

Kamil Dossar



Fahrenheit

OVERGADEN

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O – OVERGADEN
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Det er en stor fornøjelse at introducere denne publikation, der udkommer i forbindelse med Kamil Dossars soloudstilling, *Fahrenheit*, på O – Overgaden. Udstillingen er kulminationen på vores særlige INTRO-forløb – et etårigt postgraduate-program, som O – Overgaden årligt tilbyder to kunstnere. Med generøs støtte fra Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansens Fond skaber INTRO en unik mulighed for at udvikle og udvide vores samarbejde med kunstscenens nyeste stemmer igennem både en stor udstilling og denne ambitiøse publikation, hvis målsætning er at udvide samtalerne omkring den kunstneriske praksis og åbne op for, at nyt materiale kan udspringe heraf.

I dette tilfælde har kurator, skribent og professor på Kungl. Kunsthögskolan i Stockholm, Natasha Marie Llorens, bidraget med et essay, der sammenvæver perspektiver på monstrøsitet, orientalisme, science fiction og Dossars biografi, mens Mike Sperlinger, kurator og professor på kunstakademiet i Oslo, har skrevet en tekst, der dykker ned i værkernes tematik. Endelig indeholder publikationen en serie associative noter af Kamil Dossar, som bygger på samtaler, han har haft med kunstner Ed Atkins, om arbejdet med udstillingen *Fahrenheit*. Jeg vil gerne takke alle bidragsydere varmt, samt takke publikationsredaktør Nanna Friis og hele O – Overgadens team for den store indsats i forbindelse med dette projekt. Naturligvis også en stor tak til fanfare, vores grafiske designere, for deres dedikerede arbejde på denne publikation. Sidst, men ikke mindst, en særlig tak til kunstneren, Kamil Dossar, for at dele sit materiale – fra koncept til udvidede samtaler – med os alle sammen, både gennem udstillingen og denne publikation.

Kamil Dossars kunstneriske praksis – film, malerier og collager – opbygger associationsrækker, der ofte indeholder popkulturelle referencer, animation og avatarer, som spejler stereotype billeder af migration, statslige strukturer og udstødte, udviskede identiteter.

INTRODUKTION

Til sin første store soloudstilling har Dossar skabt en serie nye værker, der prikker til vestlige kulturelle koder – ikke ulig *Fahrenheit*-temperaturskalaen eller den matematiske orden bag Johann Sebastian Bachs klassiske kompositioner – og det potentielt fremmedgørende, der ligger indlejret i selv samme systemer.

I udstillingens første rum viser en ganske lille skærm en nyere optagelse af en klaverkoncert af Bach. Ved hjælp af et specialdesignet script baseret på 'deep fake' AI-teknologi er pianisten forvandlet til et reptil – en generisk fremstilling af et monster. Den monstrøse filmiske forvrængning af klaveroptagelsen antyder, hvordan klassisk musik, trods sin tilsyneladende opbyggelighed, som hovedsøjle i vestlig kultur også er en del af en historie, der kaster lange skygger i form af kolonial undertrykkelse og krav om assimilering. I løbet af sin danske opvækst oplevede Dossar, hvordan hans nu afdøde far, der var politisk flygtning fra Irak, studerede Bach i et forgæves forsøg på at finde ro i Europa.

Følger man Bachs musik ind i udstillingens andet rum, udfoldes værkets modpart: Kunstnerens optagelser af bylandskaber i Irak efter krigen vises i storskala – bl.a. en café, hvor lyset lejlighedsvist forsvinder på grund af strømafbrydelser. Dermed skabes nærmest en arena for klaverkoncerten, og ligesom pianisten bliver de lokale i disse scener forvandlet til krybdyr. Således accelererer Dossar mekanismerne bag den kollektive paranoia over for det 'fremmede' og skubber derved det monstrøse billede så langt, at det begynder at udviske sig selv. Vi ser de reptillignende skabningers rolige, menneskelige bevægelser midt i hverdagslivet, hvilket overskrider deres umiddelbare fremtoning. En reptiltjener går forbi og tørrer et bord af i en afslappet, ubesværet bevægelse.

Rhea Dall
Leder og chefkurator på O – Overgaden,
december 2025

PARTEREDE NOTER OM KAMIL DOSSAR

Mike Sperlinger

I den ekspressionistiske horrorklassiker, stumfilmen *The Hands of Orlac* (1924), mister en anerkendt pianist sine hænder i en ulykke og får som erstatning et par transplanterede hænder, der for nylig har begået et mord. De nye hænder kan ikke spille klaver, de lader til at leve deres eget liv – og med tiden modarbejder de deres ejers vilje og lokker ham til nye mord. Det fascinerende er ikke så meget dette melodramatiske plottwist, men synet af skuespilleren Conrad Veidt, der i rollen som Orlac holder sine nye hænder ud i bogstaveligt talt strakt arm og betragter dem som fremmede parasitter.

I en af videoerne i Kamil Dossars udstilling spiller en pianist en flamboyant, virtuos udgave af Johann Sebastian Bachs Goldberg-variationer. Skærmen i den ene ende af rummet er lillebitte, men musikken giver genlyd gennem hele udstillingen, og det besynderlige ved det hele bliver kun tydeligere ved nærmere eftersyn: pianisten har et øglehoved.

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Den tidligst kendte beskrivelse af vikingeliv blev skrevet på arabisk af en mand fra Bagdad. I 922 blev Ibn Fadlān, som kaliffens udsending, sendt på et togt til den muslimske leder i Bulghars. På vejen stødte han på en gruppe Rūs – svenske vikinger, der handlede med pels og sværd – langs Volga-flodens nordlige strækninger.

Ibn Fadlāns korte Rūs-beretning minder om en fakta-bulletin fra en anden planet – mere specifikt en planet fra science fiction-romanen *Hard to Be a God* (1964) af Arkady og Boris Strugatsky: et middelalderligt helvede af mudder, lidelse og social darwinisme. Ibn Fadlān observerer med skrækslagen, men sober nysgerrighed, hvordan Rūs-folket laver dyreofringer, har gruppesex i fuld offentlighed, hvordan de efterlader deres syge til “hundene og ådselsæderne”, hvordan en overdådig, rituel høvdingebegravelse ledes af en “dødsengel” (der ofrer en af slaverne).

Mødet med dette proto-skandinaviske folk fascinerer Ibn Fadlān: “Jeg har aldrig set mere perfekte kroppe end deres. De var som palmetræer.” Men han var også forundret over det totalt sære ved dem og bemærkede for eksempel, at “alle mænd er tatoverede fra top til tå, dækket af mørkegrønne mønstre.” Trods deres skulpturlignende ydre fandt Ibn Fadlān Rūs-folket dybt frastødende:

“De er Guds mest uhumske skabninger. De vasker ikke sig selv efter urinering eller afføring, heller ikke efter de har haft sex. De vasker ikke deres hænder efter måltider. De er som omvandrende røve.”¹

Under kremeringsceremonien viste det sig, at kulturchokket var gensidigt. Disse grønhudede aliens kiggede også skævt til Fadlāns arabiske flok.

“I arabere er fjolser!”

“Hvorfor?” spurgte jeg ham.

Han sagde: “Fordi de mennesker I elsker højest, de mest adelige blandt jer, dem putter I i jorden, og så bliver de spist af jorden og ormene og insekterne. Men vi brænder dem straks så de kommer i Paradis hurtigt og uden forsinkelser.”

Så begyndte han at grine højt...

* * *

Som et led i forberedelserne til sin udstilling rejste Kamil Dossar til Irak for første gang. Hans far kom fra Basra, men flygtede i politisk eksil i Danmark i 1980’erne. Dossar rejste rundt i flere uger, mødte slægtninge og udforskede landet. Udstillingens andet videoværk indeholder optagelser fra denne rejse: irakisk hverdagsliv – en café, et marked – hvor visse (men ikke alle) mennesker har øglehoveder.

Er disse karakterer en slags avatars fra mesopotamisk mytologi? Irakiske myter og fabler er fulde af hybrider, inklusiv enkelte semi-reptiler som eksempelvis mušhuššu: et slangelignende hoved og skællet hud smeltet sammen med løvekrop og ørnekløer. Men Dossars Irak føles ikke som hjemsted for magisk realisme. På trods af deres fotorealistiske udformning er der noget umiskendeligt samtidsagtigt og kunstigt over dem: deres spejlinger er, på lige så uforklarlig vis, meget menneskelige. Disse erstatningshoveder er både halshugninger og interpolationer – en slags ombytning af blikket.

Disse figurer er måske snarere aliens, muligvis lånt fra kitschet science fiction. Øglemennesker har en vis stamtavle, hvad angår forenklet sci-fi-paranoia – både på og udenfor skærmen. I den amerikanske tv-serie *V* fra 1980’erne blev kødædende alien-reptiler kaldt ‘Visitors’ og maskerede sig selv som mennesker. (Særligt inspireret af *V* var den tidligere britiske sportsekspert David Icke, der udbredte konspirationsteorien om, at mange af verdens mest indflydelsesrige mennesker – den britiske kongefamilie, Rotschild-familien, Barack og Michelle Obama, countrysangeren Boxcar Willie – i virkeligheden er kæmpe øglealiens i forklædning, der planlægger at overtage verdensherredømmet).

Hvis øglefolket i Dossars video er påtrængende aliens, forekommer de dog påfaldende ikke-truende.

1. Ibn Fadlān, *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, overs. Paul Lunde & Caroline Stone (London: Penguin, 2011).

De laver hverdagsting – serverer mad, sidder med en (menneske)ven på en café – og der finder ikke en “afsløring” sted: De er ude i det åbne, eksotisk ubestemmelige. Deres alien-agtige fremtoning lader til at påpege, eller snarere overdrive, en forskel, der mærkes, men ellers ikke kunne regnes ud.

* * *

Som et fremtrædende element i udstillingen hænger en imponerende stor indramning af en collage med pressede rosenblade – og rosen er åbenbart Iraks nationalblomst. (Men hvad betyder det egentlig, når en blomst nationaliseres?).

I Dossars værk er enhver form for diasporanostalgia blevet presset ud af disse kronblade: De er tørre, fastgjort som sommerfuglevinger med små knappenåle og centreret omkring to større aluminiumscirkler. Disse større cirkler efteraber knappenålshovederne, og på afstand ligner det, at hele denne rosenfirkant bliver til et stort, ikonisk rosenblad, der er fastgjort til rammen. Denne overdrevne kvalitet holdt sammen med den sommerfugleagtige æstetik og aluminiumsrammens Macbook-lignende finish skaber en vibe af dødbringende handelsobjekt – eller endda (for at blive i værkets egne overdrevne toner) af varegjort død. (Måske er enhver nation i sin destillerede symbolske form i virkeligheden en slags monster eller et lig?)

* * *

Et af Kamil Dossars tidligere værker, *Insert Song* (2023), præsenterer en slags antologi over hypertrofisk kærlighed: et soulnummer fra 1960’erne, der synligt mimes af en sanger klædt i hvidt; et CGI-animeret par fra et computerspil, der lægger an på hinanden; hjerteformede balloner; et virkeligt par, der kysser i stor idyl, lyden af deres kys i foley-bearbejdning, så det lyder, som om de er ved at fortære hinanden. Effekten er både kold og til at dåne over, som om værket tror på kærligheden som en mulighed, men kun er i stand til at tilbyde et katalog af dens mest kommercielle floskler – det, som Dossar et andet sted kalder “abstraktionens konsensus.”

Værkerne på O – Overgaden lader til at flyde ud af en lignende ambivalens. Dossar er interesseret i en form for særhed, som han godt er klar over i sidste ende er hans egen. De ‘monstre’, der vises, ved klaveret eller i Bagdads gader, er tilsyneladende alt andet. De er forvirrende readymades lånt fra vores kollektive forestillingsevne, synlige indekser over en følelse af intim og personificeret fremmedgørelse. Deres iøjnefaldende overgenkendelighed som fremmede figurer erstatter en uerkendelighed, der – ligesom et dybhavsvæsen aldrig kan blive bragt op til overfladen – forbliver strengt ubegribelig.

* * *

The Hands of Orlac var baseret på den franske romanføljeton *Les Mains d’Orlac* (1920) af Maurice

Renard, som også er blevet filmatiseret adskillige gange. Nærmest præcis samtidig – men utvivlsomt uden forudgående kendskab – skrev den sovjetiske forfatter Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky “The Runaway Fingers” (1922), en novelle med et lignende tema. I Krzhizhanovskys version er det imidlertid fingrene, der er protagonister, ikke pianisten. Midt i en koncert prøver fingrene pludselig at undslippe:

The pianist’s right hand made to pull back, to the middle register, but its galloping fingers refused – on they flew at breakneck speed... With a desperate tug the fingers suddenly wrenched themselves free, hand and all, from the pianist’s cuff and jumped – diamond ring on the little finger glinting – down onto the floor.²

Krzhizhanovskys historie er længe før Disney, men de her uvederhæftige fingre har noget distinkt tegneserieagtigt over sig, som de render rundt i byen, indtil de til sidst vender tilbage og hopper ind på plads i pianistens ærmer.

Tegningerne af hænder i Dossars udstilling føles også sært tegneserieagtige. De ligner animationer, handskelignende og uden særpræg, idet de præsenteres på lag af transparent papir – som var de abstrakte fraklip fra *Casper det venlige spøkelse*. Adskilt fra deres ejermænd er disse hænder måske i gang med at trylle eller gestikulere eller byde sig til – eller rende rundt på (eller væk fra) klavertangenterne. Ikke desto mindre er og bliver de decideret *u*-nuttede. Måske skyldes det guirlanden af spidse tænder, som de holder mellem sig i et af billederne, eller den revnede, mørke baggrund, som de deler den transparente plexiglas-ramme med i et andet. På en måde forekommer deres grovkornede, ikonografiske status som amputerede fragmenter eller reproduktioner mærkeligt truende. Hvilken konsensus lurar bag den her meget specifikke abstraktion?

En mulig grund til den hastige vækst i fortællinger om afskårne hænder i 1920’erne var formentlig de masseamputationer, der skete under og efter Første Verdenskrig. Transplantationsfantasier var i virkeligheden altid skrækhistorier om uoprettelige tab. I Krzhizhanovskys historie får pianisten sine fingre igen, men som med Orlacs er deres musikalske virtuositet gået tabt og blevet erstattet af en mere overjordisk evne.

The pianist played differently somehow: Gone were the dazzling passages, the lightning glissandos and emphatic grace notes... Then again there were moments when it seemed as though someone’s gigantic fingers – torn away from another keyboard, from another world – dropping the sun from their phalanges, were skipping along the skimpy, squeaky, rickety piano keys.³

2. Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, *Autobiography of a Corpse*, overs. Joanne Trumbull (New York: New York Review of Books, 2015), pp.117-18.

3. Ibid. p.124.

Skal man tro Francisco Goyas berømte kobberstik, er det fornuftssansens dvale, der skaber monstre. Men et århundrede før Goya formulerede René Descartes, i sin første *Meditation*, relationen mellem fornuft og monstrøsitet noget anderledes. Ifølge Descartes sover fornuften aldrig, og selv ikke monstrøsitetens kunstnere var i stand til at skabe noget ægte fremmedgørende.

For even when painters try to create sirens and satyrs with the most extraordinary bodies, they cannot give them natures which are new in all respects; they simply jumble up the limbs of different animals. Or if perhaps they manage to think up something so new that nothing remotely similar has ever been seen before – something which is therefore completely fictitious and unreal – at least the colours used in the composition must be real.⁴

Kunstnerens monstrøsitet er hæmmet af fornuft og erfaring; ethvert fantasivæsen, uanset hvor fremmed det synes, er i sidste ende mash-ups. Virkeligheden er stædigt vedholdende i enhver monstrøs forsamling.

By similar reasoning, although these general kinds of things – eyes, head, hands and so on – could be imaginary, it must at least be admitted that certain other even simpler and more universal things are real. These are as it were the real colours from which we form all the images of things, whether true or false, that occur in our thought.⁵

Det betyder ikke noget, hvordan vi forsøger at ‘opfinde’ vores monstre – deres hoveder eller hænder – på det mikrobiologiske plan, de er altid udgjort af lånte hverdagselementer. Hvordan ser monstrøsitetens produktionskæde ud i dag? Hvis man googler et billede af mušhuššu i 2025, er nogle af de første billeder, der dukker op, AI-genererede. Den teknologi, der har gjort det muligt for Dossar at transformere menneskerne i videoen til øgler på en måde, der ser så glidende ukompliceret ud, er altså en udpræget kartesiansk teknologi: at rode rundt i den digitale tidsalders ruiner med overbevisende troværdighed og stadig ikke være i stand til at producere noget, der er “new in all respects.”

4. René Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff & Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.77.

5. Ibid., p.77-8.

I MONSTRENE TID

Natasha Marie Llorens

Hurtige noter efter en bugtende Zoom-samtale med Kamil Dossar fredag den 3. oktober 2025. Den første linje lyder sådan her:

Far var kommunist i Irak i 1980’erne. Sudanesisk diaspora. Flygtede til Budapest, mødte en kvinde, flygtede fra Sovjetunionen. Endte i en tilfældig dansk by. K husker, hvordan han langsomt bevidnede denne mand blive svækket. Hans kognition, erindring, alt faldt fra hinanden. Tog sit eget liv, da K var 19. Den dag blev en forbandelse brudt. K følte virkeligheden komme meget tæt på. Begyndte at rejse, og hans kunstneriske praksis begyndte at tage form. Tegnede meget som barn. Spørgsmål om identitet. Fremmedgørelse. Hvad betyder det at glide væk fra genkendelsen? Interesse for visuel semiotik, hvad der indkapsles i det visuelle landskab gennem ideologi. Jeg tror, han taler om det orientalistiske hegemonis utrolige kraft, a la Antonio Gramsci. Den kan slå en mand ihjel.

Den palæstinenske litterat og aktivist Edward Said skrev *Orientalism* i 1975-76 under et forskningsophold ved Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences på Stanford University i Californien. Her præsenterer han ideen om, at orientalisme er et tankesystem, der spreder sig ud i hvilken som helst struktur i Europa og Nordamerika, hvis opgave det er – formelt og uformelt – at transmittere betydning. Om den vedholdenhed, der præger disse påtvungne opfattelser af mennesker og steder, bemærker Said:

Nevertheless, what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability. After all, any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable wisdom (in academies, books, congresses, universities, foreign-service institutes) from the period of Ernest Renan in the late 1840s until the present in the United States must be something more formidable than a mere collection of lies.¹

Det er altså systemer, som er udstyret med autoriteten til at fortælle sandheden om geografien og samfundene i den. Derfor er det ikke tilstrækkeligt at opfatte orientalisme som en fiktion, men snarere som en vedvarende storskala-projektion, der har virket.

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), 14.

Og hvad skal man stille op med så vedholdende et billede? I filmen *Nahla* (1979) af den algierske instruktør Farouk Beloufa ser man tydeligt hegemoniets effekter. Filmen foregår i Beirut ved borgerkrigens begyndelse i 1975, og optrævler forbindelserne mellem Nahla, en smuk sangerinde, Maha, en feministisk journalist i 40’erne, hvis eksmand har maniske udbrud, Hind, en palæstinensisk aktivist i 30’erne, der på et tidspunkt bliver revolutionær, og Larbi, en algerisk journalist, der er blevet hængende i Beirut på trods af sin avis’ forsøg på at få ham hjem. Beloufas filmiske narrativ er ellipseformet. Men virkelighedsforståelsen i Nahla går i opløsning, og Mahas eksmand får et psykotisk sammenbrud. Det er, hvad der rent faktisk sker med mennesker i krige affødt af hegemoniske ideer. De dør. De forsvinder ind i psykologisk kaos. Reparation foregår på generationsniveau, hvis overhovedet. For nogle mennesker er der ingen kritisk distance. Næste afsnit, noter fra en samtale med Kamil, fredag den 3. oktober 2025:

Mor var biolog, en ungarsk bondepige. Forældrene havde boet i en bjerglandsby med bedsteforældrene. Hun pakkede en taske; de tog til Danmark med en uges varsel for at blive genforenet. Begge interesserede i at assimilere sig. Men begge var de nødt til at gentage alle deres studier. Far var Iraks hurtigste mand. Løb er den tværgenerationelle arv. At bevæge sig så hurtigt som muligt over glohed jord. Har altid haft en følelse af, at assimilering ikke er nok. Ungarsk, polsk, dansk, det mistede arabiske. Fremmedgørelse i sproget. Han beskriver umuligheden – i Danmark – af at eksternalisere tilhørsforhold.

En sort irakisk atlet gift med en landsbyboer-nu-biolog i 1990’erne i Danmark: lagene af potentiel uforståelighed er svimlende. Hvad vil det sige at miste den verden, hvor du hører til, og strande i en anden, at skulle tage grundkurserne på din universitetsuddannelse om på et nyt sprog, dit tredje eller fjerde sprog? Det ville være umuligt at manifestere sit indre gennem så mange lag af sanset verden. Det ville være muligt at sidde fast i det ydre, strandet i de facetter af en selv, der er let aflæselige.

Og hvis dette specifikke ydre allerede er styret af orientalisme-paradigmet, som Said skriver: “premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West.”² Selv for Iraks hurtigste mand ville det være svært at overkomme følelsen af, at ens indre liv er et tomrum, når man står ansigt til ansigt med et paradigme, der minder om den fortrinsret, ekspertise har, når den baserer sig på ydre faktorer.

Da monsterets hoved første gang kommer til syne i Kamils video, sidder det på en selvsikker kvindekrop, der bærer tørklæde og rydder af bordet. Hun kredser om det firkantede bord, samler tallerkner, fejrer

2. Said, *Orientalism*, 28–29.

krummer sammen i sin ene hånd, sætter stole tilbage på plads. Hun spejler ikke den måde, Dossars familie er blevet opfattet på i 1990'erne. Jeg ser monsteret som det indlysende resultat af at strande uden troværdig adgang til ens egen subjektivitet. Kvindens reptillignende silhuet understreger det tomrum, der skabes af det påtvunget udvendige ved orientalismen. Monsteret er denne strukturelle fornægtelses barn.

“I am a cultural hybrid. Cultural hybrids are monsters. Interesting monsters, but ones without a future. I therefore consider myself condemned by history, because the future will be made based on a re-appropriated and recovered past, and we do not know what the projection of such a past into the future will bring.”³ Sådan skrev Jean el-Mouhoub Amrouche, en algiersk forfatter og journalist født i 1907, der døde, den dag Algeriet opnåede uafhængighed. Han er født ud af et tomrum, et nyt væsen, der bærer fortidens sandheder i sig og taler orientalismens sprog. Ligesom Amrouche ved Dossar heller ikke, hvad projektionen af hans egen fortid ind i samtidens Irak vil bringe – han er barn af Iraks hurtigste mand, der forsvandt under vægten af sin egen fremmedgørelse. Han lever i monstrenes tid.

Efter at være sprunget over adskillige livshistoriekapitler fortsætter noterne fra samtalen med Kamil, fredag den 3. oktober, i nutid:

Ankom fra Basra i april, 42 grader. Varmeste sted på jorden. Ilden fra oliefelterne springer ud af horisonten; flammebuer vælter op af jorden, ufattelig smukt. Han tænker for sig selv, at han må stamme fra ildlandene.

Og længere nede på siden:

Bach, et oplysningsparadigme. En reptilfigur spiller en klaverkoncert, der vises på en lillebitte skærm. Musikken fylder hele rummet. Når man går ind, bliver man klar over, at nogen spiller klaver. Men først når man kommer tæt på skærmen, hvornår i løbet af udstillingen det end er, opdager man, at det er et reptil, der spiller.

Det er et monster født af ildlandene, der spiller Bach på en lille skærm i København, og musikken fylder udstillingsrummet med et sonisk element af oplysning, som vi måske godt ved bliver kompromitteret, men som vi ikke desto mindre responderer på. Jeg tænker på den monstrøse, kulturelle hybrid, jeg selv er, og som Dossar er. Og så tænker jeg på, hvad det vil sige at blive født i monstrenes tidsalder.

I Ann Leckies roman *Translation State* (2023), som er en del af en serie om riget Radch i det ydre rum, er hovedkarakteren Reet et forladt barn af en ikke-menneskelig art ved navn Presger, der lever på tværs af mange dimensioner, og efter menneskestandarder er paradigmatisk irrationelle.

3. Amrouche, “Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français,” citeret i McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism*, 225.

Reet ved ikke, at de er menneskelig, eftersom de er blevet forladt ved fødslen af Presger-forældrene. Det er et komplekst univers, men det viderefører en ældgammel trope i mere følelsesmæssig forstand: Den, der bærer det monstrøse i sig, men ikke ved det, som så pludselig vækkes af begær til et andet monster – og derefter aktualiserer sig selv. På grund af de specifikke monstrøsiteter, der er på spil og den historiske timing i fortællingens klimaks, forandrer Reets selvaktualisering følelsen af orden og balance i hele universet.

Dossar fortæller mig om søuhyrer, som mennesker har fotograferet, men aldrig set, fordi de eksploderer, når de ikke bliver holdt sammen af dybhavstrykket. Det er også det, Amrouche påpeger – han er klar over, at han, som en slags monster, ikke har nogen fremtid. Når trykket ændrer sig og paradigmerne skifter, vil han forsvinde. Så hvad skal vi sige? Er Dossars monstre en slags katalysatorer for systemskifte eller en tilbagekastning af det tomrum, som orientalismens projektioner efterlader? Er de dømt til at falde fra hinanden, når den verden, de kom fra, bliver indhentet af klimakollaps og rigets sammenstyrtning, eller er de snarere billedet på en ny, anden verdensorden?

LINKS

Kamil Dossar

Følgende tekst samler en række associative tanker hentet fra Kamil Dossars fortløbende samtale med Ed Atkins frem mod færdigstillingen af udstillingen *Fahrenheit*.

ASSIMILERING

Udstillingen på O – Overgaden er blevet til en værkserie, der afspejler temaer som identitet, fremmedgørelse og monstrøsitet. Min interesse udspringer af observationer omkring det at være irakisk/ungarsk immigrant – og af de forventninger, der ligger til assimilering i det danske samfund. Min far blev politisk eksileret efter krigen i Irak, og konsekvenserne af denne fordrivelse gjorde, at livet med ham var en konstant konfrontation med identitetens, sprogets og ideologiens prekære natur.

Den antagonistiske retorik mod irakere efter Golfkrigen, som blev intensiveret efter 11. september, og som førte til øget marginalisering af arabiske minoriteter i Vesten, afskar også min fars bånd til sit hjemland yderligere og skabte en dyb fremmedgørelse.

De her ting interesserer mig meget, fordi de bliver vinduer til forståelsen af, hvordan vi forholder os til os selv og andre, i en verden bygget af billeder. Irak er blevet et hyperobjekt,¹ en fantasi, et sted, som er blevet en fiksering for det vestlige blik. Denne opmærksomhed viste mig mine egne kulturelle tilbøjeligheder og betingelser. Irak er blevet den blinde mands spejl. Det var derfor, jeg besluttede at tage derned og færdiggøre den rejse, min far ikke kunne tage. I den proces fandt jeg min familie, hvilket faktisk splintrede min selvskabte fantasi om denne region.

Jeg vil bruge splinterne af denne fantasi til at lave kunst: jeg vil suspendere dem mellem billeder og minder og forsøge at sammensætte en udstilling, der afspejler den komplekse virkelighed, som har skabt denne fantasi. I sidste ende handler det ikke om min far eller om Irak; det er mere et spørgsmål om, hvad det vil sige at glide ud af genkendelsens greb eller væk fra, hvad der føles hjemmevant.

1. Begrebet hyperobjekt, formuleret af filosofen Timothy Morton, betegner noget, der ikke er begrænset til et bestemt punkt i rum og tid, består af flere andre objektrelationer og ‘overtager’ andre objekter (det vil sige, at det påtvinger andre objekter sine relationer og virkninger); se Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

FORVANDLING

16 år efter min far døde, rejste jeg til Irak. Krigen var stadig i gang, da han døde, og det var nemt at retfærdiggøre at vente med at rejse. Men da krigen sluttede i december 2021, stod det klart, at tiden var kommet. Da jeg ankom til Irak sammen med min søster nogle år senere, forsvandt alle de forudindtagede forestillinger om dette møde med det samme. Frygt og skyld blev erstattet af enorm taknemmelighed. De lokale behandlede os, som om vi var en del af familien. Generøsiteten var så overvældende. Vi så os selv i deres øjne, og en slags forbandelse blev brudt – en forbandelse fremmanet af billeder.

I de her rejsedage og -uger, fyldt med gæstfrihed og brudte forbandelser, begyndte jeg at tænke på forvandling eller transmutation. På den ene side ville jeg gerne accelerere den forudindtagede, kollektive “andetgørelse” af Irak og placere den lige dér i hjertet af hverdagslivet. Det fik mig til at begynde at arbejde med AI. Jeg ville gerne omvende det eksotiserende blik, der ligger bag AI-udskiftningerne (i dette tilfælde er menneskelige ansigter udskiftet med reptilhoveder); ikke for at forstærke allerede eksisterende fremmedgørelsesstrukturer, men for at kritisere netop det eksotiserende blik ved at fodre det i en monstrøs og overdreven form. På den anden side kunne jeg ikke lade være med at dyrke ideen om reptilet som repræsentationen af “den Anden.”

Den indlejrede generiskhed i dette billede peger tilbage på den klassiske “alien” i vestlig bevidsthed. Den reptillignende skabning rammer en allestedsnærværende nerve i billedet af alien-invasioner, en paranoia overfor noget udefrakommende, der infiltrerer den såkaldte civilisation og ændrer den indefra. Octavia Butler opstiller idéen om, at når aliens bortfører mennesker, er det i virkeligheden en skyggeprojektion af slavehandlens kidnapning af afrikanere til Amerika. Et tema, som er til stede i de fleste af hendes værker. Frygten er en tilståelse. Selv den mest arkaiske idé om en alien eller et monster er blevet afbildet som reptiler. I den babylonske æra er det monstrøse et forfærdeligt reptil kaldet mušḫuššu, der vil fortære os alle.

Gennem denne paranoia ville jeg vende denne relation på hovedet og vise en parallel virkelighed, hvor en urfolkscivilisation af reptiler invaderes og koloniseres af mennesker. Bybilledet i Irak efter krigen, hvor lyset flimrer af strømafbrydelser. En reptiltjener passerer forbi kameraet, fuldstændig almindeligt, og tørrer et bord af i en afslappet, ubesværet bevægelse.

MONSTRØSITET

Min idé til det værk, som skulle blive centralt for min udstilling på O – Overgaden, faldt sammen med AI's gennembrud i 2024. Jeg begyndte at udforske nye metoder for billedgenerering, der tidligere var forbeholdt traditionel, dyr CGI. Mens jeg udforskede AI med min samarbejdspartner, kunstneren Utko Önal,

viste AI sig som en slags mušhuššu. Eller måske rettere en Golem, der, med den rette teknik og manipulation, kan “trickes” til at spytte reptiler ud. Fordi jeg ville have, at billedet af reptilerne skulle fastholdes, konsekvent, i filmklip, der skulle vare længere end ti sekunder ad gangen, blev udviklingen af AI-pipelinen ekstremt kompleks.

Der er en grund til, at AI-“slop” er det, der dominerer vores mainstream-billeder. Og det er ikke kun på grund af vores kulturelle billedudmattelse og dets dominerende vulgaritet, som Dean Kissick meget rigtigt har reflekteret over.² Det er også bare, fordi det er sådan, det nuværende AI-design ser ud. Der er en skjult krig mellem Kina og USA bag dette AI-“slop”, hvor enorme potentialer undergraves og gatekeepes, og det er dette potentiale, som vi – om end i mikroskopisk omfang – har formået at udnytte; og det er kun et spørgsmål om tid, før dette også får et stort marked. I løbet af den seks månedersperiode, hvor vi udviklede vores AI-pipeline, lykkedes det os at lave en proto-AI-generator, der specifikt kunne substituere alle hoveder i filmklippene.

TAB

At opleve Bachs Goldberg-variationer, BWV 988, har været en af de mærkeligste erfaringer i mit liv. At min far, som var politisk eksileret og kommunistisk afhopper fra Irak, ankom til Danmark, var en form for held, grundet et bureaukratisk smuthul, der beskyttede ham mod deportation. Men Danmark, brandet som “verdens lykkeligste land”, viste sit grimme ansigt over for arabiske minoriteter.

Mine forældre forsøgte at assimilere sig til det danske samfund, men alligevel blev vi altid behandlet som andenrangsborgere. Denne behandling dannede grundlaget for deres fremmedgørelse. Min far ville sidde dag ud og dag ind på sofaen og læse og lytte til Bach, mens han forsøgte at forstå både dansk, sig selv og sit nye liv. Og i sine bestræbelser mistede han gradvist sit modersmål. Der er noget hjerteskræende ved billedet af en træt mand, der glider væk fra det genkendelige, mens han lytter til Bach.

I bogen *Bach’s Cycle, Mozart’s Arrow* (2007) argumenterer musikologen Karol Berger for, at Bach ændrede sin måde at skabe og opføre musik på for at afspejle et nyt og ændret syn på tid. Cyklisk opstigen. Er det i Bachs opstigning, vi taber os selv? Hjalp Bach med at få min fars omrids til at falme? Det startede der – med at han forsvandt, mens han lyttede til Goldberg-variationerne.

Når jeg kigger tilbage på min fars tilstand, tror jeg, den lærte mig, hvordan hans tab af sproget var en anden måde at miste sig selv på. Hvem kalder du på, når ingen svarer dine råb? Det må være en slags

2. Dean Kissick, “The Vulgar Image,” Spike Art Magazine, nr. 84: Vulgarly (sommer 2025), udgivet online 9. november 2025: spikeartmagazine.com/articles/vulgarity-the-vulgar-image.

ubegribeligt vanvid. Hvis identitet er så indvævet i sprogets stof, hvad betyder det så, når man mister sit greb om det? Den udsigelige dimension eksisterer lige dér: på tærsklen, udenfor sproget eller det semiotiske. Den her tanke gjorde mig besat af monsteret; fordi monsteret er en analogi til noget udsigeligt.

Det tætteste, man kan komme på at forstå det [monstret] på, er nok ved at se det som et allegorisk spejl, der reflekterer vores virkelighed gennem sin modsætning. Det absorberer og fastholder alle samfundets kollektive rædsler, smerter og absurditeter, så vi kan finde frem til en konsensus om dets abstraktion. Gør billedet begribeligt. Gør det til irakere, og så videre. Men det kommer til kort, fordi billedet [af monstret] kigger tilbage på os.

OPSTIGNING

Men hvorfor Bach? Hvad er det ved hans musik, der tiltrak min fars opmærksomhed? Og den specifikke pianist i mit værk, Lang Lang – hvad tiltrak hans opmærksomhed? Jeg tror, der er to sider af den sag. Den ene er, at Bachs musik er blevet ideologisk instrumentaliseret ind i den europæiske selvforståelse og har bidraget til at konsolidere den eurocentrisme, som desværre også har affødt white-supremacy-ideologier. Kombineret med den reelle, rene form for transcendens, der virkelig også findes i Bachs musik, har dette skabt en falsk forestilling om identifikation. Lang Lang var tiltrukket af denne tyngde og genopfører Bach langt bedre end europæerne – meget mod deres vilje. Min far er en del af denne dynamik på sin egen måde. Bach blev en slags vektor for hans forvandling.

O – OVERGADEN
Overgaden neden Vandet 17, 1414 København K
overgaden.org

Kamil Dossar
Fahrenheit
Udstillingsperiode: 22.11.2025 – 25.01.2026

Kamil Dossar (f. 1988, DK) er uddannet fra Det Kgl. Danske Kunstakademi (2024) og bor og arbejder i København. Dossar har tidligere udstillet på bl.a. Anonymous, New York (2025) samt Wschód, Warszawa/New York (2025) og Bianca D’Alessandro, København (2022/2024), som begge også repræsenterer Dossar. Dossars soloudstilling på O – Overgaden markerer kulminationen på hans deltagelse i det etårige samarbejdsforløb INTRO, som er generøst finansieret af Aage og Johanne Louis-Hansen Fonden.

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07:17

12:46













consistent reputilians, and for this imagery to last for more than ten seconds at a time, the development of the AI pipeline became extremely complex.

There is a reason why AI slop dominates the

mainstream, and it's not only because of our cultural exhaustion of the image and superseding vulgarity, as I think has been correctly reflected by Dean Kissick,² but also simply because that's the current design of AI commodification. Underneath the slop, there is a hidden war between China and the US, subverting and gatekeeping tremendous amounts of potential, which we have tapped into to a microscopic extent, and in a matter of time it certainly will become commodified too. Having developed the pipeline in the six-month period, we managed to create a proto-AI generator specifically to replace any head in the footage.

LOSS

Experiencing Bach's Goldberg Variations BWV 988

was one of the stranger experiences in my life.

My father, politically exiled as a defecting Iraqi communist, arrived in Denmark by luck, via a

bureaucratic loophole that meant he could stay and

not be deported. However, Denmark, branded the

"happiest country in the world," reared its ugly head

towards Arab minorities.

My parents tried to assimilate into Danish society, yet we were always treated as second-rate citizens. Their treatment formed the bedrock of their alienation. My father would sit on the couch, reading and listening to Bach, day in, day out, trying to catch up with Danish, himself, his new life. And in his efforts to catch up, his native tongue would slip away. There is something heart-wrenching about a tired man slipping out of recognition while listening to Bach.

In the book *Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow* (2007),

musicologist Karol Berger argues that Bach changed his conception and execution of music to reflect an altered view of time. Cyclic ascension. Is it in Bach's contours we lose ourselves? Did Bach help my father's contours to fade? It started there, with him slipping away, listening to the Goldberg Variations.

I think, looking back at my father's condition, I learned that his loss of language was another way of losing himself. Who are you calling when no one is returning your call? That must be a form of incomprehensible madness. If identity is so tightly woven into the fabric of language, what does it mean to lose that grip? The ineffable dimension exists right there, at the threshold, outside semiosis. At least, that thought made me so obsessed with the monster; insofar as the monster is analogous to the quality of ineffability. At most, the closest way to perceive the monster is by turning it into an allegorical mirror, reflecting reality antithetically.

2. Dean Kissick, "The Vulgar Image," Spike Art Magazine, no.84: Vulgarity (Summer 2023), published online 9 November 2023, spikeartmagazine.com/articles/vulgarity-the-vulgar-image.

It has subsumed and fixed all societies' collective horrors, pains, and absurdities, so that we could find a consensus of its abstraction. Make an image comprehensible enough. Make it Iraqi and so on. It falls short because it looks back at us.

ASCENSION

But why Bach? What is it in his music that would draw my father's attention? And the particular pianist in my piece, Lang Lang—what drew his attention? I suspect it's two-fold. One reason is that Bach's music has been instrumentalized ideologically into European consciousness, and helped consolidate a Euro-centrism, which unfortunately has led to white supremacist ideologies. This fixture, together with the real, pure quality of transcendence we genuinely hear in Bach's music, has created a false notion of identification. Lang Lang was drawn by this gravity reiterating Bach's music, outcompeting even the Europeans, to their distaste. My father tapped into this, in his own way. Bach became the vector for his shapeshifting.

O—OVERGADEN
Overgaden nedden Vandel 17, 1414 København K,
overgaden.org

Kamil Dossar
Fahrenheit

Exhibition period: 22.11.2025 – 25.01.2026

Kamil Dossar (b. 1988, DK) is a graduate of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (2024) and lives and works in Copenhagen. He has previously exhibited at venues including Anonymous Gallery, New York (2025) as well as Wschod Gallery, Warsaw/New York (2025) and Bianca D'Alessandro, Copenhagen (2022/24), both of which also represent his work. Dossar's solo exhibition *Fahrenheit* marks the culmination of his participation in the one-year postgraduate program INTRQ, supported generously by the Aage and Johanne Louis-Hansen Foundation.

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She is not a mirror to the way Dossar's family might have been perceived by Danes in the 1980s. I see the monster as the obvious evolution of being marooned without reliable access to one's own interiority. Her reptilian silhouette constitutes this void produced by Orientalism's enforced exteriority. The monster is the child of such structural denial.

"I am a cultural hybrid," wrote Jean El-Mouhoub "Amrouche, an Algerian writer and journalist born in 1907 who died on the eve of Algerian independence. "Cultural hybrids are monsters. Interesting monsters, but ones without a future." He was born of a void, a new creature that carries the truth of the past in his body and speaks the Orientalist's language. "I therefore consider myself condemned by history," Amrouche continues, "because the future will be made based on a re-appropriated and recovered past, and we do not know what the projection of such a past into the future will bring."⁴ Dossar also does not yet know what a projection of his own past—child of the fastest man in Iraq who disappeared under the weight of his own alienation—into the contemporary Iraqi landscape will bring. He is in the time of monsters.

Skipping several paragraphs of life story, the notes from a conversation with Kamil, Friday, October 3, continue in the present:

Dossar tells me about sea creatures that humans have photographed but never seen, because they explode without the deep pressure of the ocean floor to hold them together. This is also what Amrouche was saying—that he understands that, as a monster, he has no future. When the pressure changes and the paradigm shifts, he will disappear. So which is it? Are Dossar's monsters catalysts of systemic change or refractions of the void left by Orientalism's projections? Are they destined to disintegrate when the world that they evolved from is superseded by climate collapse and the fall of empire or are they the image of this new other world order?

Came from Basra in April, 42 degrees, Kuwait. Hottest place on earth. Fire from oil fields bursting up from the horizon; arcs of flame leaping off the ground, incredibly beautiful. He thinks to himself, he must come from the fire lands.

Then, further down the page:

Bach, a paradigm of the Enlightenment. Reptilian figure playing this piano concerto, which is shown on a tiny screen. The music will fill the whole space. When you enter, you know someone is playing the piano. Only when you approach the screen, whenever that might be during the viewer's experience of the exhibition, do you realize that a reptile is playing.

There is a monster born of the fire lands who plays Bach on a tiny screen in Copenhagen and its music fills the exhibition space with a sonic element of Enlightenment, which we may know to be compromised but nevertheless respond to. I think about the monstrous cultural hybrid that I am, that Dossar is. And then I think about what it means to be born in the time of monsters.

3. Jean El-Mouhoub Amrouche, "Un Algérien s'adresse aux Français," quoted in James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.225.

4. Ibid.

In the novel *Translating State* (2023) by Ann Leckie, which is part of a suite of books about an interstellar

LINKS

Kamil Dossar

The following text amalgamates a series of associative, personal notes drawn from Kamil Dossar's ongoing conversations with artist Ed Atkins in the period leading up to the completion of the exhibition *Fahrenheit*.

ASSIMILATION

The show at O—Overgaden has become a body of work that reflects themes of identity, alienation, and monstrosity. My interest sprung from my observations as the child of Iraqi/Hungarian immigrants and of the mechanisms and expectancy of assimilation into Danish society. My father being politically exiled from Iraq and the inherent repercussions of this displacement made life with him a constant reckoning with the precarious nature of identity, language, and ideology.

The rhetoric of antagonism towards Iraqis since the Gulf War, accelerated after 9/11 and the subsequent marginalization of Arab minorities in the West, further severed my father's ties to his homeland and created a profound alienation.

This stuff interests me a lot, because it is a window to understand how we relate to ourselves and others in a world built on images. Iraq has become a hyper-object,¹ a fantasy, a place that has become a fixation of a Western gaze. The attention revealed to me my own cultural dispositions and conditionings. Iraq has become a mirror to a blind man. And that's why I couldn't. And in that process, I found my family, which shattered my self-imposed fantasy of this region.

I want to make these shards of fantasy into art: I want to suspend them between images and memories, and put together a show that can somehow express the complex realities that constituted the fantasy. Ultimately, it's not exclusively about my father or Iraq, but about what it means to slip from the grasp of the recognizable and the familiar.

1. Coined by philosopher Timothy Morton, a hyper-object is something that is not limited to a particular point in spacetime, is comprised of multiple other object relations, and "takes over" other objects (that is, it forces its relations and effects on other objects); see Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

TRANSMUTATION

Sixteen years after my father passed away, I traveled to Iraq. At the time of his death, the war was still raging and so the justification for waiting to go there was easy for me. However, in December 2021, when the war ended, it became clear that the time had come. When I arrived in Iraq with my sister some years later, all our presumptions about this encounter evaporated immediately. Our fears and guilt were replaced with enormous gratitude. The locals treated us like we were part of the family. Their generosity was beyond overwhelming. In their eyes we saw ourselves and a curse had been broken—a curse made of images.

In those days and weeks of roaming, curse-breaking, and hospitality, I started to think about transmutation. On the one hand, I wanted to accelerate the preconceived collective "othering" of Iraq and place it right there, in the heart of everyday life. This led me to start working with AI. I wanted to circumvent the exoticizing gaze beneath the AI replacement (in this case of human faces with that of reptiles); not to reinforce pre-existing structures of othering, but to critique an exoticizing gaze by monstrosity, help but entertain the reptilian creature as a representative of "the Other."

The inherent genericness it embodies points back to the "alien" in Western consciousness. The reptilian creature strikes an ever-present chord of the alien invasion trope, a paranoia of something from the outside infiltrating so-called civilization and replacing it from within. Octavia Butler posits the idea of the fantasy of alien abduction or captivity narrations as a shadow projection of the slave trade of the African people to the Americas, a theme that is present in most of her works. The fear is a confession. Even the most archaic notion of the alien and the monster was also depicted as reptilian; in the Babylonian era the monstrosity is a terrible reptile called mušḫuššu, poised to devour us all.

Accessing this paranoia, I wanted to flip this narrative and present a parallel: a reality where native reptilian civilizations are invaded and colonized by humans. The post-war Iraqi urban landscapes that flicker with power outages. A reptilian water passes in from of the camera, entirely ordinarily, her hand sliding in a seamless gesture, carefree.

MONSTROSITY

My idea for the work that would come to constitute my exhibition at O—Overgaden coincided with the rise of generative AI in 2024. I began to explore new methods of image generation, previously the sole prerails of expensive CGI. While exploring the possibilities of AI with my collaborator in the field, the artist Utko Onal, AI itself emerged as something of a mušḫuššu. Ultimately, because I wanted

and emphatic grace notes... Then again there were moments when it seemed as though someone's gigantic fingers—torn away from another keyboard, from another world—dropping the sun from their phalanges, were skipping along the skimpy, squeaky, tickety piano keys?

According to Francisco Goya's etching,⁸ famously, it is the sleep of reason which produces monsters. But a century before Goya, René Descartes, in his first *Meditation*, put the relation between reason and monstrosity rather differently. For Descartes, reason could never sleep and even the artist of monstrosity was never creating something truly alien:

For even when painters try to create sirens and satyrs with the most extraordinary bodies, they cannot give them natures which are new in all respects; they simply jumble up the limbs of different animals. Or if perhaps they manage to think up something so new that nothing remotely similar has ever been seen before—something which is therefore completely fictitious and unreal—at least the colours used in the composition must be real.

The artist's monstrosity is constrained by reason and experience; all satyrs and chimeras, however outlandish, are ultimately mash-ups. Reality stubbornly insists on the monstrous assemblage:

By similar reasoning, although these general kinds of things—eyes, head, hands and so on—could be imaginary, it must be admitted that certain other even simpler and more universal things are real. These are as it were the real colours from which we form all the images of things, whether true or false, that occur in our thought.¹⁰

It does not matter how we try to "invent" our monsters' parts—their heads or hands—at some micrological level, they are always composed of elements borrowed from everyday life.

What does the production line of monstrosity look like today? If you google an image of a mushûssu in 2025, some of the first images you find have apparently been made with AI. The same technology that has allowed Dossar to transform the people in his videos so seamlessly into lizard remains, for the time being, distinctly Cartesian technology: jumbling up the digital *disjecta membra* with dazzling plausibility, yet incapable of producing anything "new in all respects."

7. Ibid., p.124.

8. Francisco Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (El sueño de la razón produce monstruos), from the series *Los Caprichos*, plate 43, 1797–99.

9. René Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.77.

10. Ibid., pp.77–78.

IN THE TIME OF MONSTERS

Natasha Marie Llorens

Notes typed quickly from a meandering Zoom conversation with Kamil Dossar on Friday, October 3, 2025. The first lines read:

Father was a communist in the 1980s in Iraq. Sudanese diaspora. Fled to Budapest, mt a woman, fled the Soviet Union. Placed randomly in a town in Denmark. K remembers slowly seeing a man deteriorate. His cognition, memories, everything fell apart. Suicided when K was 19. That day, a spell was broken. K could feel reality come very close. Started traveling, and his artistic practice began to take shape. Used to draw a lot when he was a kid. Questions about identity. Alienation. What does it mean to slip out of recognition? Interest in visual semiotics, what gets imbedded in the visual landscape through ideology. I think he is talking about the incredible strength of Orientalist hegemony, in Gramsci's sense. It can kill a man.

Palestinian scholar Edward Said wrote *Orientalism* in 1975–76 during a fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University in California. In it, he argues that Orientalism is a system of thought that extends into all the structures tasked with the transmission of meaning—formal and informal—in Europe and North America. He remarks on the tenacity of this imposed idea about a set of places, peoples:

Nevertheless, what we must respect and try to grasp is the sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse, its very close ties to the enabling socio-economic and political institutions, and its redoubtable durability. After all, any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable wisdom (in academics, books, congresses, universities, foreign-service institutes) from the period of Ernest Renan in the late 1840s until the present in the United States must be something more formidable than a mere collection of lies!

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), p.14.

It is a system endowed with the authority to tell the truth about geography and the societies nestled in them. Orientalism is not properly understood as fiction, then, but rather as a successful durational projection on a massive scale.

Next paragraph, notes from a conversation with Kamil, Friday, October 3:

Mother was a biologist, a Hungarian farm girl. They had been living in a mountain village with the grandparents. She packed a bag; they left for Denmark with a week's notice to reunite. Both interested in assimilating. But both had to repeat all their studies. Father was the fastest man in Iraq. The intergenerational legacy is running. Moving as fast as possible across scorched earth. Always had a feeling that assimilation is not enough. Hungarian, Polish, Danish. Lost Arabic. Alienation in language. He is describing the impossibility—in Denmark—of externalizing belonging.

A Black Iraqi athlete married to a Hungarian villager-turned-biologist in the 1990s in Denmark: the layers of potential unintelligibility are dizzying. What would it mean to lose the world you belong in and get stranded in another, re-doing foundational courses at university in your third or fourth language? It would become impossible to manifest one's interiority through so many layers of the sense-world. It would be possible to get stuck in pure exteriority, marooned in the facet of oneself that is immediately perceptible.

And if that specific exteriority is already governed by the paradigm of Orientalism, which Said writes is, "premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West."² Even for the fastest man in Iraq, it would be hard to outrun the feeling that one's inner life was void in the face of a paradigm that assumed the prerogative of expertise based on exteriority.

When the head of the monster appears for the first time in Dossar's film, it is mapped onto the body of a confident woman in a headscarf clearing a table. She circles the square table several times picking up plates, deftly wiping debris into one hand, and shifting chairs back into position.

2. Ibid., pp.28–29.

DISMEMBERED NOTES ON KAMIL DOSSAR

Mike Sperlinger

In his encounter with these proto-Scandinavians, Ibn Fadlan found himself fascinated: "I have never seen bodies more perfect than theirs. They were like palm trees."² But he was also perplexed by their utter strangeness, noting, for example, that "from the tips of his toes to his neck, each man is tattooed in dark green with designs."³ For all their statuesque glamour, Ibn Fadlan found the Rus profoundly revolting:

They are the filthiest of God's creatures. They do not clean themselves after urinating or defecating, nor do they wash after having sex. They do not wash their hands after meals. They are like wandering asses.⁴

When it came to the Rus's cremation ceremony, it turned out that the culture shock was mutual. These green-skinned aliens looked askance at his Arab company in turn:

"You Arabs are fools!"
"Why is that?" I asked him.

He said: "Because you put the men you love most, and the most noble among you, into the earth, and we burn them in the fire in an instant, so that at once and without delay they enter Paradise."⁵ Then he began to laugh in a very excessive way.⁶

In preparing the work for this exhibition, Kamil Dossar traveled to Iraq for the first time. His father came originally from Basra, but fled to Denmark as a political exile in the 1980s. Dossar traveled for several weeks, meeting relatives and exploring the country. Footage he shot during the trip features in the exhibition's second video: everyday vignettes of Iraqi life—a café, a market—in which some (but not all) locals' heads have, inexplicably, been replaced with reptilian features.

Are these characters avatars of Mesopotamian mythology? The Iraqi mythical bestiary is full of hybrids, including some semi-reptilian ones, like the mushtus: a snake-like head and scaly skin fused to a lion's forelimbs and eagle's talons. But Dossar's Iraq does not suggest a zone of magical realism. Despite their photoreal renderings, there is something undeniably contemporary and artificial about these characters: their reflections remain, just as inexplicably, human. These head-replacements are both decapitations and interpolations—the transposition of a gaze.

These figures might instead be aliens, perhaps, on loan from pulp science fiction. Lizard-people have some pedigree as shorthand for sci-fi paranoia, on- and off-screen. In the 1980s, an American television series

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

In the silent, expressionist, horror film classic *The Hands of Orlac* (1924), a celebrated pianist loses his hands in an accident, only to have them replaced by the transplanted hands of a recently executed murderer. The new hands, whilst failing to play the piano, seem to have a life of their own—and eventually, they overpower the will of their new owner, compelling him to new murders. But what fascinates is less the melodramatic twists of the plot than the sight of the actor Conrad Veidt, as Orlac, holding his new hands at literally arms' length, gazing at them like alien parasites.

In one of the videos in Kamil Dossar's exhibition, a pianist gives a flamboyantly virtuososo concert recital of Johann Sebastian Bach's Goldberg Variations. Presented on a tiny screen at one end of the space, but with the sound reverberating throughout the gallery, its peculiarity only becomes apparent on closer inspection: the pianist has the head of a lizard.

The first description we have of Viking life was written in Arabic by a man from Baghdad. In 922, Ibn Fadlan was on a mission to the Muslim ruler of the Bulgars in his role as an envoy from the Caliph, when he encountered a group of Rus–Swedish Vikings who traded in fur and swords—along the upper reaches of the Volga river.

Ibn Fadlan's brief account of the Rus is like a matter-of-fact bulletin from another planet—more specifically, a planet resembling the one which features in the 1964 Soviet science-fiction novel *Hard to Be a God* by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, a medieval hellscape of mud, suffering, and social Darwinism. Ibn Fadlan observes, with a horrified but sober curiosity, the Rus's animal sacrifices, public group sex, abandonment of sick party members to "the dogs and birds of prey," and a chieftain's elaborate funeral rites presided over by an "angel of death" (who sacrifices one of the slaves).¹

1. Ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North*, translated by Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (London: Penguin, 2011).

called V featured carnivorous alien reptiles called the Visitors who disguised themselves as humans. (One person particularly inspired by V was the British former sports pundit David Icke, who has popularized a conspiracy theory that many of the world's most influential people—the British royal family, the Rothschilds, Barack Obama, the country singer Bocar Willie, and so on—are, in fact, giant alien lizards in disguise, bent on taking over the planet.)

If the lizard people in Dossar's video are alien interlopers, however, they seem distinctly unthreatening. They are doing everyday things—serving food, sitting with a (human) friend in a café—and there is no 'reveal': they are out in the open, exotically nondescript. Their alien character seems to register, or rather exaggerate, a difference which is felt but could otherwise not be figured.

Prominent in the exhibition, in an imposing metal frame, is a giant collage of pressed rose petals—the rose apparently being Iraq's national flower. (But what does that really mean, in any case, for a flower to be nationalized?)

In Dossar's work, any diasporic nostalgia has been firmly pressed out of these petals: they are desiccated and pinned like butterfly wings, with two circular aluminum bosses in the center. These bosses ape the pins and, from a distance, turn the whole field of petals into a single iconic rose petal pinned against the frame. This exaggerated quality, together with the lepidopterist aesthetic and the aluminum frame's MacBook-like finish, give the work the vibe of a deadly commodity—or even (to speak in the work's own exaggerated tones) of commodified death. (Maybe every nation, in its distilled symbolic form, is really a form of monster, or a corpse?)

One of Kamil Dossar's previous works, *Insert Song* (2023), presents a kind of anthropology of hypertrophic love: a 1960s soul song visibly mimed by a singer in all-white; a CGI anime couple from a video game courting; heart-shaped balloons; a real-life couple kissing in an idyll, the sounds of their kisses treated with folky effect to sound like they are devouring each other. The overall effect is both swooning and cold-eyed, as if the work wants to vouch for the possibility of love, while only being able to offer a catalogue of its most commodified commonplaces—what Dossar has called elsewhere a consensus of abstractions.

The works at Overgaden seem to spill out of a similar ambivalence. Dossar is interested in a strangeness which he recognizes is ultimately his own. The "monsters" on display, at the piano or in the streets of Baghdad, are clearly anything but. They are bewildering readymades borrowed from the collective imaginary, visible indexes for a feeling of intimate and embodied estrangement.

Their conspicuous overfamiliarity as figures which would otherwise—like a deep-sea creature which can never be brought to the surface—remain strictly inconceivable.

The Hands of Orlac was based on a serialized French novel, *Les Mains d'Orlac* (1920) by Maurice Renard, which was adapted several times for the screen. At almost exactly the same time—and almost certainly without knowing of Renard's work—the Soviet writer Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky had written a short story with an analogous theme, "'The Runaway Fingers'" (1922). In Krzhizhanovsky's version, however, it is the fingers which are the protagonist, not the pianist. In the middle of a concert, they make a break for it:

The pianist's right hand made to pull back, to the middle register, but its galloping fingers refused—on they flew at breakneck speed... With a desperate tug the fingers suddenly wrenchched themselves free, hand and all, from the pianist's cuff and jumped—diamond ring on the little finger glinting—down onto the floor.⁶

Krzhizhanovsky's story predates Disney, but his truant fingers have a distinctly cartoonish quality, as they mince and scamper across the city, until they finally return and jump back into the pianist's cuff. The drawings of hands in Dossar's show also feel oddly cartoonish. Featureless and glove-like, and appearing as they do on overlaid transparencies, they resemble animation cells—abstracted out-takes from *Casper the Friendly Ghost*. Separated from their owners, these hands might be conjuring, or gesturing, or proffering—or scampering across (or away from) a piano keyboard. They remain, however, resolutely uncut. Perhaps it is the bunting of pointy teeth they seem to hold between them in one of the images, or the ripped, dark background with which they share their hermetic Perspex frame in another. Somehow the violence of their brute iconicity, together with their dismemberment and reproduction, makes them oddly threatening. What consensus lurks in these particular abstractions?

One likely cause for the proliferation of stories about severed hands in the 1920s was the experience of War. The fantasy of transplantation was always, in reality, a horror story about irredeemable loss. In Krzhizhanovsky's story, the pianist regains his fingers but, like Orlac's, their musical virtuosity is lost, replaced by some otherworldly quality:

The pianist played differently somehow: Gone were the dazzling passages, the lightning glissandos

6. Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky, "'The Runaway Fingers'" [1922], in *Autobiography of a Corpse*, collection, translated by Joanne Trumbull (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2013), pp.117–18.



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It is a great pleasure to introduce this publication, published on the occasion of Kamil Dossar's solo exhibition, *Fahrenheit*, at O—Overgaden. The exhibition is the culmination of our INTRO program, a one-year postgraduate program offered annually to two artists. With the generous support of the Aage and Johanne Louis-Hansens Foundation, INTRO creates a unique opportunity to develop and expand our collaboration with the newest voices in the Danish art scene through a major exhibition and ambitious publication, through which we aim to extend the conversations around the artistic practice and open up space for new material to emerge.

In this particular case, writer, curator, and professor at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm Natasha Marie Llorens has contributed an essay that interweaves perspectives on monstrosity, Orientalism, science fiction, and Dossar's own biography, while Mike Sperling, writer, curator, and professor at the Art Academy in Oslo, has written a text diving into the themes in Dossar's works. Finally, the publication includes a series of associative notes by Kamil Dossar, gleaned from conversations he shared with artist Ed Atkins during the process of creating *Fahrenheit*. A warm thank you to all contributors. I also wish to thank our publications editor Nanna Friis and the whole team at O—Overgaden for their efforts in realizing this project, as well as the graphic design team at fanfare for their always dedicated work, and of course not least the artist, Kamil Dossar, for generously sharing conceptualizations and co-thinking with all of us, through both the exhibition and the making of this very publication.

Kamil Dossar's artistic output—films, paintings, and collages—builds chains of association often employing pop cultural references, animation, and avatars to ponder systemic images of migration, state craft, and outcast, invisible identities.

For his first large-scale solo show, Dossar has created a suite of new works toying with Western cultural codes—not unlike the *Fahrenheit* measuring scale or the mathematical order of Johann Sebastian Bach's classical compositions—and their potential alienating effects.

Entering the exhibition, a tiny screen plays a recent recording of a Bach piano concert. Creating a custom-designed script using "deep fake" AI technology, the musician is turned reptile—a generic rendering of a monster. The twisted, monstrous visuals of the piano recording hint at how classical music, despite its apparent benevolence, as a core pillar in Western culture is also part of a history that throws long shadows of colonial oppression and demands for assimilation. During his Danish upbringing, Dossar watched his late father, a political refugee from Iraq, studying Bach in his futile efforts to find solace in Europe.

Following Bach's music into the second space, the piece's counterpart, a large-scale projection, shows post-war Iraq cityscapes filmed by the artist—including images of a café where lights oscillate due to occasional power outages—as if constructing an arena for the concert. Just like the pianist, the locals in these scenes are transformed into reptilian creatures. Thus Dossar accelerates the very mechanism of collective, paranoid "othering"—pushing the image of monstrosity so far that it begins to undermine itself. We watch the reptilians' gentle, human movements in the heart of everyday life, overwriting their immediate appearance. A reptilian waiter passes by, her hand sliding in a seamless gesture, carefree.

Rhea Dall,
Director and Chief Curator, O—Overgaden,
December 2025

INTRODUCTION

