



ihsan saad
ihsan tahir

TH8 BJIBK

OOOOO
RGADEN

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O – OVERGADEN
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INTRODUKTION

Det er en stor fornøjelse at introducere denne publikation, der udkommer i forbindelse med ihsan saad ihsan tahir's soloudstilling *THS BJIBK* på O – Overgaden. Over de seneste år har O – Overgaden med generøs støtte fra Augustinus Fonden produceret en publikationsrække, der udgives i forbindelse med kunsthallens soloudstillinger. Målsætningen med denne serie er at mangfoldiggøre samtalerne under og efter udstillingerne og åbne op for, at nyt materiale kan udspringe heraf.

I dette tilfælde har forfatter Deniz Kiy, kurator og skribent Mariam Elnozahy og ikke mindst rapper Sivas alle bidraget generøst – en stor og varm tak til alle tre. Derudover vil jeg gerne takke hele O – Overgadens team for den store indsats i forbindelse med udstillingen, og naturligvis også fanfare, vores grafiske designere, for deres dedikerede arbejde på denne publikation. Sidst, men ikke mindst, en særlig tak til ihsan for at dele sit materiale – fra koncept til udvidede samtaler – med os alle sammen, både gennem udstillingen og denne publikation.

Hænder, gestik, positurer. I sin udstilling på O – Overgaden tager ihsan saad ihsan tahir afsæt i, hvordan fremstillinger af arabiske kroppe kontinuerligt er blevet frygtet og begæret, approprieret og udnyttet – ikke ulig kunstværker eller kulturelle genstande – idet han gentager historiske skulpturformater i nutidige, industrielle materialer.

Udstillingens titel, *THS BJIBK*, er arabizi for udtrykket “trust your pockets”. Arabizi er et uformelt skriftsprog, der blev opfundet for at omgå tidlige mobiltelefoners mangel på arabiske tegn, og som stadig anvendes bredt i popkulturen, blandt andet i sangtitler. Samtidig er arabizi dialektspecifikt, så der findes ingen officielt styrende regler: Det er gadekulturens eget, levende sprog. Titlen peger således tilbage på spørgsmålet om, hvordan arabisk kultur kan skabe sin egen plads i en vestligt domineret verden – og hvilke regler, oversættelser og tegn dette afføder. Som udtryk betyder “trust your pockets” ret ligeud “stol på det, du har i lommen”, hvilket i overført betydning kan oversættes til “stol på din mønt” eller “stol på din egen værdi”. Dette åbner for en diskussion om

værdisætning og ejerskab: Hvilke kroppe og positurer afbildes på fortidens såvel som nutidens friser?

Et centralt værk på O – Overgaden er en rekonstruktion af Farao Amenhotep III's kolossale granitarm med knyttet næve, skabt i flamingo og jesmonite – en skulptur, som i sin tid blev plyndret og i dag er i samlingen på The British Museum. tahir har tilføjet en *manus fica*, en historisk gestus, hvor tommelfingeren presses mellem pege- og langfinger. Håndtegnet har mange betydninger: Historisk har det i Middelhavsområdet været brugt til at afværge det onde øjne og andre forbandelser, og i dagens Danmark bruges det hos børnefamilier til at vise, at “jeg stjæler din næse”. Samtidig anvendes håndtegnet som en grov fornærmelse i gadekulturen, og her i værket viser det et oprør mod en undertrykkende overmagt – en modstand mod kolonihærdømmets tyveri, der peger direkte ind i den aktuelle diskussion om historiske kunstværkers og kulturgenstandes nationale tilhørsforhold og repatrieringen af samme.

Ved siden af denne skulptur tager en række nye relieffer på forskellig vis udgangspunkt i kunstnerens egne rødder. På den ene side refererer værkerne formelt set til de assyriske friser fra det nordlige Irak. På den anden side består relieffernes afbildninger af en kombination af tahir's private fotoarkiv – en gruppe af hans mandlige familiemedlemmer, en selfie, et favntag mellem far og bror – og fundne billeder af arabiske mænd, herunder blandt andet en gangsterlignende positur foran en bil såvel som en større frise, hvor det er uklart, om panelets figurer fester eller slås.

På linje med Faraoens knyttede næve er hænder, der gestikulerer, beder, holder en telefon eller kærtegner, et dominerende motiv. Reliefferne er udskåret i polyuretanskum og har en overflade, der imiterer sandsten. De lyse og bløde, næsten forsvindende konturer kræver en intim, nærgående betragtning, der hjælper til at destabilisere en stereotyp forestilling om den arabiske mandekrop som krigerisk eller aggressiv, og samtidig peger på en anden, blød maskulinitet præget af gensidighed og omsorg.

Rhea Dall
Leder og chefkurator på O – Overgaden,
marts 2026

GUDERNE FORLADER ANTONIUS

Mariam Elnozahy

Til ihсан: Jeg skriver fra Texas til Alexandria, hvilket er lidt som at skrive fra København til Bagdad eller Liverpool til Jerusalem eller Calgary til Karthago – det er for at sige, at når man taler fra vest til øst, taler man på tværs af årtusinder og gennem mytologier, og man taler hjertets sprog. Dette sprog er musik, der ekkoer gennem gestikulation, udelukkende aflæseligt for dem, der forstår, hvad det vil sige at komme fra en falden civilisation. Det er dem, der ved, hvordan man genopbygger verden med sine hænder.

Mange af dem, der dedikerer deres liv til kulturproduktion, er – måske i et afgørende øjeblik, måske helt flygtigt – stødt på Vestens antikke kunst og litteratur, det vil sige den græske eller romerske oldtid. Hvorfor er det, at klassicismens spor – disse troper og motiver, der består længe efter rigernes fald – stadig fylder så meget på vores museer, i vores bøger og pensumlister efter alle disse år? Denne civilisation er i manges øjne et fundament for “Vesten” som vi forstår den i dag. Et fundament for den vestlige nationalstat – fra freden i Westphalen til Weimarrepublikken – med sine idealer om orden, etik, rationalitet, jura, byer, borgerskab og repræsentativt demokrati. Ontologisk står den næsten altid i kontrast til det irrationelle, barbariske, primitive Østen, en sammenstilling, der muliggjorde Vesteuropas koloniseringsprojekt, retfærdiggjorde de “civiliserende missioner” på diverse forposter verden over. Selv i dag trækker vestlige magthavere på den klassiske arv for at legitimere deres dominans, fremstiller sig selv som fornuftens, ordenens og fremskridtets arvtagere.¹ Således allestedsnærværelsen af museer, som er stopfyldt

1. Se den omfattende diskussion mellem Huntington og Said: Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22–49; Edward W. Said, “The Clash of Ignorance,” *The Nation*, 22. oktober, 2001; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

med klassiske friser og moderne filmhyldester til Homer (Christopher Nolans *Odysseen* kommer snart). Men hvad hvis vi opfattede Rom som et billede på det moderne, vestlige rige (læs: Euro-Nordamerikanske rige) gennem dets besejring og netop ikke dets sejr? Gennem dets svagheder, ikke dets overlegenhed? Måske vi så bedre vil kunne forstå, hvad det vil sige at bevidne en civilisations fald.

Plutarchs bog om Antonius den Store optrevler Marcus Antonius’ nederlag og Romerrigets endeligt. Antonius, denne romerske konsul og general, der herskede over rigets østlige provinser fra 45-30 f.Kr., var en berygtet hedonistisk, men dedikeret soldat, hvis uregerlige kærlighedsaffære med Egyptens dronning Cleopatra fremskyndede hans nederlag til Octavian (den kommende kejser Augustus) i den sidste af de borgerkrige, der knuste den romerske republik.² Plutarch tilskrev Antonius’ undergang, at han netop tilegnede sig “østlige” vaner: Hans liderlighed var opstået i Irak under de parthiske felttog, og hans korrumperede ødselhed og uorden var konsekvensen af ophold i Libyen eller Alexandria. Hans besejring er karakteriseret ved netop opgivelsen af romersk disciplin og borgerdyd til fordel for østlig dovenskab og passion.

Det ironiske er, naturligvis, at Antonius blev besejret ikke bare af sit eget folk, men også af Det Parthiske Rige, Roms vedvarende rival mod øst. Det Parthiske Rige strakte sig fra midten af det 3. århundrede f., Kr. til begyndelsen af det 3. århundrede e., Kr. og omfattede et enormt stykke land fra Tigris og Eufrat – fra Mesopotamien og Iran – til dele af Centralasien. Med hovedstad i Ctesiphon, omkring 35 kilometer øst for nutidens Bagdad, blomstrede riget som knudepunkt for handel, kunst, arkitektur og rituelle traditioner, der godt kunne rumme en pluralisme af indflydelser – fra hellenismen til zoroastrismen og videre endnu.³ Plutarch beskriver Antonius’ parthiske felttog som en katastrofal fiasko, hvor de romerske tropper blev udslettet, langt overgået af partherne, der både var en militær overmagt og en bedre strategisk modstander.

Antonius’ mangefacetterede nederlag er patetisk og ubetydeligt. Der er ikke meget at sørge over ved en civilisation, der – rig på kavaleri og terræn – fældes på sin egen hybris. Efter sit nederlag til partherne og inden sit nederlag til Octavian er Antonius deprimeret og “spøgelsesagtig”, han har intet at leve for. Da han får samlet kræfter til at lave sine sidste ryk for at vinde en smule værdighed i den kamp mod Octavian, han allerede ved, at han vil tabe, sørger han for at igangsætte felttoget med et kæmpemæssigt og korrumpert festmåltid. Alle, der deltager, ved godt, at de går deres egen død i møde, og de drikker derefter. Den nat, mellem de sidste salutter inden det

2. Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, in *Parallel Lives*, overs. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1920), bk. Antony, sec. 1.

3. For mere læsestof om Det Persiske Rige se: Uwe Ellerbrock, *The Parthians: The Forgotten Empire* (London: Routledge, 2021).

ultimative nederlag, skriver Plutarch om et varsel, der udfolder sig i baggrunden af Antonius’ afskedsfest. Det er et varsel i form af skøn musik i det fjerne, der lyder gennem byen omkring midnat. Melodien identificeres som noget, der akkompagnerer et dionysisk optog. Lyden er fjern og drømmagtig, den kommer fra en procession, der bevæger sig væk fra festlighederne i centrum og i retning mod Octavians lejr i udkanten af byen, inden den helt hører op og overlader natten til stilheden. Det siges, at processionen var Dionysos selv, den gud, som Antonius havde viet sit liv til, som nu forlod ham og marcherede ud i det fjerne, væk fra byen.

Hvilken musik spiller, når en civilisation falder?

I 1911 skrev den egyptisk-franske digter Konstantinos Kavafis (1863-1933) om Antonius’ nederlag i digtet *At guden forlader Antonius*. Kavafis blev født i Alexandria og døde i Alexandria, men boede derimellem i Liverpool, London og det daværende Konstantinopel og arbejdede som embedsmand for den britiske regering. Selvom han er en af Alexandrias største digtere – en usædvanlig anerkendelse for et moderne menneske i en af verdens ældste byer – skriver han ofte om “byen” på meget overdrevne måder. Byen er næsten altid Alexandria, men kan også være Liverpool, hvor han tilbragte en formativ del af sin barndom, eller Ithaka, Odysseus’ hjem i Homers *Odysseen* og en oldgræsk hovedstad, der senere blev besat af Romerriget og Det Byzantinske Rige. Han skriver på moderne græsk, og hans poesi er distinkt og tilgængelig, en fængslende skrift, der beskæftiger sig med længsel, hjertesorg, civilisationer, byer, menneskelig lidelse. I “The City” (1894) skriver han:

“You won’t find a new country, won’t find another shore. This city will always pursue you.”

Og i “Ithaka” (1911) skriver han:

“Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey. Without her you wouldn’t have set out. She has nothing left to give you now. And if you find her poor, Ithaka won’t have fooled you. Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, you’ll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.”

På samme måde handler *At guden forlader Antonius* lige så meget om en moderne by, som den handler om romersk nederlag. Kavafis bevidnede Alexandrias sidste dage inden Egyptens uafhængighed og nationalisering. Allerede i hans egen levetid var det Alexandria han boede i, ved at være et overstået kapitel, spoleret af den modernisering, der var i gang med at transformere den ældgamle by. Sociale og kulturelle homogeniseringer af Alexandria og Egypten var et nederlag, der blev overskygget af den spirende republiks sejr efter årtiers undertrykkende kolonimagt. I løbet af få år blev den polyglotte by med sin græske og italienske dominans påtvunget det langt mere fremherskende arabiske sprog. Med hvert nederlag følger en sejr: Arabisk over græsk, Øst over Vest, parthisk over romersk, Cleopatra over Antonius

“When suddenly, at midnight, you hear an invisible procession going by with exquisite music, voices, don’t mourn your luck that’s failing now, work gone wrong, your plans all proving deceptive—don’t mourn them uselessly. As one long prepared, and graced with courage, say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving. Above all, don’t fool yourself, don’t say it was a dream, your ears deceived you: don’t degrade yourself with empty hopes like these. As one long prepared, and graced with courage, as is right for you who proved worthy of this kind of city, go firmly to the window and listen with deep emotion, but not with the whining, the pleas of a coward: listen—your final delectation—to the voices, to the exquisite music of that strange procession, and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing.”

Kavafis’ digt er en slags universalisering af det, som Plutarch også noterer sig: at civilisationers ånd er det første, der falder. Den sære midnatsmusik – det dionysiske optog, der forlader byen – er en vuggevis, lige så meget som det er en advarsel. Kavafis kalder på Antonius – den patetiske, drengede, fortabte søn – for at få ham til at lytte godt efter musikken og acceptere den. Acceptere nederlaget.

Nederlagets musik, som den beskrives hos Plutarch, er altså en tilbagevendende historisk lyd hos Kavafis. Mange komponister har forsøgt at animere den⁴ (hvilken musik spiller, når en civilisation falder?), og hvert bud er lige smerteligt og subliment. Larry McMurtry hører også musikken i *In the Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas* (1968), hvor en sørgmodig texansk folkevis om cowboylivet føles som et ekko af Antonius’ aften ved det fornævnte vindue i Alexandria. Han skriver: “It’s a slight song, but for the Texas writer, an inescapable subject. When I think about the passing of the cowboy, my mind inappropriately hangs on the poem of Cavafy’s, from the scene in Shakespeare, from the sentence of Plutarch’s: the poem in which the god abandons Antony.”⁵ Larry McNurtry er en prisvindende forfatter fra Texas, han skrev manuskriptet til *Brokeback Mountain* og fik dermed bragt Americana ind i det 20. århundrede på en måde, kun en cowboy ville kunne: fra nederlagets og udskejelsernes perspektiv. For ham repræsenterer cowboyen en livsstil, der er ved at forsvinde, en falmende amerikansk myte om frihed og mod, der maskerer en kulturel tomhed og et tab af historie. Han graver sig igennem forskellige cowboy-figurer fra Westerntraditionen og påpeger, den uundgåelige udhulning af et symbol, der er kalket til i fortiden. Cowboyen er et tomt billede på sejr: en mand

4. Et eksempel er en kantate komponeret af Nicolas Roussakis: [youtube.com/watch?v=oLhsQjgmm2k&t=376s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLhsQjgmm2k&t=376s), et andet er George Dalaras: [youtube.com/watch?v=-vRjgW52mYY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vRjgW52mYY).

5. Larry McMurtry, *In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

på en hest, der rider ud i horisonten i et rige, der allerede er faldet. Hverken McMurtry eller jeg selv er interesserede i at sørge over cowboyn. Hans fald er derimod et tegn på den kosmiske frelse for al den uret, der er blevet begået ved hans hånd. Men når han portrætteres som en enkelt, ensom figur, der vader ud i intetheden, mens bilerne drøner forbi, er det svært ikke at mærke et stik af tab.

Som det 20. århundrede skrider frem, må ryttere på hesteryg overgive sig til ryttere på motorcykler; maskulinitetens ydergrænse baner vejen for dens moderne forskydninger. Ligesom Antonius besejres cowboyn ikke i kamp, historien opfatter ham derimod som ynkværdig. Fra Rom og Alexandria til Texas er lektien den samme: Når civilisationer knuses, er tabene i bund og grund svar på historiens tiltale. At holde godt fast i de jordiske rester er at brænde og blive brændt. Og stadig er det at slå på og modsætte sig nederlaget det samme som at udvide omfanget af de skader, der er sket i dets navn. Det er sandt, at civilisationer er allervoldeligst, når de er ved at kollapse. Hvis vi opfatter Romerriget og dets sammenbrud som model for det vestlige herredømme, kan vi begynde at anerkende, at nederlagets sande tragedie er den manglende evne til at acceptere det, ydmygelsen i det uforbederlige narrativ: en ydmygelse, der oftest rammer stolte mænd.

Hvilken musik spiller, når en civilisation falder? Ingen musik er sødere i ørerne end lyden af den vuggevise-advarselssang, der lyder, før en ny dag gryr. At lytte, virkelig at høre efter, føles som den sande sejr.

VIDNETS VIDNE

Deniz Kiy

Langs muren, der omkranser den sænkede Blågårds Plads, står 22 granitfigurer, der alle repræsenterer Nørrebros arbejderhistorie. Fiskerkonen, Brolæggeren, Grønhandleren. Imellem statuerne slænger københavnerne sig. Lyden af ølkapsler, der skraber igennem parkgruset. Børnene langs muren hvirvler støv op i skyer, som de selv gennembyder med hævede legetøjsgeværer og smældende klipklapper i løb. De skyder sig igennem en scene, ordene flyger ud i salver, skuddene formes bag fortænderne. En bil glider nænsomt forbi, bred og skinnende. Den spejler pladsens almene lejligheder, og bibliotekets facade flyder ind i sommerhimlen. Solen er hvidglødende. Nu vrider de gadevendte caféer og granitkroppene sig i bildørene som olie i en varm gryde. Luften er kvalmende, tæt og ikke til at undslippe, som under en langærmet bomuldsskjorte i Ankaras sommerhede, *det var da utroligt*. Jeg sidder på bænkene under træerne, og i den fjerne ende, tæt på legepladsen og småstenene, sidder mødrene under en Real Madrid-heliumballon som bundet fast svæver over barnevognen.

Men det er først, da indsatsstyrken pludselig står i fuld armering, gevær, skudsikker vest og hjelm med sigte mod børnene, at jeg blev vidnets vidne; da børnene løb tilbage til deres mødre i omfavnelser beskyttelse, fortrak indsatsstyrken uden et ord, som om volden aldrig havde været her.

Over landevejsbroen, i et sving rundt om bakken, og ind på en skovvej imellem fyrretræer. En tiltagende uro gryer imellem os og bryder ud, da én tager sig til ansigtet og græder. Endelig standser bilen. Sneen ligger i dyner parallelt med skinnerne. Vi bliver stående stille, indtil luften rejser sig, parate til at løbe efter toget, der buldrer i det fjerne – og så – i et smæld igennem kroppen, er toget allerede passeret. Når man fra det ene øjeblik til det andet går fra at være seks til fem i gruppen, og denne sjettede har afgivet hylsteret, ændret form og glider rundt i en ikke-tilstand imellem de resterende fem, er stilheden en dirrende fornemmelse på vrangen af skindet – når én bryder ud i gråd, trækkes luften ud af de andre, og sorgen bliver symbiotisk, uden at man forstår, hvem symbiosen er til fordel for. Mest af alt er der det dirrende, mest af alt er der lugten af død, der klæber sig til fingerspidserne.

Rummet er aflangt, det er pacificerende lyseblåt med bænken op ad væggen, madrassen og det tilstødende toilet med spejlene. De indridsede postnumre. Et lille træk omkring væggen. Senere kørte de os til togstationen. Hun var helt mørbanket, men ligesom jeg totalt accepterende overfor hændelsen og det faktum,

at vi sad bag i en politibil, eskorteret til stationen med en jokende tone imellem os, for hvad mere skulle vi kunne miste. *Du risikerer, at vi også stopper dig, at du mister kørekortet, idet du kommer hænderne på rattet*, havde de sagt. Men vi havde brug for vores bil. Tarotkortene, som blev lagt over madbakken på McDonald's stenbord, fortalte os, at vi skulle følge linjen ud, og det gjorde vi. Fik taxachaufføren til at køre os tilbage. I mørket travede vi op ad bakken, igennem gitterporten og op til pladsen, hvor bilen var parkeret. Jeg bakkede bilen ud, og en mørk, glidende kviksølvsskikkelse i periferien af mit syn fæstnede sig, blev til en bil og blå blink. Vi blev stoppet igen.

Alligevel lykkedes det. Det lykkedes at få lov at være et menneske igen i øjnene på indvandrerbetjenten. Jeg tror, vi udvekslede et blik. Om vi gjorde det eller ej, er lige meget. Min formodning om, at han ville behandle os bedre end sine kollegaer, viste sig at være sand.

Jeg ved snart ikke, hvor mange gange jeg har forsøgt mig med at beskrive det. Først ønskede jeg at skildre det som et rum imellem rum. Jeg kaldte det oversættelsens rum – en korridor, som forbindelsesleddet mellem dørene. Et mellemrum, hvor informationer veksles fra snart det ene til det andet sprog og tilbage igen. Men beskrivelsen var ikke fyldestgørende. Jeg slettede sætningerne, billederne, og tilbage stod jeg med et tomt ark. Derefter forsøgte jeg at beskrive, hvordan rummet, mellemrummet, som en ballon, udvider sig, som om det pustes op af slipstrømmen af en nutid, der hvirvler som en storm bag væggene. Jeg forsøgte at beskrive, hvordan skriften er på hælene af nuet, rækker ud for at indfange det, blot for, som en anden Midas, at måtte sande, at nuet allerede er passeret, og det, der er tilbage, allerede er dødt, ikke-levende, som et guldæg, der ikke lader sig knække. Jeg ved snart ikke. Min lænd gør ondt af at sidde med hovedet i metafysikken. Jeg er træt. Det burde være nemt at beskrive rummet, jeg har trods alt været her, siden bevidstheden tegnede væggene op omkring mig. Det er mange år siden. Det handler vel om blikket, om sproget, sprogene, en mor, der skal ledes igennem statens it-løsninger, og en far, som i et øjebliks udbrud af uret og misforståelser løber ind på banen for at holde om sit barns ankel, der er blevet savet midt over i en kamp, hvor forældre råber de grimme ting til de fremmedes børn. Det handler om tilhør. Det handler om afstand. Det handler om at lægge hånden på hans skuldre og lade sig bære væk, blive sat ind i bilen og kørt hjem og ind i det rum, som jeg forsøger at beskrive. Jeg klapper skærmen i, føler mig underligt til mode. Går i køkkenet, ser en sølvfisk flygte ind under gulvlisten. Jeg sætter kaffen over. Rydder op efter morgenrutinen. Havregrød. Plastikkoppen. Lægger børnebøger på plads. På altanen med kaffen, fjerde sal, spejde ned mod bagtrappedørene, i stilhed observere, hvem der går ind og ud. Jeg plejede altid at sætte mig bagerst i bussen – gøre det samme, som jeg gør nu – spejde, anskue, forstå, knytte koordinaterne sammen – og i en flygtig spejling fra ruden se de to brune øjne glide igennem byens rum.

NEDERLAG & TRIUMFER

Sivas Torbati

Da jeg var barn og jeg farede vild i junglen troede jeg at mit liv var ovre,

Strejfede rundt og fandt oasen så jeg genfandt håbet

Se hvor skrøbelig virkeligheden kan være for børn og yngre, og hvor nemt deres tanker egentlig fører dem ned i dybet

De her dage især, hvor ungdommen er blevet produkter

De her dage hvor vi kun reklamerer med vores triumfer

Hva med de nederlag der gjorde dig til den de beundrer

Har du glemt de dage, de timer vi har brugt i bunkeren

I har glemt jer selv og hvor i startede hele bundtet

For nogle blodige diamanter og nogle fucking bundter

Jeg er Mike Tyson da han bed Holyfields ører I stumper,

For de prøver at nikke mig skaller men jeg bukker aldrig under,

Mohammed Ali nede i junglen mens min mave den rumler.

Michael Jordan, imod målet så længe hjertet dunker.

Jeg lærer mine yngre at de ska fiske mens I spiser hummer.

Der er ingen summer, der tilfredsstiller min evige hunger.

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

ihsan saad ihsan tahir
THE BJIBK
Udstillingsperiode: 21.02.2026 – 03.05.2026

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Redaktør: Nanna Friis
Tekst: Rhea Dall, Mariam Elnozahy,
Deniz Kiy, Sivas Torbati
Oversættelse: Nanna Friis
Korrektur: Sofie Vestergaard Jørgensen
Foto: David Stjernholm

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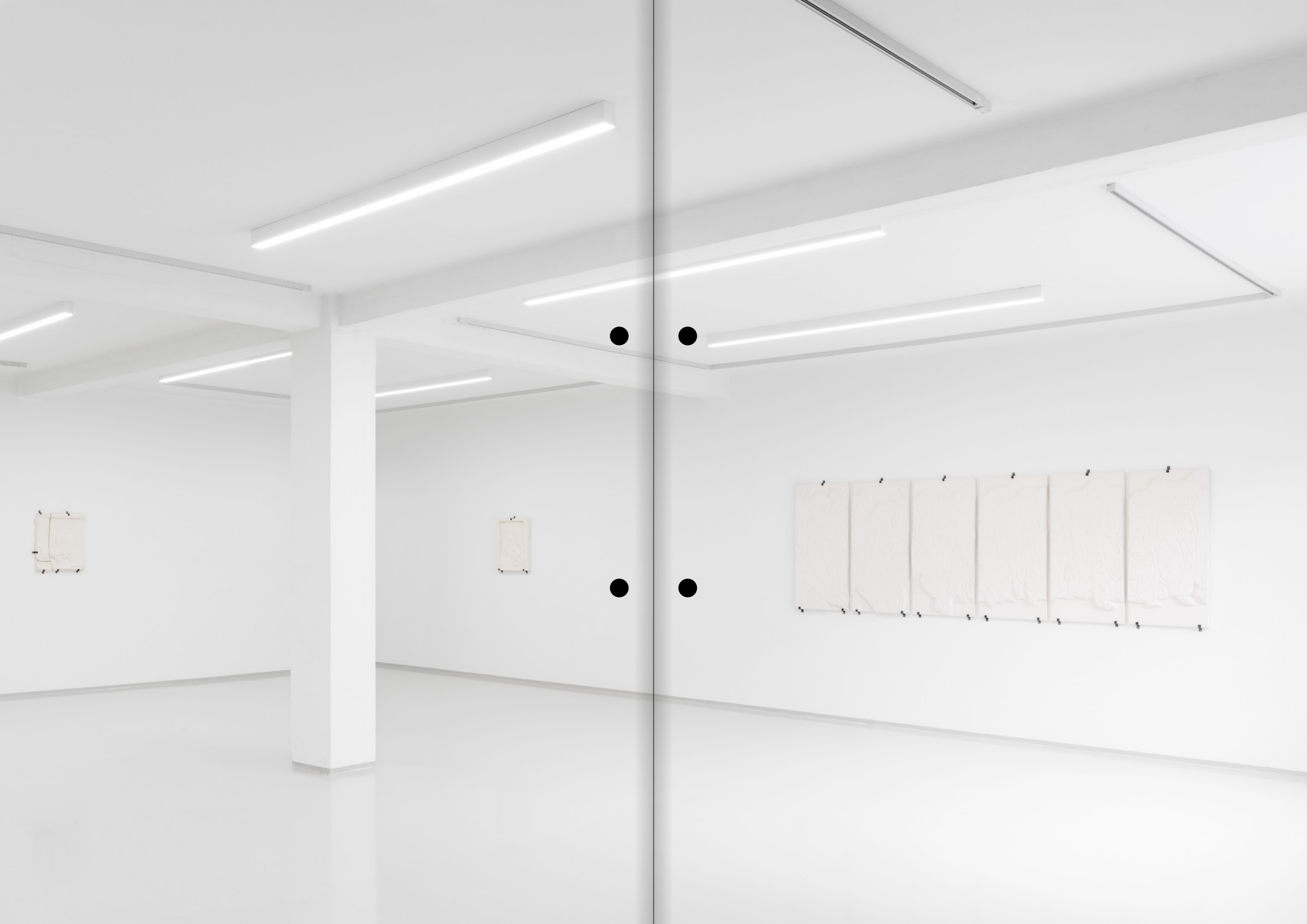
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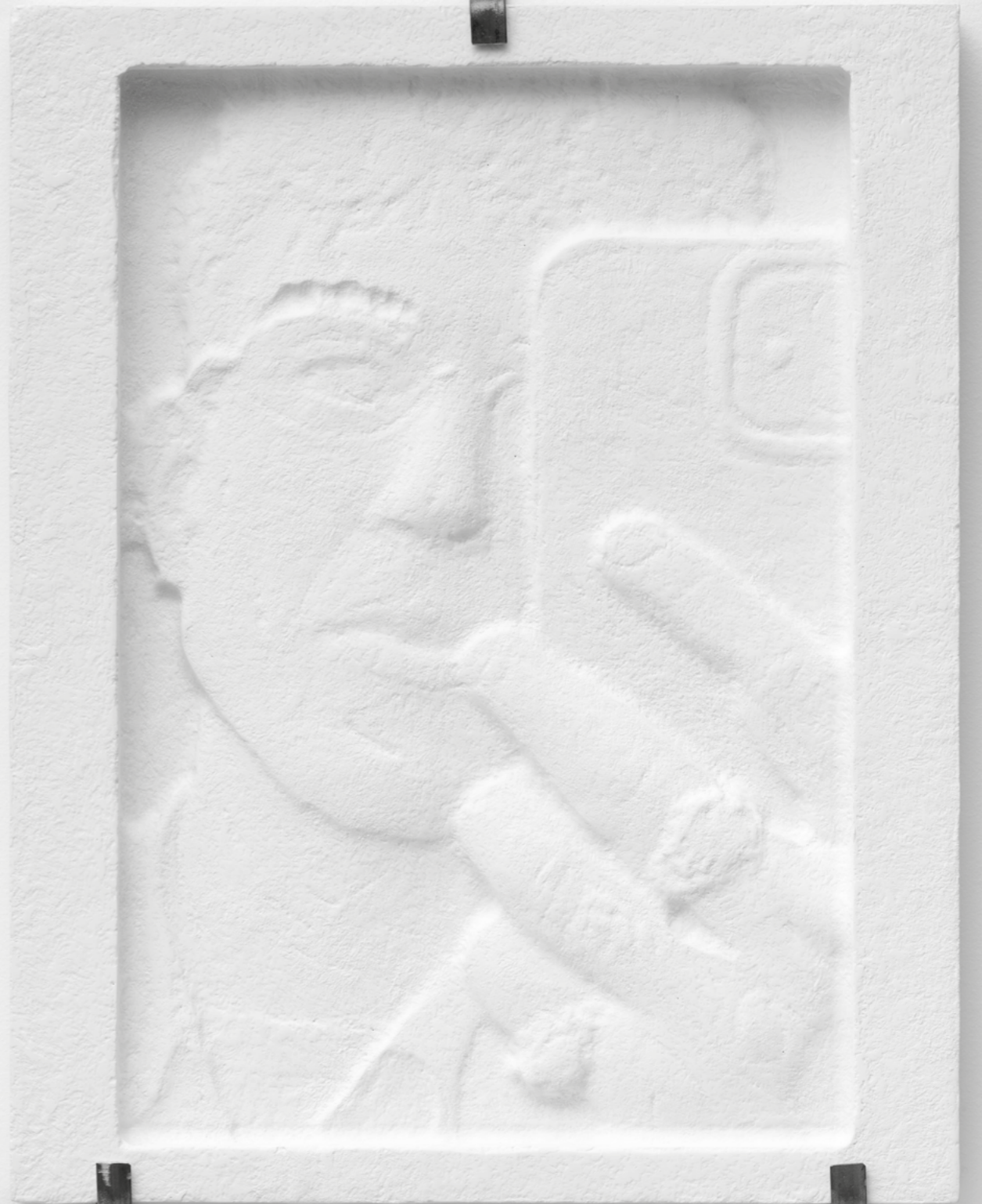
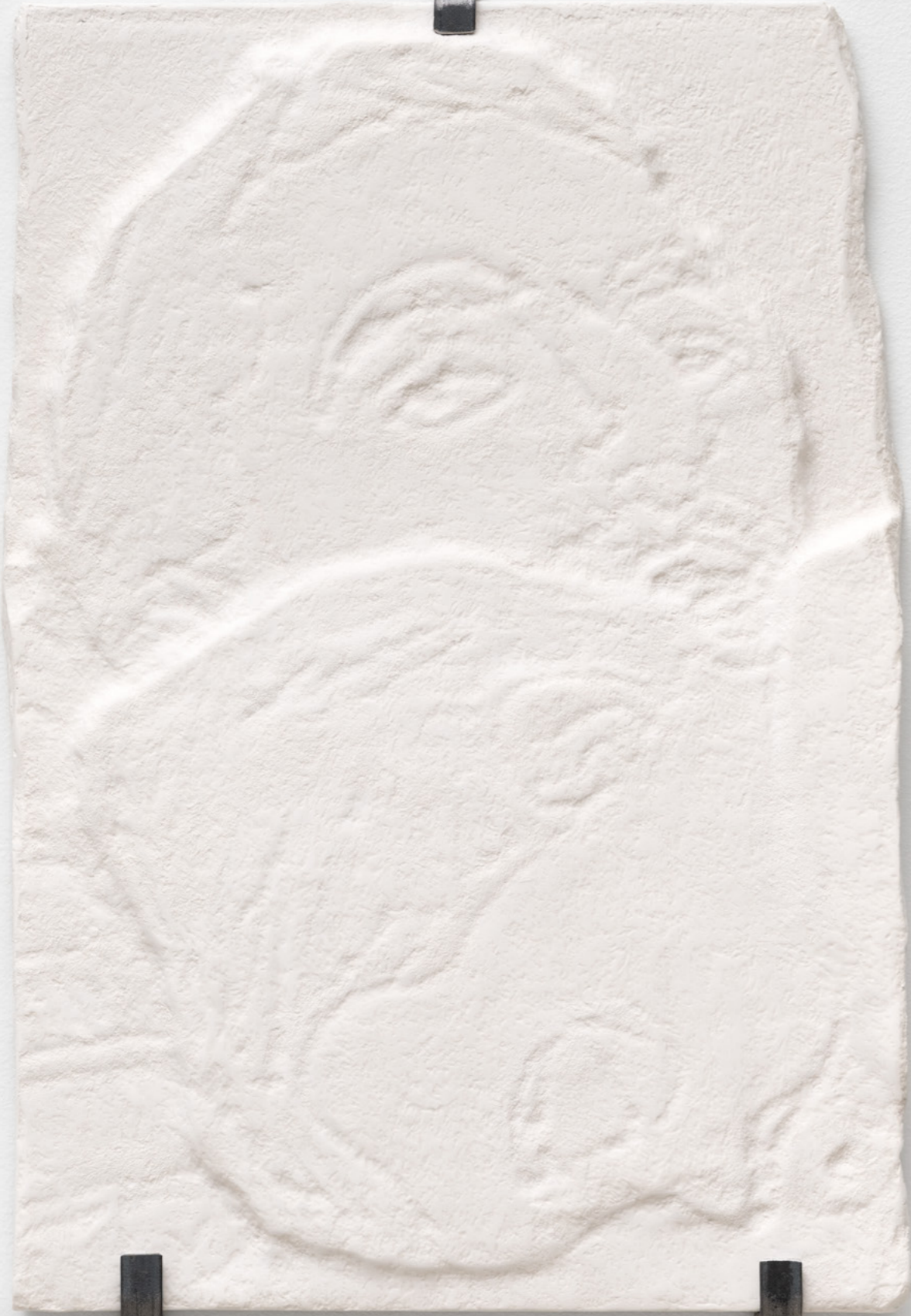
















DEFEATS & TRIUMPHS

Sivas Torbati

As a kid, when I got lost in the jungle I thought my life was over;

Roaming around, I found the oasis and so I retrieved the hope.

See how fragile reality can be for the kids and for the young, and how easy their thoughts really bring them down,

Especially these days, where youth has turned into products;

These days where we promote our triumphs only.

What about the decays that made you the one they admire?

Did you forget the days, the hours we spent in the bunker?

All of you, you forgot yourself and where you started, just for some bloody diamonds and some fucking wads.

I'm Mike Tyson when he tore Holyfield's ear to bits, Cause they try to head-but me but I never give in; Mohammed Ali in the jungle while my stomach churns,

Michael Jordan jumping at the rim as long as the heart dunks.

I teach my young to fish while you're eating lobster. There is no summer that will satisfy my endless hunger.

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ihсан saad ihсан tahir
TH8 BJIBK
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ihسان saad ihسان tahir (b. 1995, UK/DK) graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (2025) and Goldsmiths University of London (2025), and lives and works in Copenhagen. Tahir has previously exhibited at institutions including Kunsthal Kongeaaarden, Korsør (2026); SKAL Contemporary, Skagen (2025); Vitrine, Lausanne (2024); Kunsthal Aarhus (2023; 2024); Collega, Copenhagen (2024); and All All All, Copenhagen (2023).

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Deniz Kiyi, Sivas Torbati
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As the 20th century progresses, riders on horses yield to modern displacement. Like Antony, the cowboy is not defeated in battle but rendered pitiful by history. Across Rome, Alexandria, and Texas, the lesson remains the same: when civilizations are defeated, the losses incurred are merely the indictments of history. To hold onto the remains tightly is to blister and burn. Even still, to thrash and resist defeat is to widen the radius of the harm suffered in its name. It is true that civilizations are most violent when they are collapsing. If we understand Rome as a model for modern Western empire through its fall, we can begin to recognize the true tragedy of defeat as the inability of acceptance, the indignity of an incorrigible narrative: an indignity which most often befalls proud men.

What is the music that plays when a civilization falls? There is no joy to the ears like the sound of a lullaby-alarm-song that precedes a new dawn. To listen, to really hear it, seems to be the true victory.

THE WITNESS'S WITNESS

Deniz Kiy

to the train station. She was acting but, like me, totally accepting of the incident and the fact that we were sat in the back of a police car, escorted to the station. There was a joking tone between us; what more did we have to lose? "As soon as you grab the wheel, you risk being pulled over, you risk losing your right to silence," they said. But we needed our car. The tarot cards, laid out across the tray on the McDonald's stone table, told us to follow the trail backwards, and so we did. We trotted up the hill in the dark, through the iron gate and up to where the car was parked. I backed it out and a dark, mercury-looking figure appeared in my peripheral vision, fastened, became a car and blue lights. We were stopped again, but we managed; managed to be a human again in the eyes of the immigrant cop. I think we exchanged a look. Whether we did so or not doesn't matter. My assumption that he'd treat us better than his colleagues turned out to be true.

I actually don't know how many times I tried to describe it. At first, I wanted to portray it as a space between spaces. I called it the space of translation: a corridor like the link between doors. A kind of in-between where information is exchanged from one language to the next and back again. But the descriptions weren't sufficient. I deleted the sentences, the images, and was left with a blank sheet. Afterwards, I tried to describe how the space, the in-between, expanded like a balloon, as if blown up in the wake of a present that whirls around like a storm behind the walls. I tried to describe how the writing exists at the heels of the present moment, reaches out to catch it only to, like Midas, face the fact that the moment has already passed and what remains is already dead, non-living, like a golden egg that doesn't break.

My lower back hurts from sitting with my head in the metaphysics. I'm tired. It should be easy to describe the space, after all I've been here since my conscience sketched up the walls around me. This was many years ago. It's probably a matter of gaze, of language, languages, of a mother who needs guidance through the state's IT-solutions and a father who, in a moment of injustice and misunderstanding runs onto the pitch to hold his child's ankle, as it's crushed in a game where bystanders shout the most horrid phrases at the foreigners' children. It is a matter of belonging. It is a matter of distance. It is a matter of laying a hand on his shoulders and allowing yourself to be carried away, of being placed in the car and driven home, into this space I'm trying to describe.

I'm shutting down my screen, in an odd mood. Walking into the kitchen, a silverfish disappears beneath the floorboard. I make coffee, tidy up the morning routine: oatmeal, plastic cup, put the children's books back in their place. At the balcony with the coffee, fourth floor, gaze towards the back stairs, silently observe who walks in and out. I always used to sit at the back of the bus, do what I do now—watch, view, understand, attach the coordinates—and in the ephemeral mirror of the window, I notice two brown eyes gliding through the cityscape.

Along the wall that encircles the sunken Blagards Square in Copenhagen stand 22 granite figures, all representing the neighborhood's working-class history. *The Fishwoman, The Paver, The Greenrover.* Among the statues, Copenhageners sprawl. The sound of beer caps scrapes through park grit. The kids whirl up dust clouds along the wall and then burst them apart with their toy guns raised and their flip-flops cracking. They shoot their way through a scene, words fired out in salvos, shots shaped behind their front teeth. A car sweeps gently by, wide and shiny, mirroring the square and its social housing units. The library's facade slides into the summer sky. The sun burns white. Now the streetside cars and granite bodies writhe across the car doors, shimmering like oil in a hot pan. The air is nauseating, dense, inescapable, reminding me of the air under a long-sleeved cotton shirt in Ankara's summer heat: *this is unbelievable.* I'm sitting at a bench below the trees. At the far end of the square, close to the playground and the gravel, mothers are sitting under a Real Madrid helium balloon, tied to a pram and hovering over it.

But it wasn't until the on-site forces suddenly appeared in full armor—weapons drawn, aiming at the kids—that I became the witness's witness. As the children ran back to their mothers' protective embrace, the forces retreated without a word, as if the violence had never been there. Across the bridge, around the hill and then on to the forest road among the pine trees. Increasingly, breaks out between us as someone buries their face in their hands and starts crying. The car finally stops. Snow piles up in duvet mounds along the tracks. We stay where we are, silent, until the air stiffens. We're ready to run for the train, and then, with a crack through the body, the train has already passed. When from one moment to the next, a group shrinks from six people into five and this sixth member has shed his holster, changed his shape, gliding around between the remaining five in a state of non-being, silence is a quivering sensation at the inside of the skin. When someone bursts into tears the air is drawn out of the others and grief becomes symbiotic without knowing who benefits from this symbiosis. Most of all there is this quivering; most of all the smell of death sticking to the fingertips.

The room is oblong. It's a pacifying shade of baby blue with a bench against the wall, a mattress, and an adjacent toilet with mirrors. The engraved postal codes. A slight draught around the wall. Later, they drove us

THE GOD ABANDONS ANTONY

Mariam Elmozahby

forthcoming). But what if we understood Rome as a model for modern Western empire (read: Euro-North-American Empire) through its defeat, not its victories? Through its weakness, not its prowess? Perhaps then we can understand what it means to bear witness to the fall of a civilization.

Plutarch's *Life of Antony* traces the defeat of Mark Antony and the end of the Roman Republic. Antony, a Roman consul and general who ruled over Rome's Eastern provinces from 43–30 BCE, was a famously hedonistic yet dedicated soldier, whose untruly love story with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, precipitated his defeat by Octavian (the future emperor Augustus) in the last of the civil wars that destroyed the Roman Republic.² Plutarch attributes Antony's fall to his adoption of "Eastern" ways: his lechery acquired from his time in Iraq during the Parthian campaigns, and his corrupting excess and disorder as things he picked up during his time in Libya or Alexandria. His defeat is characterized by the abandonment of Roman discipline and civic virtue in favor of Eastern indulgence and personal passion.

The irony, of course, is that Antony was defeated not only by his own kin, but also by the Parthian Empire, Rome's enduring eastern rival. The Parthian Empire spanned from the mid-3rd century BCE to the early 3rd century CE, and controlled a vast terrain stretching across the Tigris and Euphrates (from Mesopotamia and Iran) to parts of Central Asia. With its capital in Ctesiphon, about 55 kilometers east of modern Baghdad, the empire flourished as a hub for trade, art, and architecture, and ritual traditions that encompassed the plurality of influences, from Hellenistic to Zoroastrian and beyond.³ Plutarch describes Antony's Parthian campaign as a disastrous failure wherein the Roman troops were crushed, bested by a superior military power and more strategic opponent in the Parthians.

Antony's multipartite defeat is pathetic and unremarkable. There is little to mourn about a civilization that, rich in cavalry and expansive in terrain, falls ill to its own hubris. After his defeat to the Parthians, and before his defeat to Octavian, Antony is depressed and "ghost-like," with nothing to live for. When he musters up enough energy to offer his final jerks to redeem his dignity in a battle against Octavian that he knows he will lose, he makes sure to inaugurate the campaign with a massive debauchetous feast and party. Everyone in attendance knows they are marching towards their own death, and they drink accordingly. That night, amidst the final hoorah before the ultimate defeat, Plutarch writes about an omen that takes place in the backdrop of Antony's final festivities. This omen takes the form of a great

2. Plutarch, "Life of Antony," in *Parallel Lives*, translated by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1920), bk. Antony, sec. 1.

3. For more reading on the Parthian Empire, see Uwe Ellicbrock, *The Parthians: The Forgotten Empire* (London: Routledge, 2021).

To usan: I am writing from Texas to Alexandra, Baghdad, or Liverpool to Jerusalem, or Calgary to Carthage—which is to say that when you speak from West to East, you are speaking across millennia and through mythology, and you are speaking the language of the heart. This language is music echoed through gesticulation, intelligible only to those who understand what it is to come from fallen civilizations. They are the ones who know how to rebuild the world with their hands.

Many who have dedicated their lives to the production of culture have encountered—perhaps at a pivotal moment, perhaps in passing—the art and literature of Western antiquity, by way of ancient Rome or Greece. How is it that the *classical trace*, those tropes and motifs that remain after the passing of Greco-Roman civilization, remain so present in our museums, books, and curricula after thousands of years? This civilization, for many, is considered to be the bedrock of the "West" as it stands today. It serves as the foundation of the Western nation-state—from the Peace of Westphalia to the Weimar Republic—in its ideals of order, ethics, rationality, law, cities, citizenry, and representative democracy. Ontologically, it is almost always contrasted with the irrational, barbaric, or primitive East, a juxtapositional framing that enabled the colonial projects of Western Europe to justify their "civilizing missions" in various outposts across the world. Still today, Western powers use classical heritage to legitimize their dominance, presenting themselves as heirs to reason, order, and progress.¹ Hence the ubiquity of museums flanked with classical friezes and modern cinematic homages to Homer (Christophher Nolan's *The Odyssey*, Said; Samuel R. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.3 (Summer 1993): 22–49; Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," *The Nation*, 22 October 2001; Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

1. See the great debate between Samuel Huntington and Edward

music heard over the city from a distance that plays at midnight. The tune is identified as accompanying a Dionysian street parade. Distant and dream-like, the sounds come from a procession that moves away from the festivities in the city center and towards Octavian's camp on the margins of the city before disappearing entirely, surrendering the night to silence. It is said that this procession was the god Dionysus himself—the god that Antony had devoted his life to—abandoning him, marching off into the distance away from the city.

What is the music that plays when a civilization falls? In 1911, the Alexandrian-Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy (1863–1933) wrote about Antony's defeat in his poem "The God Abandons Antony." Cavafy was born in Alexandria and died in Alexandria, but in between lived in Liverpool, London, and the then Constantinople, working as a civil servant for the British government. Though he is the definitive poet of Alexandria—an extraordinary accolade for a modern man in one of the oldest cities in the world—he often writes about "the city" writ large. The city is almost always Alexandria, but can also sometimes be Liverpool, where he spent a formative part of his childhood, or Ithaka, the ancient home of Odysseus in Homer's *The Odyssey* and a former Greek capital later occupied by Rome and Byzantium. Writing in modern Greek, his poetry is distinctive in its accessible, arresting prose that speaks of longing, heartache, civilizations, cities, and the endurance of the insufferable human condition. In "The City" (1894) he writes: "You won't find a new country, won't find another shore. This city will always pursue you." In "Ithaka" (1911), he writes: "Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey. Without her you wouldn't have set out. She has nothing left to give you now. And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you. Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean."

Similarly, "The God Abandons Antony" is about a modern city as much as it is about a Roman defeat. Cavafy saw the last days of a cosmopolitan Alexandria, before Egypt's independence and nationalization. Even in his lifetime, the Alexandria he inhabited was fleeing, marred by the thrashes of modernity that were transforming the ancient city. The social and cultural homogenization of Alexandria and Egypt was a defeat cast in the shadow of a nascent republic's victory over decades of colonial rule. Within a matter of a few years, by the far superior tongue of Arabic. With every defeat comes a victory: Arabic over Greek, East over West, Parthian over Roman, Cleopatra over Antony.

When suddenly, at midnight, you hear an invisible procession going by with exquisite music, voices, don't mourn your luck that's falling now, work gone wrong, your plans all proving deceptive—don't mourn them uselessly. As one long prepared, and graced with courage,

say goodbye to her, the Alexandria that is leaving. Above all, don't fool yourself, don't say it was a dream, your ears deceived you: don't degrade yourself with empty hopes like these. As one long prepared, and graced with courage, as is right for you who proved worthy of this kind of city, go firmly to the window and listen with deep emotion, but not listen—your final delirium—to the voices, to the exquisite music of that strange procession, and say goodbye to her, to the Alexandria you are losing.

Cavafy's poem universalizes what Plutarch records: civilizations fall first in spirit. The strange music heard at midnight—the Dionysian procession leaving the city—is a lullaby as much as it is an alarm. Cavafy calls on Antony—the pathetic, boyish, prodigal son—to listen carefully to the music, and accept it. Accept the defeat.

The music of defeat as written in Plutarch, in Cavafy is a recurring historical sound. Many composers have tried to animate it (what is the music that plays when a civilization falls?) and each rendition is equally as devastating and sublime as the next.⁴ Larry McMurtry hears the music too in *In the Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas* (1968), where a Texas folk song lamenting the passing of the cowboy way of life echoes Antony's moment at the window sill in Alexandria. He writes, "It's a slight song, but for the Texas writer, an inescapable subject. When I think about the passing of the cowboy, my mind inappropriately hangs on from the poem of Cavafy's, from the scene in Shakespeare, the god abandons Antony." Larry McMurtry was the writer laureate of Texas who co-wrote the screenplay for the film *Brokeback Mountain* and inscribed Americana in the 20th century in a way only a cowboy could: from the perspective of debauchery and defeat. For him, the cowboy is a disappearing way of life, a fading American myth who represents freedom and grit that masks cultural emptiness and historical loss. He pores through different representations of the cowboy in Western film and literature, demonstrating the process of hollowing out a symbol whose role is calcified in a foregone past. The cowboy is an empty signifier for victory: a man on a horse riding into the horizon of a falling empire. For McMurtry, and for myself, the cowboy is not to be mourned, seeing as his fall signifies the cosmic redemption for injustices incurred at his will. Nevertheless, when portrayed as a singular, lonesome fellow, trotting off into the distance while cars speed past him, we can't help but feel a pang of loss.

4. One such example is a Cantata composed by Nicolas Rousakis: [youtube.com/watch?v=Lh8Qjgm2k&t=276s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lh8Qjgm2k&t=276s), another is George Dalaras: [youtube.com/watch?v=VRjgW52mYY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRjgW52mYY).

5. Larry McMurtry, *In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

INTRODUCTION

Which bodies and postures are depicted on the friezes of the past as well as the present?

A centerpiece at O—Overgaden is a styrofoam and jesmonite reconstruction of the colossal granite arm of Pharaoh Amenhotep III with clenched fist, expropriated to the British Museum. To this tahr adds a *munshica*, a historic gesture where the thumb is pushed between index and middle finger. The hand sign carries multiple meanings: Historically it was used in the Mediterranean region to distract and ward off the evil eye and other curses; in present-day Denmark it is used among families with children to signal “I’ve stolen your nose.” Meanwhile in contemporary street culture it is employed as an explicit insult; and here in the work, it signals protest or revolt—a resistance to the colonial theft the sculpture embodies, one that points directly to the current discussion around the national belonging of historical artworks and artefacts, and calls for repatriation.

Alongside this sculpture, a series of reliefs employs the artist’s roots in a dual fashion. On the one hand the panels formally reference the Assyrian friezes of Northern Iraq. On the other hand, their imagery is a combination of tahr’s private photo archive—a group of his male family members, a selfie, a carss between his father and brother—and found images of Arab men, including, among other scenes, a gangster-like character posing in front of a car as well as a large-scale frieze in which it is unclear if the figures are celebrating or fighting.

Resonating with the Pharaoh’s clenched fist, hands are a dominant motif: gesturing, praying, holding a phone, caressing. Carved in polyurethane foam with a surface imitating sandstone, the reliefs’ soft, almost vanishing contours ask for an intimate, close-up viewing, that helps to destabilize the stereotypical framing of the Arab male body as combative or aggressive, while pointing to a different, soft masculinity of mutuality and care.

Rhea Dall,
Director and Chief Curator at O—Overgaden,
March 2026

It is a great pleasure to introduce this publication accompanying Ihsan Saad Ihsan Tahir’s solo exhibition *THE BJIBK* at O—Overgaden. Throughout recent years, O—Overgaden has, with the generous support of the Augustinus Foundation, published a monographic series in conjunction with our large-scale solo exhibitions, aiming to expand the conversations around each show and produce new, offspring material.

In this instance, writer and poet Deniz Kiyi, curator and writer Mariam Elnozahy, and rapper Sivas have each contributed texts that together comprise a richly varied whole. A warm and heartfelt thank you to all contributors. I further wish to thank the whole team at O—Overgaden for their efforts in realizing the exhibition, as well as the graphic design team at fanfare for their always dedicated work, and of course not least the artist, Ihsan, for generously sharing conceptualizations and co-thinking with all of us, through both the exhibition and this publication.

Hands, gestures, poses. Ihsan Saad Ihsan Tahir’s exhibition at O—Overgaden reflects how depictions of Arab bodies have been continuously feared and desired, appropriated and exploited—not unlike artworks or artefacts—by quoting ancient sculpting formats while reiterating these in contemporary industrial materials.

The exhibition title *THE BJIBK* is Arabizi for the expression “trust your pockets.” Arabizi is an informal writing system invented in response to the lack of Arabic characters on early mobile phones, and it remains widely used in popular media, for instance in song titles. It is also dialect-specific, with no official governing rules; a living language of street culture. The title thus points to how Arab culture can carve out a space in a Western-dominated world—and what rules, translations, and signs this produces. “Trust your pockets,” beyond literally meaning “trust your own currency” or “trust your own value.” In this way, it opens up a discussion about valuation and ownership:

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