there. Taswir's theoretical and artistic research aims to transplant details of ancient wisdoms to the open field of contemporary art and the artistic field.

that she is.³¹ Inside the artistic context, the *mekudeshet* is set free. Is this the correct approach for studying Gülçin Aksoy's psycho-artistic installation *The Family Cemetery I Love*? As a piece of mourning? A bridal chamber? The empty chair—a requiem for the *mekudeshet*, for the psychoanalytic setting?

Psychoanalysis has transferred not one but *three* ancient "Hebrew" techniques into its own field. "The [psychoanalytic] world stands on three things."³² The *mekudeshet* is one of them. The question how exactly the rabbinic bride is "reconfigured" in the psychoanalytic setting, and the details of this transference, are stunning. Wednesday Society will explore that in another chapter, in a different context, elsewhere. What are the other two "Hebrew" techniques transferred to the psychoanalytic field? The second one is the method of "free association." Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham claimed that in psychoanalysis "the talmudic way of thinking"³³ must be remembered. This was a specific practice relating to letters and words that the ancient rabbis mastered, treating letters as bodies, knowing how to touch them, trace them, mirror them, conflate, cut, veil or unveil them, undoing referential regimes, unhinging grammar, sidetracking metaphors. It was a way of following metonymic chains, proceeding from outside in, from answer to question, in a typically Talmudic flow of free association, taking its cue from wounds, semantic hides and seeks, word plays, all triggered by the imagination, by desire, fear, and dreams.

The third rabbinic moment transferred into the psychoanalytic field is knowing the cathartic effects of speech acts that have the capacity to undo the knots of disastrous beginnings. The traditional scene is the High Priest entering the *kodesh kodashim*, the Holy of Holiest in Jerusalem's ancient temple on Yom Kippur. *Kodesh kodashim* does not accidentally share the same letter roots with the *mekudeshet*—*kds: someone or something set apart, intimate settings in which speech and sex acts have the power to undo beginnings from a perspective that is yet to come, creating a "Discourse of the Last Things Before the First."

31 In a different context I will show how the "wisdom that she is"—the wisdom of the *mekudeshet*—literally translates into "the wisdom of st. femme," a sister word-play to be explored further. It comes to mind when reading Jacques Lacan's seminars on "sinthom / st. homme" and the psychoanalytic function of the psychoanalyst. Thinking of the institutional imprisonment suffered by the *mekudeshet* I recall a line by Elliot R. Wolfson: "Suffering the suffering of this axiom is the first step on the path to redeeming an ancient wisdom, tiredly waiting to be liberated from the confinement of its own textual embodiment." See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 390. Cf. Almút Sh. Bruckstein, "ERW: Fourfolded Forward," lecture held at the symposium "Heidegger and Kabbalah" in honor of Elliot R. Wolfson's recent book *Heidegger and Kabbalah: Hidden Gnosis and the Path of Poiesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019). The conference was held in March 2020; the lecture is unpublished.

32 "The world stands on three things: on Torah, on works, and kindness to others." *Pirke Avoth* 1:2. Wednesday Society transferred fragments of this ancient saying into the poetry thread of the imaginary artist.

33 "Die talmudische Denkweise kann ja nicht plötzlich aus uns verschwunden sein." Sigmund Freud / Karl Abraham, *Briefe 1907–1926*, ed. Hilda C. Abraham and Ernst L. Freud (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1965), 48.



GÜLCİN AKSOY, "FAMILY CEMETERY I LOVE" (2018/2019), EMPTY CHAIR WITH THE INSCRIPTION "AILE" (FAMILY) ON IT PRODUCED BY TORN OUT TEXTILE THREADS FORMING THE LETTERS A I L E, BLACK MATTRESS ON BLACK FLOOR, BLACK PAPER PANELS WITH WHITE PENCIL, SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION. THE "FAMILY CEMETERY I LOVE" WAS SHOWN IN THE SOLO-EXHIBITION OF GÜLCİN AKSOY IN RUM GALATA SCHOOL IN ISTANBUL, FALL 2018.



The Discourse of the Last Things Before the First is the work of Beirut artist, architect, and writer Tony Chakar. In the Wednesday Society exhibition this work, which includes an Antiochian icon, was presented as the last niche that was also the first, and it took the position of the *turning point*, a place from which one returns with roots undone, an iconic work that teaches beholders how *not* to betray the beloved in exactly the moment in which it is too late. Visitors enter the niche of Holy Mary only to get involved in a story of betrayal: her mural shadows, scattered limbs, and the affixed texts on the history of central perspective between them, teach a story of interests and gains, chains of beginnings, central perspectives, fetish narratives in architecture, art, war making, nationalism, economy, capitalism, psycho-technology. "No central perspective!" is written all over her iconic face, *noli me tangere*, an iconostasis that visitors ignore.³⁴ "You are my secret garden, my treasure, my bride, a secluded spring, a hidden fountain." When visitors turn around, they see the icon's behind and realize: it is too late to be faithful. "Daughter(s) of Jerusalem . . . Do not waken up love before it so desires."

It is time to unravel ancient secrets in the territory of art.

³⁴ See Ana-Lisa Dieter, "Noli me tangere: Die berührungslose Gesellschaft," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 2020, for a noteworthy commentary on how the rules of lockdowns and physical distancing interrelate with Christian iconography. Image: Rebecca Raue, Reconnect to Female Power - The Captive Peasant with His Two Wives (Folio from a Kalila wa Dimna, 18th Century Syria or Egypt), 2017, Acrylic, coal, crayon, pastel, pencil and paper on paper mounted on aluminum composite panel, 69,6 x 49,5 cm

REBECCA RAUE, WHO WAS BORN IN BERLIN IN 1976, STUDIED VISUAL ARTS WITH GEORG BASELITZ AND REBECCA HORN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARTS IN BERLIN. SINCE 2002 SHE HAS REGULARLY PARTICIPATED IN INTERNATIONAL SOLO AND GROUP EXHIBITIONS; HER LIST OF EXHIBITIONS IS EXTENSIVE. RAUE HAS HAD SOLO EXHIBITIONS IN BERGEN, BERLIN, DRESDEN, ISTANBUL, NEW YORK, TOKYO, VIENNA, AND ZÜRICH; SHE HAS CONTRIBUTED TO GROUP EXHIBITIONS IN COLOGNE, SALZBURG, SHANGHAI, AND VALPARAISO. RAUE HAS PARTICIPATED IN THREE HOUSE OF TASWIR EXHIBITIONS, *THE RED GAZE* AT ZILBERMAN GALLERY BERLIN (2016), *FRAGMENTS FROM OUR BEAUTIFUL FUTURE* AT THE BUMILLER COLLECTION BERLIN (2017), AND IS CURRENTLY FEATURED IN *MEINE KLEINE MNEMOSYNE* AT HOUSE OF TASWIR IN BERLIN (2020). THE *KALILA WA DIMNA* SERIES WAS SHOWN AS A SOLO POSITION IN *FRAGMENTS FROM OUR BEAUTIFUL FUTURE* IN BERLIN IN 2017. HER WORKS ARE INCLUDED IN MANY IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIONS. REBECCA RAUE LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN.



REBECCA RAUE, REMEMBER THE JOY / PLAYING THE GAME - MAN'S FATE OR THE MAN TAKING REFUGE IN A WELL INHABITED BY A DRAGON (FOLIO FROM A KALILA WA DIMNA, 18TH CENTURY SYRIA OR EGYPT) 2017. ACRYLIC, COAL, CRAYON, PASTEL AND CARDBOARD ON PAPER MOUNTED ON ALUMINUM COMPOSITE PANEL, 70 X 49,5 CM.

REBECCA RAUE, OVERCOMING CONTEMPT - THE POOR MAN APPREHENDS THE THIEF (FOLIO FROM A KALILA WA DIMNA, 18TH CENTURY SYRIA OR EGYPT) 2017. ACRYLIC, COAL, CRAYON, PASTEL, PENCIL, BALSAM WOOD AND CARDBOARD ON PAPER MOUNTED ON ALUMINUM COMPOSITE PANEL, 67,8 X 49,5 CM.

WHEN STORIES FLY An Essay on Rebecca Raue's Kalila wa Dimna Series by Marleen Stoessel

The two things that strike the eye when first looking at Rebecca Raue's pictures are their unbridled delight in color and something childlike, seemingly chaotic. Both belong together. The free, playful, sometimes also humorous gesture is suggestive of old picture books in which, as children, we used to roam about with crayons, drawing loops and scribbling letters and numbers in them—leaving clumsy marks and traces to make something from these fascinating sources our own.

Immersing ourselves in Rebecca Raue's pictures, we soon realize that what we first perceived as childlike in fact evinces a high degree of complexity, skill, and self-awareness—all without losing its character. All of Rebecca Raue's pictures, whether based on external models or not, are superscriptions, overpaintings, collages. Like children's drawings, they do not worry about the measure and consistency of bodies and objects, their mutual proportions, their physical and logical location in the room, let alone about their meaningful connection. Words, characters, crossed-out and erased objects turn into picture elements of equal rank and importance; color snafus and pieces of cardboard become vivid islands or seams, adding a spatial dimension independent of consistent coordinates, providing points of reference for the eye within a fantastically luxuriant tumult of color. Like these, also recurring motifs, similar to codes, show an (artistic) handwriting (in the literal sense of the word)—a pictographic writing that presents itself as palimpsest, picture puzzle, and dream-narrative where these codes function as rebus elements.

The paintings are based on the Book of *Kalila wa Dimnah*, a famous Indian collection of animal fables, which is named after two jackals serving at a lion's royal court and disseminated across the Arabic-Persian world from the 10th century onward. It is a book of folk tales, richly and elaborately illustrated time and again. But also and especially, it is a textbook, a *Mirror for Princes* written for the country's future rulers. In line with oriental tradition, an unending chain of stories is woven, each related with the one preceding it—a thread which (except by arbitrary decision) never ends and which, much like Sheherazade's narrative, over and over again rekindles the curiosity of readers and listeners.

It might at first come as a surprise that the artist is not interested in any of this. What attracted her when she first saw the Egyptian-Syrian illustrations of the book from the 18th century at New York's Metropolitan Museum were the colors and the, to her, incomprehensible pages interspersed with Arabic-Persian writing. She also ignored the captions referring to the respective narratives.

Like a child (the comparison imposes itself once more), she traces the outlines of trees on photographic reproductions carefully printed on aluminum sheets, here and there reinforcing the red and thus inflaming the fruits of a tree. New and vivid accents are placed; a gesture is imitated; a chunk of gold or feces (Freud!) thrown into a dragon's open mouth, accompanied by the word *feeding* as comment. She paints, crosses out, abstracts—also from the semantics and contexts of words: *the bird knows, wisdom, knowledge, being inside*—expressions which are not so much carriers of concrete meaning but rather mystical references, traces of a secret knowledge that makes each of

her pictures into a rebus of its own. Small sticks, most of them painted red, carved from Asian balsa wood, fall from the skies like pencils, strengthening or marking a line, or cutting through a surface, seemingly plumbing the layers and depths of a dreamscape rife with color, as in the picture *The thief falls through the skylight in the bedroom* to the wand of the *magic story teller*, who, between times and lines, plays his game of transformation. As if she were re-dreaming the model for her pictures, she creates a new (ironic) narrative in which the husband surprised by burglars becomes a storyteller who, as though by magic, sends his fabric flying: *Stories fly...*

What was faded or appeared as a subdued patina in the original now begins to glow in this new conception—allowing things that were absent (thus also absent meanings), hidden, semi-concealed, or translucent in the layers of appropriation, filtering, and overpainting to emerge from their museum-imposed cocoon, and giving rise to time holes as though they were spyholes into the past which in its unfathomable enigma either projects itself into the future or finds itself transfixed in an emphatic now. These dreams abounding in world-cultural cross-references defy interpretation. And yet, one is tempted to pursue the traces left by their energy—an energy which, like ancient rock paintings, has stood the test of time. The only thing that matters and undergoes interpretation is that which individually concerns us in this encounter. "Perceptibility [is] an attentiveness," Walter Benjamin once wrote, quoting Novalis. It is subject to the law of chance, which is never purely accidental, that determines when something which might have been there all the time appears to us. There can be no doubt that Raue's dreamscapes are surreal formations, even though they have nothing in common with the agenda once proclaimed by Surrealism. Heartened by her teacher Rebecca Horn, she completely trusts her own inner voice. And maybe it was her other teacher, Georg Baselitz, who encouraged her boldness and free play with conventions.

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