

# Management

Invitations to tremble:

*Trauma, mourning, and care in the work of eight contemporary artists and artist collectives*

Afruz Amighi

Bruce High Quality Foundation

David Bernstein and Sijben Rosa

Tahir Karmali

Liane Lang

Kate Liebman

Vladislav Markov

Nikholis Planck

(New York, NY) Management is pleased to present *Invitations to Tremble*, curated by Brooke Lynn McGowan, reflecting on the practice of eight artists and artists collectives and investigating the slippages between trauma and self-care, between death and reversal, between fear and bliss. Featuring the work of Afruz Amighi, David Bernstein and Sijben Rosa, Bruce High Quality Foundation, Liane Lang, Kate Liebman, Tahir Karmali, Vladislav Markov, and Nikholis Planck, *Invitations to Tremble* considers the artists' oeuvres not only in the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic, but also in light of intergenerational or interpersonal trauma, the violence of capitalistic exploitation, or the intimate devastation of lost loves and loved ones. *Invitations to Tremble* is a meditation--at turns uncanny, devotional, ironic, and sincere--on oppositions to repetitive narratives of trauma, occupations of the liminal space of overcoming, and considerations of death as both symbol and fact.

*Invitations to Tremble* takes its title from a slippage in philosophy, derived from two contrapuntal sources. The first is that elaborated by Jacques Derrida in *The Gift of Death*, based on the Socratic notion of *melete thanatou*, suggesting that the examined life is one bound up in care for one's death. In Derrida's understanding, this being-towards-death demands a sacred trembling, a sublime sacrifice riven with fear, branded with trauma: "We have fear of fear... we tremble... We tremble in that strange repetition which links an irrefutable past (a blow that occurred, a trauma that has already affected us) to a future". Contrary to this, Edouard Glissant offers the liberating concept of *tremblement*, or trembling thinking: "What I call tremblement is neither incertitude nor fear... [It] is the instinctual feeling that we must refuse all categories of fixed and imperial thought... and in which we can counter all the systems of terror, domination, and imperialism with the poetics of trembling." He invites us to *tremble* with the world.

In Afruz Amighi's *Love Story, Ghost Story*, a diptych from 2018, recently exhibited at the Frist Art Museum, two figures barely emerge from shadowy darkness. Drawing on the artist's previous graphic work evoking a funerary procession, these heraldic figures recall David Foster Wallace's enigmatic aphorism 'Every love story is a ghost story', recurrent in the novelist's letters and private correspondence. Nikholis Planck's works from a series of wax paper paintings, *Another Portal* (2021) and *Untitled (duo horizontal)* (2021), are durational studies completed at Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn and point directly to questions of trembling and ontology. If being is a being towards death, and if signification since ancient times has been bound to a tomb, as the Greek word *sema* for sign is also that for grave, then Planck's provisional landscape studies indicate towards the moribund as site of meaning-making and towards our uncertain regard for landscape in the age of capitalist expansion and

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the virtual. Vladislav Markov's *Cremation Society* (2020) reflects the artist's use of industrial and disused found objects to evoke and frustrate the viewer's desire for representation; made of dehydration trays designed to make food last longer, the work recalls our human desire for self-preservation and presents the uncanny visual suggestion of a death mask. For Bruce High Quality, in a piece from the series *Ways to Die* (2018) post-structuralist tautologies of 'the death of reach ironic apogee. As the collective states in interview, "If Socrates was right and how to die is all there is to philosophize about, someone ought to write the index." What is our relationship to death not as lived, or even sign, but simply signified?

Nonetheless, real pain occurs. And real healing. It can be personal. Or political. Kenyan-born artist Tahir Karmali's works *Fingers in the Soil* (2017) and *PARADISE VII* (2019) address bodies of trauma and redress, politically and personally respectively. For *Fingers in the Soil*, fine worked raffia stained with cobalt drapes from a copper pole yielding a cascading textile sculpture. Cobalt is the same mineral used in contemporary cellphones; its exploitative extraction in the region has resulted in devastating child labor, abuse, and endangerment. The organic Congolese cloth acts as a cipher for the body of the nation and the individual marked by the harm of the continuation of colonial relations by other means. In *PARADISE VII* (2019), conversely, the trauma is not sociological but personal; this image reflects an exilic identity, whilst also taking inspiration from the hadith saying from the Prophet Mohammed, 'Paradise is at the feet of the mother'. Featuring images of the artist's brother, deceased suddenly and much too young, in the Elysian sands of their mother's native Seychelle Islands, this series, composed just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the artist describes as "deeply cathartic".

Likewise, Kate Liebman explores a personal trauma, but in this case through a practice of painting. As the artist intones, "My work explores time, specifically how grief transforms the experience of time's passage." After the sudden loss of a loved one, the artist sought to process both her trauma and attendant fixation on the passage of time, through iconography and mythology, with particular reference to Bruegel's portrayal of the fall of Icarus. In the densely layered *After Bruegel 3* (2023), images oscillate between clarity and opacity of representation, reflecting the struggles in the mind when one is attempting to account for the experience of trauma and loss.

In all this trauma, in all this death, in all this trembling, we need *Something to Hold On To* (2019). Completed by Brussels-based David Bernstein and Sijben Rosa, and previously presented at the Sculpture Center, New York, this haptic and participatory body of work includes multiple uncanny objects that spectators are quite literally invited to *hold on to*, as they traverse the exhibition landscape of anxiety, trauma, and healing. *Something to Hold On To*, reflects the duo's emphasis on intimacy and connection in an increasingly augmented and mediated reality. Meanwhile, in Liane Lang's *Bliss* (2022), a photograph printed on agate, provides a moment of hope and escape, presenting the possibility of pleasure: trembling in the ecstasy of being.

Finally, for this exhibition, at the center of the room, a site-specific mandala shimmers, with a singular chain hanging from above; here artist Afruz Amighi presents a devotional gesture, a quivering and defiant poetics of ritual, which, after Glissant, '*counters all the systems of terror, domination, and imperialism.*' In other words, she invites us to tremble with the world. And we do.