

Artists: Jessica El Mal, Parham Ghalamdar

Castlefield Gallery is proud to be working in partnership with Grundy Art Gallery in Blackpool, Touchstones Rochdale, University of Salford Art Collection and Shezad Dawood Studio on Hybrid Futures: a pilot project that aims to act on climate change by introducing sustainability in commissioning, exhibiting and collecting art for their region. For more information, visit: www.hybrid-futures.salford.ac.uk.

The Poetics of Water features new work by Jessica El Mal and Parham Ghalamdar that is motivated by the effects of colonialism, corruption, conflict and capitalism on the natural environment. Through a series of ceramics and oil paintings, Ghalamdar has been reflecting on a recurring theme in Persian mythology: the struggle to prevent the separation of soil and water and the repression of growth and knowledge that this causes. This struggle has echoes in our popular culture and the discourse around the climate crisis. For Ghalamdar the narrative takes on an absurd tone as we repeatedly fail to make significant positive change.

The Workers Are Suffering (2023) features a text written by a journalist, author, artist, and activist, whose name has been redacted for their safety. They have been incarcerated in Iran under charges of “propaganda against the system” and “conspiracy and collusion to undermine national security”. The text has been translated from Persian to English by Ghalamdar who has also added a preface. The work serves as an example of the Iranian government’s suppression of climate change rhetoric. The author’s exploration of the climate crisis has been deemed heretical within the context of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Working with Kimiā Collective (Chahine Fellahi and Kais Ayouch) in Morocco, October 2022, El Mal wanted to record the rain by coating sheets of paper with cyanotype solution (a

Handout

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slow-reacting photographic printing formulation sensitive to ultraviolet light) and exposing them to the open air. Due to drought, there was no rain, so a river was sought out instead but the rivers were also dry. After travelling up into the mountains a water source was finally found. The imagery used to make the animation in *The Water We Seek* (2023) was made from prints of the Oud Diyal Oukaimden, a river at the highest point of a mountain in the Tobkal range of the High Atlas Mountains. Paper coated in cyanotype solution was left in the stream, so that its shape would be imprinted on the page. The marks made reflect the force of the river and its movement. Digitised, and animated by Zineb Sekkat a.k.a LINEZ, the imagery is re-animated in response to the soundtrack, coded to move depending on what it ‘hears’. Edited by musician and producer Patryk Krol, the piece begins with the voice of Mbarek Benghazi, a local guide to Auberge Dar Sahara in Mhamid El Ghizlane. He explains the changing relationship to water in the area which is the last oasis before the Sahara. Benghazi’s voice is interwoven with field recordings and conversations recorded at the MOSS observatory, musical elements performed by Krol and poetic interventions written by El Mal (translated and performed by Nussaiba Roussi).

Spring Rain Collection (2022 – ongoing) by El Mal is a series of cyanotype prints of rainfall in Morocco. The title refers to a poem by Nizar Tawfiq Qabbani, Arab futurism and the Arab Spring (a series of anti-government protests, uprisings and armed rebellions that began to spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s). It is also influenced by a connection the author, activist, and political analyst Naomi Klein makes between the areas in the world that both receive the least rainfall and the highest concentration of western air strikes. The dates in the titles note the dates the prints were made. After days of praying for rain the prints finally recorded its repetitive and random patterns. El Mal does not see these works as a record of drought - a colonial imaginary of North Africa as a dry desert - but

of salvation. Of rain coming and of new beginnings. In some Arabic proverbs, when it rains, heaven is open and there is a more direct line to God, so it is a good time to pray. *An Ocean in Every Drop* (2023) is made from fabric screen printed with imagery taken from the *Spring Rain Collection* cyanotypes. Repeated across the fabric the ephemeral becomes infinite with layouts inspired by old testament manuscripts and Abrahamic religious iconography. Every effort during the making process was made to make the work as sustainably as possible: recycling material, sourcing things locally and using environmentally friendly inks. These two works by El Mal are accompanied by a sound piece which was made alongside the screen printing process, the two works influencing the production rhythm and editing of each other. *Taghounja* (2023) draws out the musicality of the rain and its links between culture, spirituality and song. El Mal worked with musician Saad Elbaraka and Oud player Mohktar Hsina. The piece also includes a popular children's chant which wishes for the rain to come and sound sampled from *Zeft* (a 1984 film by Tayeb Saddiki) in particular the sound of the agricultural machinery, dialogue about rain, and the sound of rain.

The title of El Mal's work *An Ocean in Every Drop* (2023) references the many hands that helped make the work, particularly Soufiane Ourich who worked with El Mal and others to build and work the large frames necessary to produce the work. For El Mal it is important to recognise that all her work is made within an interdependent community. The work for this exhibition has been made over two years, between Marrakech, Mhamid, Casablanca and Manchester, and engaged the skills, care and pleasure of many people within her community. Ghalamdar would like to thank artist Alice Merida Richards, for her generous assistance with the ceramics made for the exhibition which were fired and glazed at The Manchester Ceramics Collective studios.

Jessica El Mal is a British-Moroccan artist and curator with a particular interest in ecology and care. Her work addresses global structures of power through critical research, multidisciplinary projects, and speculative future imaginaries. She works internationally,

having had projects with Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, Manchester Museum, Esmat Publishing Cairo and MAMA Rotterdam to name a few. In the UK, she runs arts programs in nature for people with experience of migration, as a way of addressing accessibility of green spaces whilst also building community networks. Jessica is also the co-founder of A.MAL Projects, an art and research initiative between Europe and North Africa, dedicated to providing paid opportunities for artists.

Parham Ghalamdar is a painter with a background in graffiti. He studied MA in painting at Manchester School of Art, specialising in oil painting. Ghalamdar expanded his painting and drawing practice into the digital realm in 2020 and has recently finished two short animations/films in collaboration with the director Martin Cooper, commissioned by the Oscar-winning artist, animator and filmmaker, Joan Gratz. He is a member of the Workplace Foundation's Community of Artists. Recent solo exhibitions include *Painting: An Unending HOME* Manchester, *Fig.1* at Caustic Coastal, *A Fine Kettle of Fish* at Granada Foundation Galleries HOME, Manchester and *Against the Absurdity of Life* at Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar Gallery, Monte-Carlo. Recent group exhibitions include *The Lowry*, Salford, *Rebecca Hossack Gallery*, London, *London Paint Club*, *Floorr Magazine*, *Castlefield Gallery*, Manchester, *Manchester Art Gallery*, the *Whitworth*, Manchester, *Beep Painting Biennale*, Swansea, *Asia Now Art Fair*, Paris. His work is also in University of Salford Art Collection and Government Art Collection.

This exhibition is part of Hybrid Futures: a collaborative pilot project exploring sustainability in commissioning, exhibiting and collecting art in the North West.



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