

*Split Body*EXQUISITE CORPSE
4 June 2025

Each successive exhibition of Ittāh Yoda arrives already dissected and cross-pollinated. *Split Body* folds genetic-artistic material gathered in Indonesia, Greece, and France into Ittāh Yoda's self-generating practice, grafting new branches onto earlier research through successive residencies and collaborations with artificial intelligence, fabricators, technicians, writers, glitches, environmental conditions and non-human life. Consider this section of the exhibition's inventory: images of the cliffs of Paxos and the garden of Rumah Tangga in Depok, Indonesia, where the artist most recently produced the present body of work; various weaves of silk from Lyon; French and Indonesian ochre; mica dust from Greece; models of natural elements and human subjects captured over photogrammetry techniques in Bandung and Bali. The involvement of a breadth of actors has been a consistent thread since the duo, formed of Virginie Ittāh (b. 1984, Paris) and Kai Yoda (b. 1985, Tokyo), began their collaborative practice at the Royal College of Art in London. The exhibition represents this ever-growing ecology.

The exhibition's opening gesture, a ramp ascending without handrails toward a panoramic painting, establishes the terms of our engagement here. We are forced into a kind of bodily commitment to the precarious trajectory that we have chosen as we ascend toward a panoramic landscape, in which everywhere a motif is thrown into its most vulnerable or plosive state. That is, to follow the itinerant journey of Ittāh Yoda is to learn that a place declares itself beyond the eye and through our submitting to unstable grounds. The dark room that we enter is both sensory deprivation and overload, attuning us to the slow insistence of factors like the

weather, heat, dust, otherworldly hums that travel from epidermis to neuron. The task, Ittāh Yoda seems to suggest, is to stay alert to these almost-imperceptible currents that settle the terms of our traffic with unfamiliar grounds.

We relate to the central figure of this paranoid scene, the figure of Charon adapted from an early-sixteenth-century painting by the Flemish artist Joachim Patinir, who crosses treacherous waters of half-liquid, half-leopard-print crescents—a Styx remade for our moment between realms of the living and dead. Kai shared of his conviction that his studio was populated by unseen presences while he worked on this painting, and the canvas does indeed preserve traces of what seem like interruptions or visitations: sudden changes in brushwork, tremors in the paint handling that suggest a loss of control or a yielding to forces beyond the artist's conscious intention. Whether we read this as a species of automatism, a form of technological unconscious (the painting emerged partly through AI-assisted processes), or simply as the registration of environmental pressures of heat, humidity, the accumulated fatigue of working in an unfamiliar space, matters less than the way the work manages to hold these different registers of experience in productive tension.

This question of control and its abandonment runs throughout the exhibition, and it is here that the collaboration with artificial intelligence becomes most significant. Kai's process of building paintings through AI prompts represents a deliberate attempt to introduce generative interferences. Accompanying paintings in the first section of the exhibition elucidate this quality of their practice which result from a drift of viewpoints, including those which are not their own. One might see in these works a recall to the tradition of Chinese ink landscapes before an unexpected burst of a lightning strike would ambulate this course. The source of these nonlinear journeys begin from a visual bank of art historical references to recent photographs of landscapes captured on tour. It is a way to explore the difference between creation that begins from one's own perception towards a preliminary release of control to machine vision and our grasp of a concrete reality during the artistic process. Understood as a form of contemporary landscape painting, they seem to register the conditions under which landscape becomes visible in our current moment: technologically mediated and shot through with the interference patterns generated by competing systems of

representation (materially, the paintings also employ interference colours that change with light). Like the pattern-recognition systems that increasingly mediate our visual experience, meaning itself has become subject to strange metamorphoses and sudden shifts between registers.

This is where a disembodiment begins to lodge itself in the practice of Ittāh Yoda. There is an interest in exploring an experience of artmaking akin to psychedelia, involving slippages of matter and a releasing to substance (here machine or a sensitivity to the otherworldly). These ideas sidle up to what Lars Bang Larsen described of post-Second World War psychedelic art as a "scandal of ephemeral form, hermetic imagery, and strange temporalities, used by artists to bridge impulses and brainwaves with real events in social space through works that reach for ways to re-imagine life from their place in the middle of history." Without pharmacological triggers, these works inhabit these promiscuities by suggesting one's ability to escape from limited understandings of our perceived realities. If there is a trip here, it is one taken through a renewed and heightened attention to our surroundings and a sense for the contemporary urgency of collaborative, symbiotic relationships to the human and non-human agents that surround us.

To stand still is to miss half of these works' spectra, and the exhibition's second room extends this investigation into the realm of figuration and material experimentation. We enter this room experiencing a series of undulating polyptychs that mediate between silk and space. But first, we must dip our fingers into a perfume pooling inside a sensuous glass sculpture, in turn offered to us by *Balthazar*, a frangipani-wood chimeric sculpture of salvaged wood from Bali. The scent, entitled *Learning to Fly*, is itself a symbiosis of the natural and synthetic, incorporating Luban incense to simulate meditation whilst allowing the nostalgic combination of warm wax, milk, and orange blossom to evoke a journey to one's childhood memories. We proceed to and encircle these paintings with this liquid second skin, grasping the continuously indeterminate forms of the effects of painted and printed pigment on silk—translucent head-on, opaque at an oblique. Their medial nature is a play of atmospheric forms of light as much as it is cultural. They dare the assemblage of animist sculptures and paintings from visits to Musée Guimet in Paris to the charged emotions of figures populating Indonesian bas reliefs, enlivened by the elastic drips of pigment of another

speculative panorama of land and sea.

As an attitude that recognises exchange as an elusive affair, Virginie Ittah recognises the ways in which their multicultural origins influence a fugitive connection between geographies and material. The sculptured figures that populate these paintings are as much a reflection of Ittah's cross-cultural art historical interests as much as her experience of embodying multiple cultural identities, her unplaceable visage that registers differently across geographies. It is this biography and structural condition of increasing relevance to contemporary artistic practice that colours her interest in what she calls "archetypical emotions"—gestures or expressions that carry the trace of specific cultural contexts while remaining available for translation across different systems of meaning.

The exhibition's sonic dimension relays the duo's continuous exploration of collaboration in various forms, this time as an experiment in collaborative blindness: working independently with sound artist Dylan Amirio, each half of the duo created separate prompts that would eventually interweave into a single composition. Suggestive of the process of an exquisite corpse, where various parties create something together without knowing the end result as well as the counterparty's corresponding input, both Virginie and Kai began a series of conversations with Amirio independently of each other, with the intention thereafter to then allow for Amirio to have fully agency in developing two distinctive sounds based off of their respective prompts, which would then interweave together into a musical composition in the gallery space.

Despite receiving two singular points of input to produce two sounds, Amirio sensitively constructed binaural beats in unison—an auditory illusion created by the brain when listening to two slightly different tones in each ear. The brain perceives the difference between the two tones as a third tone, the binaural beat, which can shift brainwave activity depending on the frequency being generated. This difference is typically in the range of 1-35 Hz, which corresponds to different brainwave frequencies: gamma (30 Hz and higher), beta (13 Hz - 30 Hz) alpha (8-12.99 Hz), theta (4-7.99 Hz) , and delta (1-3.99 Hz). A growing body of research suggests that listening to certain frequencies of binaural beats may increase specific cognitive awareness and function that pertain to thinking and feeling. This soundscape acts as an integral aspect of *Split Body*, intentionally manipulating

the viewer's neurological makeup in terms of establishing a specific neurological baseline and frequency by which to approach Ittah Yoda's *Split Body*—fundamentally shifting how it is perceived within the realm of even the deeper subconscious psyche.

What distinguishes Ittah Yoda's practice from earlier forms of artistic collaboration is its systematic cultivation of these networks of estrangement. The duo's itinerant methodology creates conditions where familiar forms of artistic production become strange to themselves. This stretches beyond cultural tourism towards an attempt to discover what kinds of aesthetic possibilities emerge when artistic practice becomes genuinely nomadic, unmoored from place and individual authorship.

To picture bodies unlike one's own is an act of reciprocal care. It is a counter-economy to the hardening of borders and the sorting of difference, where instead, shifting vantages may release gradients of affinities. The question is not whether such conditions compromise the authenticity of artistic vision (that anxiety belongs to an earlier moment) but how they might be turned toward productive ends.