

Dala Nasser  
*In the Purple*  
11.09. – 16.10.2021

The turtle who  
walked so long  
and saw so much  
with  
his  
ancient  
eyes,  
the turtle  
who ate  
olives  
from the deepest  
sea,  
the turtle who swam  
for seven centuries  
and knew  
seven  
thousand  
springtimes,  
the turtle  
hooded  
against  
the heat  
and cold,  
against  
sunrays and waves,  
the yellow

turtle  
plated  
with severe  
amber  
scales  
and feet for catching prey,  
the turtle  
stopped  
here  
to sleep  
and didn't know it.  
So old  
that he kept  
getting harder,  
he quit  
loving the waves  
and became rigid  
like a clothing iron.  
He closed  
the eyes which  
had defied  
so much  
sea, sky, time and earth,  
and went to sleep  
among the other  
stones.

-Pablo Neruda, *La Tortuga (The Turtle)*, 1961 [trans. Jodey Bateman]

Forgive any misconceptions about the contemporary or modern. Our shared ancestry, with each turn for joy and love a counter-history of war and destruction. We cannot escape the inevitable, although there's enough delusion to believe so. There is no corner left unturned, nativity a figment of yesterday's imagination, indigeneity erased at the stroke of a pen and the breaking of ground. Displacement appears here to stay, tumbling into a blue sky, brown earth and green sea.

Dala Nasser's work is an epitaph for the living, a call to raise the dead. A sensory capture for the synaptic, a guide for the lost. A map of Tyre, porphyrin-laced substrate, the surface bends to the subdural. Touch and feel are primary and present, bringing image to the unseeable and memory the unknowable. Discovery is the salted crust, a shifting mound of hubris on which reinscription will commence.

She seeks other ways, and we find them with her now. As our hearts break in two, this work is imperative, restorative and urgent. It's origins in imperialist conquest and trade, the subjugation of terrestrial life forms for the sake of financial capital. The trade: 250,000 *Muricidae* offer their lives for one ounce of Tyrian Purple. Forsaking the pleasure of the luxurious and royal is no small feat, the folly of human Earthly relations implicate the delicate status of the giving creatures and those who mercilessly take.

What can be felt, smelled, tasted, seen, spoken, heard and rubbed is embedded *In the Purple*.

AL Steiner

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Deborah Schamoni Gallery proudly presents *In the Purple*, the first solo exhibition by Lebanese artist Dala Nasser, a material and process-based artist who works through abstraction and alternative forms of image making. The exhibition premieres Nasser's latest video production *The Dead Shall Be Raised* and accompanying paintings; works that explore questions around how we continue to witness and record that which can't be recorded. She deploys various tools such as 3d renderings, text, landscape/seascape scenes and processual documentation to further reveal the human and non-human entanglement in the perpetually deteriorating environmental, historical and political conditions.

*The Dead Shall Be Raised* takes us through undulating scenes of a lost city under sea, the story of King Hiram and his offerings, an inverted blurry present of urban sprawling and the documentation of the artist's process of archeological rubbings. Nasser destabilizes our sense of what is real, what is lost, what remains and what could be through an intentional conflation of history, myth and material being. As in previous works but through moving image this time, Nasser continues to insist on creating an autonomous narrator, one that breaks away from the dominant discourse that is built on delusion and myth. The act of rubbing, the use of charcoal and then submerging the dated cotton in the sea to fade out what she had been diligently doing under the sun and sky are all parts of a practice of survival but also a reclamation and questioning of what might have been lost. Her insistence doesn't come from a utopian desire to record history but it's a real scratching and questioning, an attempt at exposing the fragility of structures that have been constructed for decades based on histories and experiences that cannot be recorded be they historical, cultural or social. *The Dead Shall Be Raised* begs the question of how we record myth and delusion and how do we escape structures so rigidly built on them now.

The purple, the red, the mapping and the finality of the paintings on display in the exhibition are all part of the labour and embodiment of the passage of time and the act of bearing witness to it. The paintings are made through a process of Charcoal Rubbings of the archeological remnants in Tyre, on discarded fabric from her grandfather's house in South Lebanon, submerged in salty water and then dyed with a crimson and purple natural dye made of flowers from the area. What is left after the tumultuous process of making these paintings somehow still maps erasure, they reveal traces of abstract landscapes and ecologies in some, and what appears as a new language of time in others.

The powerful works of Nasser are a reminder of the cyclical weaponization of archeology and artifacts throughout history. What we are left with are structures that hold different memories and meanings to what they have been prescribed to represent today. They remain in their glorified or neglected forms the sole witness to futures; silently. The waves and currents change, what is buried might resurface and the foundations that have always been holding histories – be they myth, delusional or 'real' - can be washed away or eroded.

Reem Shadid

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