

LACED WITH DUST

2 – 30 MAY 2024

Anna Blom
Naomi Boiko
Elizabeth Dimitroff
Nada Elkalaawy
Changpeng Li

"When he calls, what will I do? When I live according to ethics, I don't feel I'm living honestly. When I looked at the wall, I saw a second moth like the first, its white wings soft and laced with dust."

Sheila Heti, *Alphabetical Diaries*, 2024

STUDIO WEST is proud to present LACED WITH DUST, an exhibition of works by Anna Blom, Naomi Boiko, Elizabeth Dimitroff, Nada Elkalaawy and Changpeng Li, inspired by Sheila Heti's recently published text 'Alphabetical Diaries', in which the author collected half a million words from a decade's worth of journals and rearranged them into alphabetically organised sentences. Mirroring Heti's experimental approach to the diaristic form, the exhibition features images that are paradoxically disjointed and yet synchronistic, thereby presenting a restructured and selective portrait of remembrance, linked by the texture and assemblage of memory, rather than by any linear narrative.

Unfolding as a trove of painted memories, the viewer reads the exhibition like a visual journal. Both Nada Elkaaway's porcelain figurines and Naomi Boiko's intimate portraits – the latter choosing to title her works after memories of conversations with her late mother – have the pointed, performative quality of a diary entry. "The self's report on itself is surely a great fiction", wrote Heti; what is truth? What do we choose to remember? What is left behind? Like a case of pinned butterflies, these works become a collection of carefully selected memories, each plucked from their context. As paintings, they both depict and become souvenirs; image-objects of the ornaments and photographs we collect to keep memories alive, reconciling experiences of loss, and inviting ever-evolving reinterpretations of a personal mythology.

Changpeng Li's work reveals the archival anxiety of our contemporary world; the instinct to record, to mine, to publish. His paintings share the dimensions and quality of film photography, the universally familiar rectangular structure that encases memory, makes it solid. In this way, his paintings are not of memories – rather they are paintings of the way in which memories are contained and altered by the endless wave of imagery created and disseminated online. His works depict, above all else, the impressions of these images from the media – indeterminable yet familiar urban landscapes, places that have become stored in the collective unconscious. When gathered together, they are reminiscent of Heti's hazily

urbane snapshots – "...I saw how being with a friend in a new city, you were still in relation to the friend, but being alone in a new city, you were entirely in relation to the city itself. I tried saying to myself, you are in Paris, you are in Paris, you are in Paris, but the more I said it, the less convinced I felt." Both Heti and Li gesture towards the slipperiness of experience, problematising how preconceived images or ideas of a place can lead to cognitive dissonance, stripping away the depth of our gaze.

Similarly, Elizabeth Dimitroff's work does not depict images of lost memories, but rather illustrates loss itself, her practice defined by its surreal compositions of an elliptical, immersive world. Dimitroff's visual leitmotifs – empty beaches, domestic corners, figures with glassy eyes – reappear in both of the two, green-hued works on show. This throughline of recurring, yet divergent figures and places problematises the apparent 'truth' of memory, the viewer questioning the authenticity of each version they see. Just like Heti's text, the logic of the index gives way to randomness, like a dream sequence. In depicting loss itself, the two works explore the impossibility of holding on to the present moment, as the lasting impressions of events, places and people melt into unverifiable memory.

Overarchingly, the pages of *Alphabetical Diaries* reveal the debris of human consciousness, indirectly acknowledging that amidst chaos, order can emerge. Anna Blom's ephemeral paintings exemplify this cluster of details, the unspecific and constant impressions made by the physical and psychological components of everyday landscape, the visual equivalent of strands of Heti's nebulous memories – "every time I look up, the sky changes colour; now everything is dark and in shadows". Blom's work is a diaristic response to her own environment; each piece drawn from an oblique, research-based process that collects objects, matter, white noise and writing which are ultimately poured into paintings. The canvases are laid out in the open, exposed to wind and light, using raw pigment and permitting situational debris to flow in - laced with dust.

Rather than following a linear narrative through her own memory, Sheila Heti's '*Alphabetical Diaries*' offers an alternate view into something necessarily impossible to depict - the subjective retrieval of the moments that make up a life. For these five painters, Heti's text becomes a liberative device, a form of permission to present fragments of their own experiences without the need for explanation, a licence to let go and invite the viewer to construct their own stories from visions of the past. In being granted this freedom, the artists also discover a route to capturing the otherwise ineffable slipperiness of memory, allowing the works on show in *LACED WITH DUST* to read as an untethered portrait of remembering without the need for expository details or whole truths.

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