



inordinate skies

an invitation to reflect, feel, and vicariously
experience the vastness above

curated and edited by pramodha weerasekera

featuring artists

sabeen omar

arshad hakim

aruni dharmakirthi

The curator/editor would like to dedicate this publication to the three artists arshad, aruni, and sabeen, for their support, insights, vulnerability, trust, and more that cannot be valued in any actual or metaphorical currency.

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This is a labour of love.
If you received this copy for free, do cherish it.

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inordinate skies invites you to be moved. You are encouraged to soak in any emotions you feel as a result of what your senses capture. You may wish to stare, slow your walking pace, sit down, close your eyes, and contemplate why each artwork moves you so. Starting from the curator's own personal desire to look at the sky in moments of despair, melancholy, and pondering, the artworks in this project mark sometimes significant, sometimes fleeting yet memorable skies.

The three artists' relationships with such skies are metaphorical and intricately detailed—they reflect on the emotional impact of the presence(s) and absence(s) of skies amidst their individual urban, busy lives in the cities of Colombo, Bangalore, and Brooklyn (with the project being primarily produced in Delhi).

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curated by pramodha weerasekera

*skies almost
forgotten*

a prelude by pramodha weerasekera

"If I go this fast, I won't see anything. If I slow down—*Everything*.—then I won't have seen everything before it disappears.

Everywhere. I've been everywhere. I haven't been everywhere, but it's on my list.

Land's end. But there's water,
O my heart. And salt on my tongue.

The end of the world. This is not the end of the world."

From 'Unguided Tour' (1979) by Susan Sontag¹

This series of vignettes started as a challenge to myself: what if I were to recollect skies from my life so far? Would I remember anything? Over the past three decades? The exercise felt doable until I got stuck and realised that in most instances what I remember are my ponderings about the colossal, precarious, unreliable, yet beautiful nature of the sky and the emotions they led to. This is thus an 'unguided tour' as Sontag defines it; with an (un)balanced pace and nostalgia of vast emotions with a connection to the sky—something I would want to write before I reach the end of the world.

1 May 2023

My friend turned 30 and she insisted that we spend time together in the south of Sri Lanka. The rain disturbed our shared affection for a swim in a pool when we got stuck in Hiriketiyā on the rooftop of MOND, a beautiful guesthouse-restaurant. We could feel the strong winds from the rooftop. From a distance, we saw the sea acting with dark anger; the sky was covered in a mist heading our way and tiny, almost invisible droplets of water. While watching the sea merge with the sky, we forgot that we were stuck until the rain receded, which was almost two hours later. Upon returning to Colombo, neither of us was tired and dreading the thought of going back to work the next day—I was too busy scrolling through the numerous photos I had taken of the tumultuous sky and sea.

¹ Sontag, Susan. "Unguided Tour." *Granta*, 1 Sept. 1979, <https://granta.com/unguided-tour/>. Accessed 15 Oct. 2023.



Our view of the sea from the terrace of MOND in Hiriketiyā

The sky is made of particles of air. What happens when humans breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide? Does that mean that humans become part of the sky just by breathing in and out, the least they must do to survive? Kiran Desai begins *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) with the breath of Sai, one of the protagonists, interacting with the air which is already contaminated by smoke and mist in the hills of Kalimpong:

"Up through the chimney and out, the smoke mingled with the mist that was gathering speed, sweeping in thicker and thicker, obscuring things in parts—half a hill, then the other half. The trees turned into silhouettes, loomed forth, were submerged again. Gradually the vapor replaced everything with itself, solid objects with shadow, and nothing remained that did not seem molded from or inspired by it. Sai's breath flew from her nostrils in drifts, and the diagram of a giant squid constructed from scraps of information, scientists' dreams, sank entirely into the murk."²

Sometimes during yoga lessons, as I breathe in and out, I wonder if I am contaminating the sky—an element that is bounteous and fascinating that it looms over all humanity.³ How ironic is it that the sky can morph itself into many shapes purely through movement but

² Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. publ, Penguin Canada, 2006. p. 2. Although I read this novel many years ago, the story and the description of the opening have stayed with me. Coincidentally, as I retrieved the book from my shelves, the dust entered my own lungs and later made me think about the effect of breathing on air pollution and vice versa.

³ Although the act of breathing out carbon dioxide in itself cannot contaminate or pollute the air, other human interventions that emit the element, such as industrial waste, transportation, and power generation are recognised to cause air pollution leading eventually to climate change. See: World Health Organisation. "Ambient (Outdoor) Air Pollution." [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-\(outdoor\)-air-quality-and-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ambient-(outdoor)-air-quality-and-health). Accessed 22 Oct. 2023.

can be contaminated by vapours caused by humans? How ironic is it that in today's discourse of mental health, meditational breathwork is considered highly effective in 'purifying' humans when their activities continue to contaminate the air they take in?

4 Webb, Toyah. "kisses on the lips of [g is for] ghosts." *Runway Journal*, <https://runway.org.au/toyah-webb/>. Accessed 13 Oct. 2023.

23 March 2023

I was visiting India for the first time. I had never travelled on a plane on my own before and it was my first flight in seven years. I landed in Bangalore at 7 pm and in the darkness and overwhelming anxiety, I could not spot the driver who had come to pick me up. Once I got in the car, the driver did not say a word to me—he double-checked if the name of the hotel was correct and kept driving while calmly speaking on the phone in Kannada, a language I do not understand. I had no internet since I had left Sri Lankan territory and I felt compelled to look at the night sky. I cannot remember a thing I saw in the sky. What I remember are the billboards of McDonald's branches spread along the way. Familiarity and quiet solitude brought me to my hotel room, safe and sound, but to a large number of WhatsApp messages and calls from friends and family who wanted to know if I had landed safely.

"In French, a *billet-doux* is a 'sweet note' passed between lovers. But a 'billet' is also a 'ticket', or an 'order for one person to pay another'. When I write you a love letter, I am demanding something from you. This demand vanishes at the moment of its appearance and is thus, unanswerable."⁴

Why does the demand for a payment vanish when it is a love letter? I rarely write letters and have become used to faster methods of communication. However, regardless of its form, a letter always places the burden of a response on the recipient. Many of us apologise for "delays" in responding and "answering in our minds" but not in fact pressing the "send" button or its equivalent.

We seem to think that the anxiety of the sender as they wait, requires an apology. Can we look at a love letter as a declaration of longing? Can the endless and enduring sky be a love letter, an expression of longing? Could we use it for comfort when no words can capture our innermost desires? But then, what if the love letter causes heartbreak?

5 A staff transport vehicle in Sri Lanka is a system where many employees of the same workplace or neighbouring workplaces can travel together at a reduced cost. These vehicles are more comfortable, punctual, and safer for women (although more expensive) than public transport in the country. 6 This governmental organisation is responsible for ensuring a disaster-free environment in Sri Lanka. It operates under the Ministry of Defence and specialises in geotechnical engineering, landslide risk management, human settlements planning, environmental monitoring, building materials research, and engineering project management.

26 March 2023

I travelled from Bangalore to Delhi by flight. I exited the Delhi airport behind a young woman who was greeted by her partner, who was ecstatic to see her. He rushed to hug her and in that moment, anything beyond her was of no significance to him. During the short cab ride from the terminal to my Airbnb, I could not stop thinking about it. On a spring afternoon, the sky was blue but there was dust in the air. Yet, I remember the exact light blue hue and the hug.

August 2022

Due to the rising prices of fuel in Sri Lanka, my mother found a staff transport bus⁵ for me to travel back and forth from work. Every day, I would wait for 10 to 15 minutes on the main road for the bus to pick me up. On the first few days, I would forget its license plate number and stare at the incoming traffic to make sure I did not miss it. Glimpses of the sun and sky peeking through several high-rise buildings were visible from the tinted windows of the bus. On a good day, there would be a soft drizzle that would stop just before my destination.

December 2022

I looked at a dark and cloudy grey sky while waiting for my vehicle in the morning. This sky was new—a layer of thick smoke was all over Colombo. Later that day, the National Building Research Organisation⁶ announced that it was a temporary fog caused by an air quality of 249. They blamed strong winds travelling from India.

When my grandmother passed away, I did not feel anything—I was numb. She had lived with us for almost 20 years, and we knew she was reaching her last few days. On some days my mother would check on her breathing because she would appear extremely still in her bedridden state.⁹ When she eventually left us, I did not feel grief. I cried only when I witnessed my mother cry upon preparing the casket for the burial. At Colombo's main burial ground, the funeral ceremony ended sooner than I thought. I was eager to go home after the burial, but there was a long queue

I was standing at the bus halt in front of the University Grants Commission (UGC).⁷ I was a second-year student at the University of Colombo, a public university where students were vehemently protesting medical degrees offered by a private higher education institution.⁸ On this day, students from my faculty had taken over the road in front of the UGC, protesting privately funded education. There was tear gas, the road was closed, and no buses were available. I was stuck in a place I did not belong. I remember looking at the open road and then switching my gaze to the gate of the UGC which students were trying to climb. The sky felt distant and hazy.

My sister and I decided to go to Galle and spend a few days together. Power cuts due to fuel shortages had started in areas other than Colombo and we did not expect the Southern Expressway to be pitch dark with no streetlights. She was driving and I kept checking Google Maps to ensure we reached our hotel safely. We were yet to realise how serious the economic crisis would turn out to be. She and I had an argument, and the tension in the car was obvious. As black skies overwhelmed us, we reached Galle and finally made up. She could not leave the country until October 2022 because of the economic crisis. She had planned to leave in April for grad school.

9 By this time, my grandmother was unable to do daily chores and was different from her past self who was excited for any celebration. My grandmother was loving in her own quiet and calm demeanour, and that is what I will always remember her by.

8 This was an island-wide protest by students at state-funded universities against a group of 82 students from a privately funded university who had filed a fundamental rights petition against the Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC) for not providing them with internships. The protests continued from 2015 until 30 July 2019 when the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka ordered the SLMC to register the petitioners and allow them to practise medicine. See: "Top Court Orders Medical Council to Register SAIMT Grads." *EconomyNext*, 12 July 2019, <https://economynext.com/top-court-orders-medical-council-to-register-saitm-grads-43917>. Accessed 22 Oct. 2023.

7 This is the government body that distributes funds to and manages primarily state-funded higher education institutions in Sri Lanka. They are also responsible for authorising private and non-governmental institutions to offer valid, locally recognised educational qualifications.

I spent an exchange semester in Germany, as an undergraduate. I loved late spring, when the sun was shining, and the atmosphere was cool and calming. During the coming months, in summer, I would wait many hours for sunset because without darkness I could not fall asleep. I did not enjoy my first and only summer in Europe; it was too warm, the sun was always blinding me, and I missed home. On Sundays, when I had some time to spare, I would look out of the window of my dorm room and think about the window in my bedroom at home. The view I remembered was static because there are no seasons in the tropics of Sri Lanka.

Now, I pay attention to that gulp in my throat when I cry.

The sensorial nature of grief is difficult to be captured in language and yet my first time reading her words made me wonder if grief could be felt physically, beyond emotion.

"Grief is different. Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life. Virtually everyone who has ever experienced grief mentions this phenomenon of "waves."¹⁰

In *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2007) Joan Didion describes how she tried to dissect grief in bodily, physical terms after her husband's passing.

of people that worked with my three uncles, wanting to pay their respects. Looking at the sheer vastness of the land against the sky in silent mourning until the queue receded was onerous and emotionally exhausting. For months afterward, I would walk into my grandmother's room calling out for her and return, momentarily perplexed by her absence.

10 Didion goes on to quote a scientific study about grief: "Eric Lindemann, who was chief of psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital in the 1940s and interviewed many family members of those killed in the 1942 Coconut Grove fire, defined the phenomenon with absolute specificity in a famous 1944 study: "sensations of somatic distress occurring in waves lasting from twenty minutes to an hour at a time, a feeling of tightness in the throat, choking with shortness of breath, need for sighing, and an empty feeling in the abdomen, lack of muscular power, and an intense subjective distress described as tension or mental pain." See: Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. 1st Vintage International ed, Vintage International, 2007, p. 37.

In her poem 'A Warm Day' (2007) Louise Glück speaks of the cold with negative connotations; it is known as a season of enjoyment with room for rest and longer slumber. As the poem progresses from a warm day in summer to a dark, cold day in winter, the narrator's neighbour deteriorates and becomes engulfed in sombre despair. My memories of European summers are the exact opposite.

"...though the sun's beginning to move lower in the sky; remember, it isn't summer yet, only the beginning of spring; warmth hasn't taken hold yet, and the cold's returning—"11

Through religious and cultural affiliations many recognise the sky as Heaven and the ground beneath as a portal to Hell. In John Milton's rendition of the ultimate sin in *Paradise Lost* (1667), Satan says the following, bringing in a new perspective about Heaven and Hell:

"The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n...
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n."12

Satan in this epic poem is not unfaithful as one would presume. Having been a devoted angel before, when he falls, he distinguishes the mind of every being to be capable of both good and bad. In prioritising the immense power and control reigning in Hell would give him, it is believed that he chose bad and Hell. Are not our minds as immense as the sky? Is it not up to us as individuals to contaminate it with bad and/or shower it with good?

11 Glück, Louise. "A Warm Day". *The Paris Review*, Vol. Winter 2007, no. 183, 2007. [www.theparisreview.org](https://www.theparisreview.org/poetry/5821/a-warm-day-louise-gluck), <https://www.theparisreview.org/poetry/5821/a-warm-day-louise-gluck>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2023.

12 Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*, 1667, Book 1, lines 254–263.



A rare snowy morning from the window of my dorm room in Giessen, Germany in late spring of 2017

28 April 2007

Sri Lankans had been waiting for this day... After a decade, we were in the final of the Cricket World Cup, against a powerful opponent: Australia. My parents went to a neighbour's house to watch the match. My siblings and I stayed home. We heard a sharp noise, and I looked out the window to see what had happened. The power supply was interrupted, and helicopters were flying overhead, coming dangerously close to land. No one was able to watch the match. We managed to go to sleep without letting the noise affect us. When our parents came home, we learned that a gas storage facility just a few miles away from our home had been bombed by a group of rebels. The Sri Lankan cricket team lost the World Cup that day. Darkness ate up the red that followed the bomb blast, and I remember looking at the moon and wondering why it was not moving.

I was ten years old and would always get angry at my sister for making us late to school. On this day, we were late, once again, but the morning sermon was delayed unexpectedly. I walked into my classroom and heard that an older student who was 16 years old had ‘jumped’ from the sixth floor of the school’s new building. We could not figure out what she had to achieve. The word “suicide” was in the air. We all kept looking at the sky, comparing it against the height of the building and guessing how much of her was left. A few days later, my mother went to the funeral and told us that she had died of suicide because of her parents’ pressure on her to study medicine. No one mentioned the correlation between mental health and suicide; she was branded as someone who had disrupted the school’s reputation.

When I was five or six years old, my father (rather unexpectedly) bought a piece of land in Nuwara Eliya, a tourist hub in the central hill country of Sri Lanka. We used to travel there every weekend while the house was under construction. There were small hills of plantation growth and every morning my father would wake up early and go out to the verandah to look out. Nuwara Eliya skies have a specific triangularity as if multiple suns were peeking through the hills. Those I remember are misty, yet full of clean air and the carefree fun of childhood. I often desired to take them home with me because Colombo skies could never be equated to them. Instead, my mother let me pick flowers during excursions in the mountains and encouraged me to buy a haphazardly yet beautifully arranged flower bouquet from a child who did not have to go to school the next day as I did.¹³

¹³ As a child, I was envious of the children in our neighbourhood who did not have to go to school. Years later, the nuances of their lives as part of the plantation sector became clear to me. Children of the plantation sector of Sri Lanka are subject to child labour more than any other community especially because daily wages have not increased beyond the national poverty line. Many children do odd jobs ranging from plucking tea leaves to selling vegetables and flowers along the road from Colombo to Nuwara Eliya. See: Chandrabose, A. S., and P. P. Sivapragasam. *Red Colour of Tea: Central Issues that Impact the Tea Plantation Community in Sri Lanka*. Human Development Organisation with the patronage of CCFD France, 2011.



From left to right: myself, my cousin, my younger brother (in the pram), and my younger sister in the garden of our Nuwara Eliya home surrounded by relatives from our maternal and paternal families. My cousin is holding a flower we would always go in search of.

What makes up the sky? They say it is made of air. I never understood nor wanted to understand anything beyond this in a scientific sense. But I have always wanted to know how clouds were formed, and what gives them the cotton candy-like appearance. Touching and eating cotton candy or ice cream makes me feel close to clouds and their fluffy nature. It brings the sky within my reach, at my fingertips, at the tip of my tongue, in a multitude of colours. Especially in times of heightened melancholy, I long for such indulgence. There is an intimate memory that spans two decades of melancholia that I do not speak of but think of every day. I once attempted to speak of the indescribable, vast emotionality of this time to a friend:

“I have changed and seem wrought in melancholy—maybe because the world often appears rather cruel. It is different from sadness or despair or loneliness or desire for a tangible thing/person—maybe it’s a combination of all of the above. I don’t know if it’s a healthy state to be in for long periods of time and have developed ways to cope with it. But it informs what I get drawn to.”

In her poem 'Renaissance' (1917), Edna St. Vincent Millay equates experiencing the sky to rebirth and rediscovery of a whole new world:

"But, sure, the sky is big, I said;
Miles and miles above my head;
So here upon my back I'll lie
And look my fill into the sky.
And so I looked, and, after all,
The sky was not so very tall.
The sky, I said, must somewhere stop,
And—sure enough!—I see the top!
The sky, I thought, is not so grand;
I 'most could touch it with my hand!"¹⁴

Bouncing back from heightened moments of melancholy reminds me of how a close look at or even the mere act of thinking of the vastness and beauty of the sky can indeed lead to a "renaissance" similar to the taste of cotton candy and ice cream.

What would the sky be, if one had to capture it with sound or a piece of music? From the window of an airplane, from the top of a mountain or while in a hot air balloon, it does not emit any particular sound. The lack of sound is perhaps what draws me to it. While curating *inordinate skies*, I was engrossed in meditative piano music, especially a piece titled *No Words Left* (2022) by Hanakiv and Alabaster de Plume. It is a genre that many would call "sad", even though I do not feel that way. It forces me to focus and return to thoughts of the sky.

¹⁴ St. Vincent Millay, Edna. "Renaissance." 1912. Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/55993/renaissance>. Accessed 10 Oct. 2023.



This section includes a commissioned response to the question by each artist, developed specially for this publication

Looking is *deliberate*. Seeing is not.

The sky appears blue, grey, and many other colours. In fact, the sky has no colour.

The sky is vast, deep, and constantly evolving due to scientific phenomena beyond our comprehension. Its vastness and depth could be many things: the innumerable emotions we experience as humans and the vulnerabilities we feel and often try to express as creative practitioners.

The sky is also often forgotten and taken for granted in urban life; whether we live in Brooklyn, Chicago, Bangalore, New Delhi, or Colombo.

*when is the last
time you looked
at the sky?*

sabeen omar
blue moon

2023
gouache, fabric, embroidery,
beads, crochet, paper



arshad hakim

this essay is about letting go or sleeping in bent light

The Context:

A playlist acts as a memory. The after-effects produce a sensorium that has already been felt and lived. A memory to drench myself in, to feel familiar. It has been months since this loop formed and now i don't know if the comfort is a sedative or a stimulant.

The Mise-en-scene:

Walking. Along the street, the park, while getting groceries; the rhythms of everyday life. Thinking of the 'what ifs' and 'perhapses'. i take a screenshot of a poem titled 'Small Sentence to Drive Yourself Sane' by Lew Welch¹ from my Twitter feed:

*The next time you are doing something absolutely ordinary, or even better
the next time you are doing something absolutely necessary, such as peeing, or making love, or shaving,
or washing the dishes or the baby or yourself or
the room, say to yourself:
"So it's all come to this!"*

The Gesture: An Incantation.

Close your eyes and feel the earth moving beneath your feet.

Think of the sky; it's night and the light makes it appear violet [read as violent]. The clouds move rhythmically, with soft changes in shape. And then there is volume. He tells me to look up as much as i can, and when he does that, i think he wants me to escape or he wants to escape, for those few brief seconds.

2023
essay

I i send the poem to a friend as a message. We share poetry with each other when we come across something resonant. She sends a smiley emoticon as a reply. i can feel her smile over my blue screen.

A self-recursive refrain that i keep telling myself: i am open to you because i can afford you. i think of you, all of you. i oscillate between affordance and attendance;² does my affordance to you translate into attending to you? Memory takes over at this point, the sky, your smile, the frown, the sharpness of your nose, your boyish gait in an old man's body, the old man's charm, the rush in your speech; his sense of certainty, the ease with which he moves, the assuredness of knowing who and what he is. i take all of this in, look at the sky, and say to myself: repeat the incantation for however long you want.

[This text is written at 37,919 metres above sea level; suspended. Flatness and depth dance in a mirage.]

Robert Ashley in *Private Parts: The Park* at 06:28, speaks, *the other side works with the things that are alongside us, the attachments.*³

For the longest, i thought i was bound to him and to the idea of him, bound in the ways he moves, how he sees the world, what he makes of it—all of it. *There was a madness to it.* And then i replaced 'bound' with 'attachment'. The attachment of being in relation, reciprocity, reconciliation, and resignation, with him.

i make a playlist for him and i call it: *fragments: i see you in shards.*⁴ The list of songs in it moves between joy, longing, hope, and what it might feel to hold power. There are five tracks in it: a two-part EP released by Parallax Editions, the tracks titled, *Ride* and *Flowers*; *the theme from Gay Man's Guide to Safer Sex*; *Japanese Planetarium* by Legowelt; and *IWD4U* by Prince interpreted by El Perro Del Mar.

The soundtrack is the genre of ineloquence most conventional to melodrama: it is what tells you that you are really most at home in yourself, bathed by emotions you can always recognize, and that whatever material harshness you live is not the real, but rather an accident that you have to clean up after, which will be more pleasant if you whistle while you work.

² i would like to thank Shveta Sarda, for pointing me towards this shift from affordance to attendance. She speaks of attendance in the context of care-givers and the question of what it means to attend to a care-taker. See: "SEA Conversations - To Inhabit, With Care #8: A Collective Reading on Care." *YouTube*, 30 Sept. 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS5_w5r9boY.

³ i first heard Ashley years ago, and like most music, i go back to it at points when i feel i need to slow down. The first track in *Private Parts: The Park* begins with a man in a hotel, trying to figure something out. What makes me go back to *Private Parts* is 1. Ashley's voice 2. the narrative structure: the loops and arcs he forms in telling this story, which are vague at best, but leave me with a sense of comfort. The album ends with Ashley describing various kinds of twilight, and then says, "Dear George, what's going on? I am not the same person I used to be." See Ashley, Robert. "Robert Ashley - Private Parts (1978) Full Album." *YouTube*, 7 Feb. 2018, youtu.be/QpHjWjNSL_k.

⁴ See: "fragments: i see you in shards." *SoundCloud*, soundcloud.com/arshad-hakim-193546503/sets/fragment/s-MF66beU9zFH?si=bb462e1eea9e405c8cd5dec9ccf4319a&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing.

The concept of “the soundtrack of our lives,” to cite a cliché that is also the ironic name of a great post-punk neo-psychedelic band and a growing category of niche marketing, is powerful because it accompanies one as a portable hoard that expresses one’s true inner taste and high value; it holds a place open for an optimistic rereading of the rhythms of living and confirms everybody as a star. Your soundtrack is one place where you can be in love with yourself and express your fidelity to your own trueness in sublime conventionality, regardless of the particularity of the sounds.⁵

The Incantation: let it all go, but make it a song.

Enter: The Invoker.

[He has a soft voice, when he speaks you want to lean closer towards him and in doing that, you notice his lips and the various shapes they make when he speaks. He speaks with his hands because he thinks the mouth and throat as organs are not enough for speech. He lives amongst the clouds in a home high above and watches the moonrise whenever he can. In the background, there are soft synths, a piano, and a deep hum, playing constantly.]

The temperamental Invoker reads out a list to him. Here is an unedited and unabridged version.

⁵ Berlant, Lauren. “Cruel Optimism” *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Duke University Press, North Carolina, 2011, p. 104.

An unstructured and inexhaustive list of associative anxieties.⁶

Air

A phoenix flying into the sun

Electro-magnetism

Radio waves

Boeing 377

Cosmic dust

Carbon

A protective membrane

Orange, lilac, purple, yellow, blue, mixed with grey

The three types of clouds

Borders

Lightning: the goddess fighting

Rain: the goddess loving

Night

Hypnosis

Water vapour

Wanderer above the Sea of Fog by Caspar David Friedrich, 1818

An endless, expansive hollow

A blanket made of fluff; buoyant:
ice cream clouds

Slyrak, the dragon, the father of fire (After Dota 2)

An axis

Shapeshifting forms

⁶ My thanks to Aastha, Ankit Ravani, Likla Lall, Rohina Thapar, Sarasija Subramanian, and Stuti Bhavsar for helping me populate this list.

A prism

Turbulent

A trickster

The bodhisattva *Vajrapani*: the carrier of thunderbolts, the god of storms

Mirrors, of varying densities

Cloud-cover; the same as a cataract in the eye.
A cloudy lens

Pyrocumulus, a fire cloud and the title of a comic a friend is making

Ether

An edge to another realm

Accessions and descensions

A depositor

A witness

Venus

The haze of Delhi winters

Mushroom cloud

Shu, the Egyptian god of wind and air

Tefnut, the Egyptian goddess of moisture and mist

Fog, and then brain fog

The Seven Skies in Islam; *Jannat-al-Adan*, *Jannat-al-Firdaws*, *Janet-al-Naeem*, *Jannat-al-Mama*, *Dar-ul-Khuld*, *Dar-ul-Maqaam* and *Dar-us-Salam*

The moment when you realise how blue the sky is while walking on a crowded street

Iblis: the faculty of imagination

An optic recalibration when you realise the moon isn't flat when seen from the earth

Reflections of the sky in puddles, or in contained water bodies, or on buildings with glass facades

Fluctuating pressures and densities

Ice clouds

Birds flying on trans-continental migration routes

A stairway to heaven

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds

Murmuration

The south-east monsoon winds over the Malabar coast

A flipped umbrella blown by a strong wind

A red helium balloon that a child lost, now high up in the sky

Vertigo

Ear pain

The seven kinds of rainbows

Aurora borealis

Zeppelins

A temple

Apsaras

Fire

Oxygen

In 1775, Carl Wilhelm Scheele proposed a theory that air consists of two fluids: *Foul Air* (“verdorbene Luft”) and *Fire Air* (“Feuerluft”). His *Chemical Treatise on Air and Fire* begins with the purpose of chemistry, which is to break things down to their constituents so that their properties are discovered, and “to compound them in different ways.” A series of experiments explain his discovery of *Fire Air*, while constantly defining air as elastic and possessing weight, and capable of transforming one quality of itself into others. To begin with, he lays out general properties of air, the most intriguing being: *air strongly attracts to itself the inflammable part of substances and deprives them of it...but it is at the same time evident that on the transference of the inflammable substance to the air a considerable part of the air is lost-and-the law of double affinity: the alkalies and lime attract the vitriolic acid, and the air attracts the phlogiston.*⁷

[Phlogiston; noun: a substance supposed by 18th-century chemists to exist in all combustible bodies, and to be released during combustion. The word “phlogiston” is written 38 times in his treatise.]

Scheele published his discovery of *Fire Air* around 1777, two years after he wrote the treatise. *Fire Air* later came to be known as oxygen. Scheele shares the discovery of oxygen as an element with Joseph Priestly, who independently discovered the element in 1774. The amount of oxygen in air was measured by how much it could burn, and to think that we breathe fire...

The Invoker: breathe fire and be consumed by it.

Exit: The Invoker.

Enter: The Seductress.

[He stands before me wearing all black, an inquisitive stare, holding power over gravity. Outside, the evening sun shines upon him, drenching him in golden light.

⁷ Scheele, Carl Wilhelm. *Chemische Abhandlung von Der Luft Und Dem Feuer*. Trans: Chemical Treatise on Air and Fire. Bokförlaget Rediviva, 1970.

It's 5:55 pm. He is a vampire, the undead, and i am always unsure if he is there before me...]

He says:

Among the four fundamental forces of the universe, gravity is considered to be the weakest since it cannot be measured on subatomic particles. However, gravity as a force is used laterally to find galaxies and star clusters, through a system called gravitational lensing. This effect is produced due to the gravitational force of massive objects in the universe that wrap space-time, and as a consequence, light travelling around these objects starts to bend. Scientists used this system to catch glimpses of galaxies and star clusters that are too distant for even the most powerful telescopes on the planet to observe. They do this by noticing background galaxies that are lensed by the cluster, images of which appear as short, thin, lensed arcs on the periphery.⁸ The distortion created by lensing effects is used to map out the quantity and location of unseen matter. In some cases, when lensing approaches perfect symmetry, a circle—which is called an Einstein ring—is formed, named after the father of the theory of General Relativity.

Seduction works like gravity—amass enough force to propel people around you, make them a cluster of promises.⁹ Your gait, a smile, how you look at them, the way you make them feel, all compounded. When seduced, the world starts to distort. Is seduction an extension of being attended to? And if being attended to is to start distorting one form of the world, what does the distortion reveal? What are the images of being seduced and being distorted at the same time?

He said: by bending gravity around me, i give you the gift of expanded vision.

i look at him with an uninterested gaze, to tell him that i am not interested in his explanation of what gravity is; rather, i want him to distort me.

⁸ The first gravitational lens was found in 1979 by Dennis Walsh, Robert F. Carswell, and Ray J. Weymann, who identified the double quasar Q0957+561 as a double image of one and the same distant quasar, produced by a gravitational lens. (See: https://www.einstein-online.info/en/spotlight/grav_lensing_history/). Since then, technologies of generating images of bent light have progressed to produce seductive and surreal images. A repository of images of gravitational lensing is on the Hubble telescope's website, which is how i found out about this lensing system. The most intriguing images are titled, 'Cosmic Snake Pregnant with Stars' (see footnote 11) and 'Cosmic Leviathan' (see footnote 12). The images produced by such systems point towards a perceptorial shift to make visible that which remains hidden and debunk the theory that light travels in straight lines. A weak force, like gravity, is enough to do so.

⁹ Berlant writes, “To phrase ‘the object of desire’ as a cluster of promises is to allow us to encounter what’s incoherent or enigmatic in our attachments, not as confirmation of our irrationality but as an explanation for our sense of our endurance in the object, insofar as proximity to the object means proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises, some of which may be clear to us while others not so much.” See: Berlant, Lauren. “Cruel Optimism” *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, Duke University Press, North Carolina, 2011, p. 93.

He said: i want he who can bend gravity, and when he bends light, he shall see me.

i told him:

The world has to survive the long episodes in which one or one's people do not know what to want, apart from something vaguely affective; then there are episodes in which crisis threatens survival norms and everyone's scrambling to find an anchor and the resources seem limited, except for those of aggression, which are unlimited; and then there is the ordinary in which incompatible needs and fantasies are always on the table, related to structural crisis or the singular chaos people bring to relationality. My point here is this: incompatible needs and fantasies induce ambivalence. Internal chaos produces external chaos, that expresses it without copying it. Any social theory worthy of its ambition requires a space for enigmatic, chaotic, incoherent, and structurally contradictory attachments; it needs a way to assess the attachment needs that put people in relation without promising to deliver "a life" that feels cushioned. There is no cure for ambivalence. This is what it means to move within an object world.¹⁰

Exit Seductress.

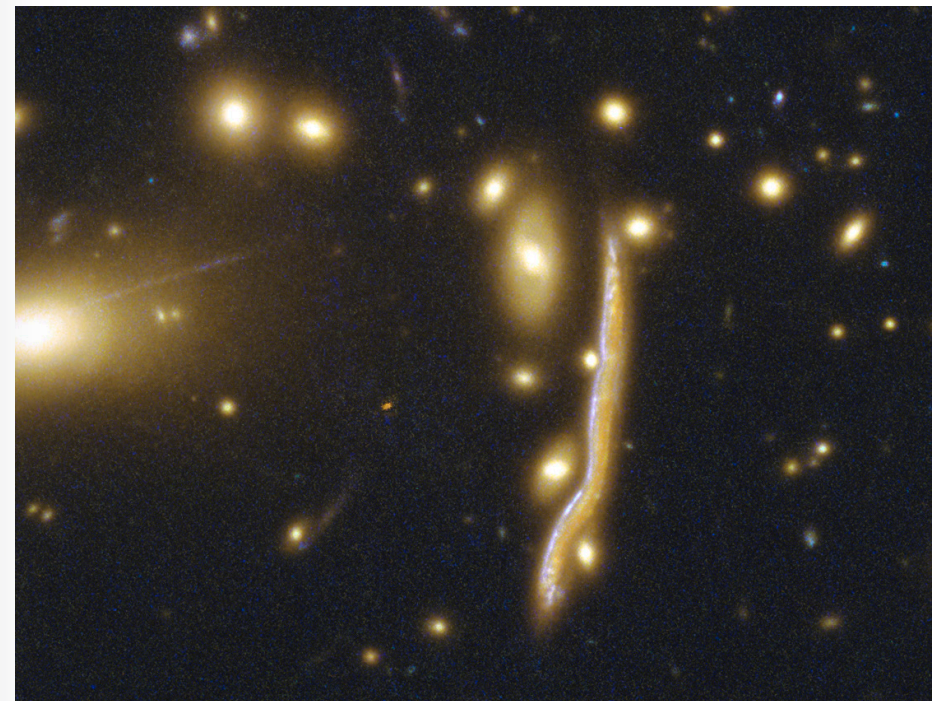
10 Berlant, Lauren.
"A properly political
concept of love:
Three approaches in
ten pages." *Cultural
Anthropology*, vol. 26, no.
4, 2011, pp. 683–691.

11 *Cosmic Leviathan*,
NASA/ESA Hubble
Space Telescope image
(open source)
See: www.spacetelescope.org,
<https://www.spacetelescope.org/images/potw2319a/>.
Accessed 22 Nov. 2023.

12 *Cosmic Snake
Pregnant with Stars*,
NASA/ESA Hubble
Space Telescope image
(open source) See:
www.spacetelescope.org,
<https://www.spacetelescope.org/images/potw1747a/>.
Accessed 22 Nov. 2023.



11



12

aruni dharmakirthi
sky body meditation

2023
meditation guide



Preliminaries:

Clear your meditation space.
Tend to your altar.
Light incense or a candle

Posture:

Sit or lay down for this meditation.
Spine straight.
If sitting legs may be crossed or in a comfortable position.
Eyes closed or focused on a point.
Breath steady.

**Note: Take this meditation at a pace that feels comfortable to you. Pause at moments that feel meaningful.*

To begin:

Notice the movement of the breath at the nose or stomach.
Count 10 breaths to calm the mind.
If thoughts appear, thank yourself for noticing and return your attention to the meditation.
Using the breath, begin to dissolve the body.
Moving up from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head.
Send your breath to the muscles, organs, and bones; imagine them dissolving.
Imagine your name, career, history, and pain dissolving.

Imagine nothing in the place where your body once sat or lay. Imagine a thin transparent outline of your body separating you from the rest of the world.
Rest here for a moment.
Moving from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet. Like a nectar dripping down. Use your breath to fill your body with a translucent blue light.
The color of the sky on a perfect clear day.
Sit with this body.
Another version of you.

Dedicate:

Whatever goodness you received during the meditation, wish that someone else may receive it too.
To return:
Deepen your breath.
Notice the sounds and scents around you.
Gently move your body.
When you feel ready, open your eyes.¹

¹The sky body meditation originates from the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist lineage and is based on the Rainbow Body practice. This meditation was first taught to me by my teacher Rachel Webb.

These artworks were displayed in the Curatorial Intensive South Asia 2023 cohort's collective exhibition, *A Matter of Time* held at the art gallery of the India International Centre, New Delhi, India, from 12–19 December 2023.

The project was supported by Khoj International Artists Association and Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan New Delhi. They were part of the exhibition, also titled *inordinate skies*, curated by Pramodha Weerasekera.

inordinate skies

curatorial (an)notations to the exhibition

sabeen omar

placed in anti-clockwise order
starting from the top left

Tiger Balm I

2016

fragments of mum's, anam's, mariam's, and my clothes,
embroidery, beads, crochet, handkerchief
collection and courtesy the artist

can you remain unmoving/ till the right action arises by itself?

2021

coloured pencil, graphite, embroidery, crochet, handkerchief,
chalk gesso
collection and courtesy the artist

memory that grows into a shape

2022

gouache, ink, oil pastel, coloured pencil, graphite, embroidery,
crochet, pigment, handkerchief, chalk gesso
collection and courtesy the artist

to be in pain is innocent

2022

ink, graphite, coloured pencil, watercolour paper, fabric in the shape
of a tissue box, crochet, chalk gesso
collection and courtesy the artist

the sky appears...more urgent, than the land

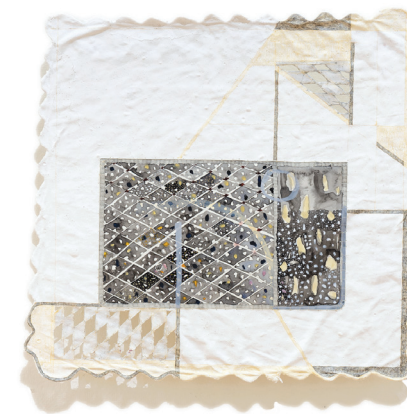
2022

gouache, ink, fabric dye, oil pastel, coloured pencil, graphite, beads,
embroidery, crochet, pigment, handkerchief, chalk gesso
collection and courtesy the artist

in war the dark is on nobody's side; in love the dark confirms that we are together

2022

ink, coloured pencil, graphite, gouache, paper, embroidery,
handkerchief, chalk gesso
collection and courtesy the artist



Sabeen's works have the recurring motif of the sky with poetic titles that encourage viewers to look closely in search of a discernible, relatable aerial image. In between the abstract spaces, patterns, shapes, textures, and colours, one can sense a desire for serenity amidst the chaos of daily life. While a clear blue image of the sky filled with white clouds would be considered conventionally beautiful and most accessible, Sabeen creates her inconspicuous skies on handmade, impermanent, imperfect canvases of cardboard and fragile cloth collected at home. She says, "When I look up at the sky, I recall the red Colombo horizon after an explosion or walking underneath a snow-filled cloudy night in Chicago. The softness of the sky and the many shapes it takes reminds me of handkerchiefs."

Although the canvas spaces appear calm with their lighter hues, she creates disruptions in the midst with renditions of the Islamic architectural technique, *Ablaq*, which alternates light and dark stones to close off or envelop spaces. These geometrically interwoven areas within each artwork can be read as depictions of various skies from her life with unidentifiable cosmic objects. Through her delicate artistic labour of sewing, embroidery, and scraping cloth away, Sabeen traces back the personal histories of women in her family, who engaged with needlework as an art form for generations. She compares her process on the canvas to her mother's process of making crisp and brittle papadams at home. Chalk gesso goes on top of the already malleable handkerchief, and as other materials such as watercolour, fabric, and colour pencil pigment are pressed onto the canvas the gesso cracks, revealing the softness beneath. The repetition of softness and hardness is cyclical, and her words speak to it better than mine: "Additive and subtractive. Here but elsewhere. Inside and out. Ephemeral but infused with love."

The handkerchief in *Tiger Balm I* is a common memory etched in the minds of generations of Sri Lankans born in the late 1980s and the 1990s, as they were available in marketplaces for easy and

cheap purchase. These generations of children were schooled during the civil war that ravaged the country. These handkerchiefs with their pastel-coloured chequered patterns and embroidered hems are thus reminiscent of skies of the three decades of the war. Handkerchiefs are also common gifts and heirlooms among generations of Sri Lankan women. The tiger balm that was used by her mother (like many Sri Lankan mothers) to soothe her and her sisters add to this nostalgia of childhood and needing protection and shelter during times of political crises

In 2020, during a residency curated by a dear friend, I hesitantly participated in a sewing circle that Sabeen and another artist facilitated; we sewed handkerchiefs. Her soft and gentle personality was evident when she helped me think through my imperfect creation. What followed is a caring, honest, and organic friendship and collaboration. Three years later, during a heavy rainy day in Colombo, my tuk-tuk driver dropped me at the wrong location as I was on my way to Sabeen's studio in preparation for *inordinate skies*. Sabeen, with much generosity and care, ensured that I had warm clothes and tea; we barely spoke about her work that day, but I left for home with conviction despite the gloomy, broody skies.

Sabeen's canvases are fragile and soft. As I was choosing the works to be displayed on walls, she and I had many conversations about how I would carry them to Delhi. While packing them in bubble wrap, dragging my luggage through multiple check-ins between the Katunayake and Delhi airports, and attaching them to dry walls using imperceptible pins, I felt a need to be a custodian of the vulnerability with which she had assembled various materials to depict her evolving relationship with the sky, starting from her fear for the safety of her family in a conflict-ridden Sri Lanka while she was studying in Chicago, and ending with grey clouds surrounded by a blank, white fabric-canvas that juxtaposes darkness in war (which separates us) and darkness in love (which bring us together).

arshad hakim

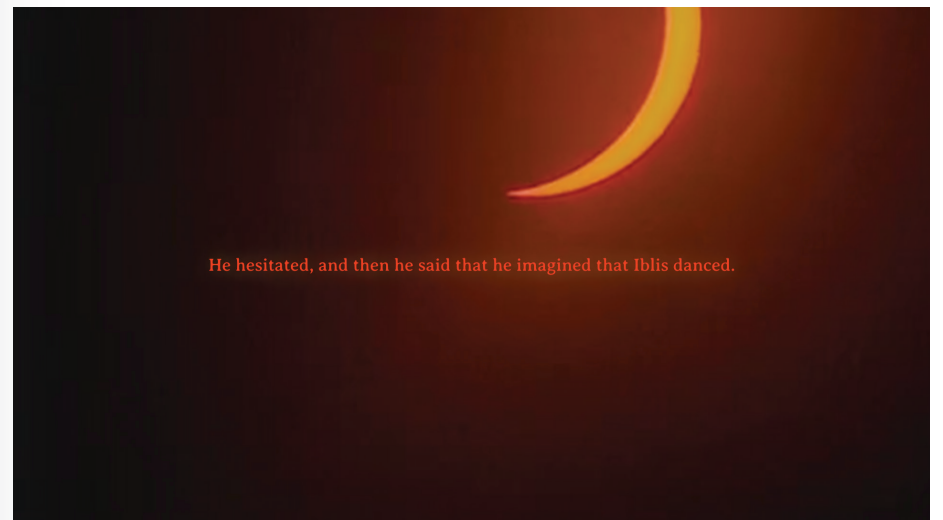
*to see the sun at midnight/
loving against time*

2023

stills from digital film with sound,
28 minutes 34 seconds

collection and courtesy the artist

This film was made possible through
the support of the Generator Cooperative
Art Production Fund, 2021–22.



to see the sun at midnight/ loving against time imagines the sun as it goes through an eclipse, alongside a textual re-reading of the story of Iblis by Husayn Ibn Mansur al-Hallaj. The film takes its visual cue from *The Stellar Rays of the Stars*, an astronomical and astrological treatise by Al-Kindi, a philosopher of the Abbasid period (750–1258). Light appears and disappears as the sun, moon, and clouds move. arshad speculates how Al-Kindi would have explained a shadow, based on his theory that rays from the stars travel in straight lines and when such rays reach an object they would carry a part of the star, which would in turn affect the object. As the aerial evolves, we learn of the story of Iblis from the perspective of three Sufi Saints who propose that he was the lover par excellence of God.

The impossibility of truly realising the two desires in the title is obvious, but the work is in earnest about coming close, as arshad explores the character of Iblis as the angel of perfect, ultimate faith and love. My first in-depth encounter with Satan or Lucifer, the equivalent of Iblis in Judo-Christian theology, was via John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667), which, in blank verse, narrates the story of the ultimate sin. Milton depicts the desire of Satan to "reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" alongside the narrative of concupiscence¹ between Adam and Eve. He also stages Satan as the almost-protagonist of the narrative, highlighting his undying love for God, by extension, power in the realm of Hell. *to see the sun at midnight/ loving against time* follows a similar, dual-edged approach to longing. It begins with the artist's desire to rediscover Iblis and ends with a wine poem by Abu Nuwas, which describes a 'sinful' yet sensual yearning he has toward a younger boy. The multiple layers of desire and longing can be read in alignment with the vastness of such feelings via imagery of the vast, never-ending sky.

¹ I personally prefer the following interpretations of the 'original sin': Augustine in *Confessions* defines it as sensuality and lust in reference to sexual relations between Adam and Eve; Thomas Aquinas builds on this notion by specifying two divisions of sensuality: joy, sadness, love, hate, desire, repugnance; daring, fear, hope, despair, anger. See: "Medieval Sourcebook: Aquinas on Sex." Fordham University: *Internet History Sourcebooks*. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/aquinas-sex.asp>. Accessed 24 Oct. 2023.

When arshad emailed his portfolio to me in early 2023, I was preoccupied by a major life change and its psychological impact on me. The film was open on my laptop as I tried to bounce back to reality over several days off from work—the background score and imagery kept me alive and breathing.

The sounds of gongs and organs bringing together the registers of the ethereal, the emotional, and the theological were soothing and uplifting. Almost like a tranquiliser for my declining mental health.

I tell arshad that we connected with each other at the right time. I was struggling to come to terms with whether I was in fact a 'curator' and he had managed to convince me that I indeed was. Around the same time, I was reading his portfolio; it was organised chronologically, showing me how his practice has evolved over the past few years with a variety of mediums and forms I could feel it across the portfolio although I barely knew him then. I will always associate him with that emotionality and vulnerability, which intensified on both our ends after we started speaking more regularly. Our friendship has grown to be an exemplification of the 'beautiful mess effect', with honesty, vulnerability, and emotional exposure taking precedence.² This is how I would describe his practice with all its complexities and nuances, without resorting to terminology that is hyper-contemporary and conventional markers of identity, often based on geographical location, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and more.

² See: Bruk, Anna, et al. "Beautiful Mess Effect: Self–Other Differences in Evaluation of Showing Vulnerability." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 115, no. 2, Aug. 2018, pp. 192–205.

arshad hakim

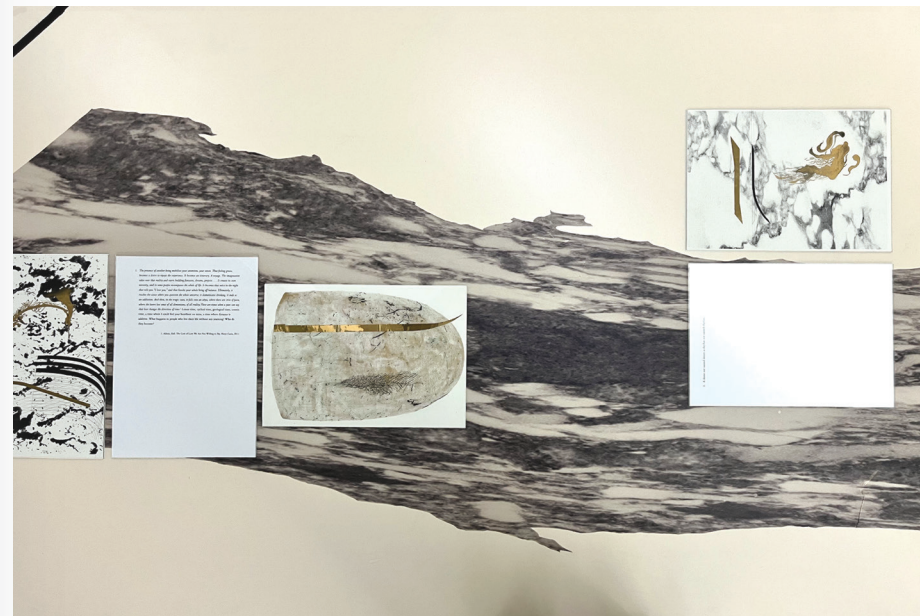
ghost rhythms

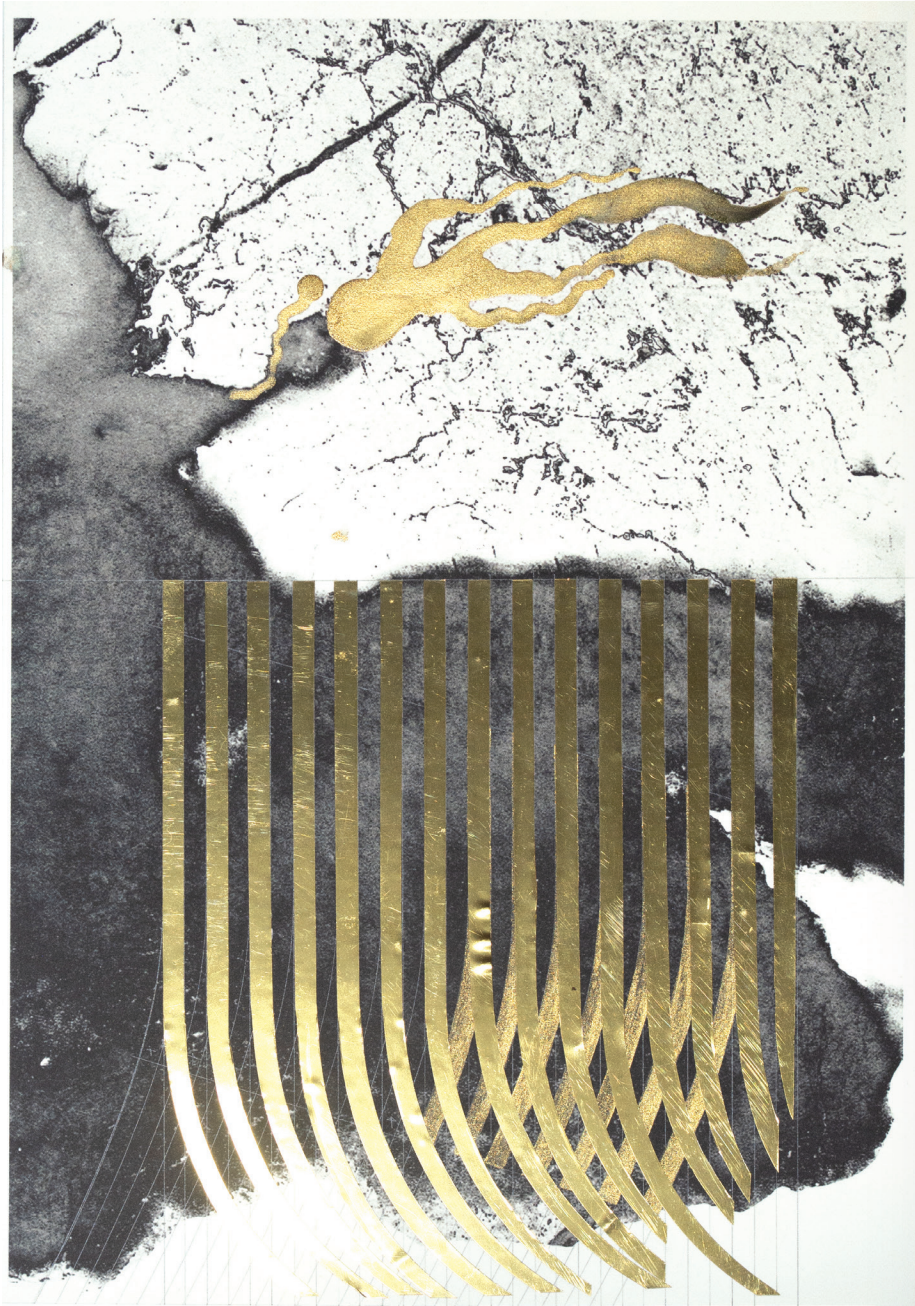
2022

digital print, gouache, gold ink, and gold vinyl on paper

3, 5, and 8 courtesy of the Ark Foundation for the Arts, Vadodara

install shots followed by detail shots





While curating and writing *inordinate skies*, I asked myself the question, how can an exhibition make its audience emotionally vulnerable? Could I predict their responses? While I knew the answer to the first, I realised that the second could only be an experiment I had to challenge myself to take on. arshad's series *ghost rhythms*, placed in a cyclical manner on a slightly elevated platform on the floor, is an invitation for visitors to look down and think about the emotions the sky induces in the artist and themselves—a reversal of their typical act of looking up to see the sky. The carefully selected pieces of text in combination with meticulously detailed planetary, geological, and cosmic objects per his imagination provide audiences the luxury of pause and rest. The abstract visual elements draw viewers to not only look deeper but also to imagine how they would engage with the sky when they leave the exhibition, beyond the physicality and tangibility of the platform, floors, and walls of the exhibition space.

I See: Adnan, Etel.
The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay/ Der Preis Der Liebe, Den Wir Nicht Zahlen Wollen.
DOCUMENTA and
Hatje Cantz, 2012, p. 7.

Etel Adnan's (1925–2021) *The Cost for Love We Are Not Willing to Pay* (2012), from which he derives the textual elements for *ghost rhythms*, is about the immense nature of longing, especially when one experiences immeasurable love. She says, "This state of being in love is an uneasy state: it is unstable, permeable to all winds, almost irrational. It easily creates a sense of terror, becomes obsessive. That's when heartbeats accelerate, and one puts out the lights, lies down with another body, and sinks into a kind of desperate bliss."¹ When I first encountered *ghost rhythms* in arshad's portfolio, I was focused not on the state of being in love but on the state of merely longing for it and never experiencing it. I left this comment in the PDF: "The presence of love tends to be romanticised, idealised in a variety of art forms while its lack or absence is often represented as a sad, crippling phenomenon. While love may be a 'ghost' in such people's lives, it does not mean that it does not exist in the depths of their hearts."

In August 2023, I visited arshad in his apartment in Bangalore, with the intentions of meeting him and looking at this series in a proper 'studio visit' manner. He asked if I wanted to roam the city and attend film screenings and more, but I refused because anxious energy had piled up in my body and mind after two long weeks in Delhi during summer. We had an agenda, dividing up the day into work-time and unwinding-time. We spent most of the time on his terrace, overlooking a children's playground, and beyond that, the sky.

The next day, as I returned to Colombo, I realised that I had no photos with him to remember the visit by. I texted him that it was most likely because we did not need photos to remember. I had also forgotten to do the 'studio visit'.

aruni dharmakirthi

dreaming of somewhere else

2021

acrylic paint on paper

collection and courtesy the artist



dreaming of somewhere else alludes to classical artistic renditions of women, particularly reminiscent of those of Venus, the Roman goddess of fertility, beauty, and prosperity. These renditions, almost always by men, show Venus as a nude figure emblematic of ideal feminine bodies; with long light brown hair and mature, curvy hips.¹ In contrast, histories of portraits of women by women include Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–c. 1653) of the Baroque who is known for her “dark backgrounds infused with stunning light effects; blood-ridden biblical and mythological subject matter; vigorous realism; triumphant women; striking psychological and emotive expression...”² Her *Susanna and the Elders* (1610) and *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1612) arouse discomfort in the viewer by confronting them with the perspective of the woman, who is often in a vengeful and powerful position. *dreaming of somewhere else* and Aruni’s larger practice continue this trajectory and join a new generation of contemporary women artists prioritising sexually liberated and feminist portrayals of women.^{3 4}

This self-portrait captures a moment where the artist was not feeling at home during the COVID-19 pandemic in their shared apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Aruni paints herself with luscious, long black hair and dark skin, against established ideas of femininity and physical beauty. The figure lying on their bed against a western cityscape and in a confined space stands out. They are not looking out the window but instead at us, subverting the gaze and claiming their power. They also do not have a direct view of the sky.

Aruni also alludes to a complex desire for something else in the face of what was unfolding in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement during the early months of 2020. They say, “mass protests in the city and across the country asked us to dream up a different world, while overuse of social media had many of us comparing our lives to the brief moments of someone else’s.” The summer of 2020 in New York, in their eyes, forced reflection about confinement and freedom in terms of both the personal and public.

1 See: *The Birth of Venus* (1879) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905); *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1484–86) by Sandro Botticelli (c. 1440–1510); and *The Triumph of Galatea* (c. 1512) by Raphael (1483–1520).

2 See: Hessel, Katy. *The Story of Art without Men*. Hutchinson Heinemann, 2022, p. 35.

3 *dreaming of somewhere else* reminds me of works by Pakistani-American artist Hiba Schahbaz (b. 1981), who works in the same vein of contemporary art depicting women’s bodies with allusions to classics, but with the intention of reversing the male gaze. See: “Hiba Schahbaz.” *Hiba Schahbaz*, <http://www.hibaschahbaz.com>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2023.

4 Cain, Abigail. “A Look at Botticelli’s ‘The Birth of Venus’ in Pop Culture.” *Artsy*, 26 July 2018, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-botticellis-birth-venus-pop-culture>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2023.

Many of Aruni’s works are large tapestries with clean, bright shapes sewn or painted on fabric in a collage-like manner, with a specific focus on feminine figures and mythological and ancient narratives.⁵ When I first encountered them at a gallery in Colombo, they were reminiscent of the cubist practices of George Keyt (1901–1993), a prominent Sri Lankan modernist artist who was a founding member of the artist collective the ‘43 Group—a milestone in Sri Lankan art history.⁶ He is known for his erotic portrayals of women from Hindu and Buddhist mythology.⁷ Aruni uses a similar cubist approach on textile to depict women in independent and comfortable states of being without the disillusionment of the male gaze. Upon going through their website, I insisted that I show *dreaming of somewhere else*, and not one of the tapestries—the confined space and lack of a sky within a small canvas were enough to convince me. However, I still wonder how Keyt would have reacted to Aruni’s tapestries.

5 Aruni discusses their process in detail in an interview with curator Sarah Burney. See: Burney, Sarah. “One Piece by Aruni Dharmakirthi, Over Time I Taught Myself...” *Kajal Magazine*, 9 Dec. 2022, <https://www.kajalmag.com/one-piece-by-aruni-dharmakirthi/>. Accessed 23 Oct. 2023.

6 See: “The ‘43 Group.” <https://www.43group.org/>. Accessed 26 Oct. 2023.

7 Yashodhara Dalmia writes about Keyt’s paintings of Radha and Krishna: “In works like Krishna Painting Radha (1948) we have the blue god painting Radha’s full breasts in a modern version of the famed Pahari miniatures made by the descendants of Nainsukh. The interplay of eroticism, love, tenderness and fusion of two individuals could not have been more masterful... Keyt spoke of divine love and merged it with eminently human gestures making it both profane and contemporary.” See: Dalmia, Yashodhara. *Buddha to Krishna: Life and Times of George Keyt*. Routledge, 2017, p. 176.

sabeen omar (b. 1987)

is a Sri Lankan artist based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Her work contemplates what can infuse everyday, discardable objects, like cardboard boxes and garment fragments, with the value of a precious family heirloom. She juxtaposes geometric motifs from Islamic architecture against a soft, ever-shifting sky to allude to the duality of the meaningless preciousness in her work. Sabeen had her first solo exhibition, *Tiger Balm & Other Boxes*, at Cornell University in 2022.

arshad hakim (b. 1992)

is an artist and filmmaker based in Bengaluru, India. He is interested in conditions of impasses, interludes, parentheses, suspensions, and interruptions. He works with forms of narrative that are first-person, fragmentary, and non-linear. He writes, makes videos/film essays, and drawings, taking from philosophy, theology, music, and poetry.

aruni dharmakirthi (b. 1990)

is a Sri Lankan-born artist and educator based in New York, USA. They explore migration, memory, ideas of self, interdependence, and relational dynamics utilising personal mythology. Through visual languages of divination and deity worship, their work takes the form of shrines as a conduit to ancestors and past/future selves. Their practice embodies processes of ritual through techniques such as sewing, weaving, and needle felting. Textiles act as a marker of familiarity and comfort. Colour, shape, and pattern function as playful design elements to allure and invite viewers.

pramodha weerasekera (b. 1994)

is a curator, writer, and (reluctant) lawyer based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. She has an interdisciplinary educational and professional background in literary studies, visual cultures, and law. Her interests revolve around gender, emotion, visual cultures, and literary theories. Pramodha has been curating educational and public programming initiatives at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Sri Lanka since 2019.

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in alphabetical order

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ruhanie perera

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