Beginnings
Kamal Boullata

Hand-made book, 27 x 18 cm, Produced by Editions Parentheses, Paris, 1992

23 Kamal Boullata

Our two bodies thunder
you say, listen
I say you listen, words ringing.
Our two bodies in offering
you fall, I fall
around us flares, fantasies
you fall, I fall.

Between you and me
words gather
and blurt.

"Beginnings of words" by Adonis, the nom de plume of the Syrian-born poet Ali Ahmad Said (b. 1920), now naturalized Lebanese and one of the foremost poets of the Arab world. The collection Beginnings draws together eight of his poems, translated in Arabic and English by Kamal Boullata and Menee Choossein. Geometric patterns on the cover and within the book in different colours echo the mood of the poems.
24a-b Dia al-Azzawi

Adonis

The first (24a) consists of lines from Adonis's well-known narrative poem 'A Grave for New York', written in 1971 following an extended stay in the city. This passage highlights his concerns about racial inequality in the United States:

'THE CHOIR}
I do not come from outside, I know your race, I know its good bread. There is no cure for famine except sudden thunder,'

(Translated Jayyusi and Brownjohn, in Jayyusi 1987: 140)

The second (24b) illustrates lines from Adonis's poem 'This is my name', written in 1968.

All Azzawi has selected five poems by Adonis in this collection, writing them out by hand, each illustration evoking the particular mood of each poem. Two of these fold-out lithographs are shown here.
"Night closes in once more, then the city and the planets by
drink down the stars, like a sad song.
The street lamps, like hourglasses, have bloomed,
like the eye of Medusa, manically turning every heart to stone.
Like the enemies that foretold fire to the inhabitants of Babylon.
From what forest did this night come? From what laws?
From what wolf's den?
From what nest among the graves did it rise, flapping its wings,
dark brown like a crow?"

[Translated by Young 1999: 234]
Almost reminiscent in form of Tibetan palm-leaf texts, the poetry on single folios is by Algerian novelist and poet Mohamed Dih (1902–2001). Expelled from Algeria in 1958 because of his support for the Algerian war of independence, remarkably he settled in France and wrote numerous novels in French. In 1954 he received the Grand Prix de la Francophonie from the Académie française. Written in 1951, ‘Enfant Jazz’ is an abstract narrative poem about aspects of life, love and war seen through the eyes of a young boy. Jazz represents the unexpected, while the child evokes the unexpected. The Arabic text is written by the calligrapher Abdelkader Raouman. Kerachi’s lithographs in sepia and black ink consist of lines of Arabic (sometimes in reverse), lines of poetry in French, and signs and symbols that evoke the Islamic magical vocabulary. They are the hallmark of Kerachi’s style, which he has developed on a variety of media, including ceramics and textiles.
"Birds die in Galilee

And when I lifted the blue wings
I saw a growing grave.

I am the man on whose skin
Chains have carved a country."

(translated from Arabic, 1996-97)

The last verse of Birds die in Galilee by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (b. 1942). Each of the 30 pages is made up of three sections: two outer leaves (27a and 27b), one of which (27a) has the verse of poetry, and an inner page with a separate monoprint (27c).
An extract from the poem Mural, written by Mahmoud Darwish (b. 1945) in 1999 after suffering a near-fatal illness. Although poems such as these are intensely personal, as the foremost Palestinian poet Darwish is often read as the voice of his people. For al-Shammary, Darwish’s questioning of life and death not only echoed his own feelings but reminded him strongly of the Epic of Gilgamesh.

"The set of paintings are scattered around the black circle that represent immortality, as if they were drafts tests written by Darwish during his illness. It shows madness, at times, to receive death while at other times appearing totally indifferent to either life or death."

(Prepared documentation)
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The rest of paintings are scattered around the black circle that represents immortality, as if they were draft texts written by Darwish during his illness... it shows readiness, at times, to receive death while at other times appearing totally indifferent to either life or death."

(Translatedakine, 2005)
Shafic Abboud, Dia al-Azzawi and Mohammed Omar Khalil
Homage to Tawfiq Sayghi (a), Khalil Hawi and Salah Abd al-Sabur (b)
A SET OF 3 LITHOGRAPHS AND 3 POEMS
36.5 x 24.6 cm (paper)

LEBANON, IRAQ, AND SAUDI ARABIA RESPECTIVELY
This collection was published by Syrian critic and poet Nayef al-Rayyes in 1988 to mark the London Festival of Arab Culture. Illustrated here are Khalil’s print (29a) depicting a tattooed face of a man, his arms outstretched. It presents a portrait of the artist’s art with a sense of freedom. (29b) by Palestinian poet Tawfiq Sayghi (1923–75), lines from which are as follows:

‘Detours end, and no way forward.
This rain will not
It pours over London’s white earth.
A London of dark skies, walls, and stone hearts.
One large un CHUNK of stone.
My chest weighs with the nightmare of days.’
[Translated by Amin Haydar and Jemima Rees; Appendix: 16–17]
Shufic Abboud, Dina Al-Azzawi and Mohammed Omar Khalil
Homage to Tawfic Sayegh (a), Khalil Hawi and Salab Abd al-
Saboor (b)
A SET OF 3 LITHOGRAPHS AND 3 POEMS
(VYOS, 1980)
H 68.5 cm, W 56.2 cm (paper)

LAMINATED FRAMES, FRAME, SIGNED AND DATED RESPECTIVELY
1974 1-5 28

This collection was published by Syrian critic and poet
Khalil Al-Rayan in 1980 to mark the London Festival
of Arab Culture. Illustrated here are Khalil's prints (26a)
depicting wrestlers for Egyptian poet Salab Abd al-
Saboor (b: '3937) and Abboud's abstract composition
'Qusti' (26b) by Palestinian poet Tawfic Sayegh
(1923-71), lines from which are as follows:

'Death and evanescence
and no way forward.
The rain pours slantwise
on London's white on white faces.
A London of dark skies, walls, and stone hearts
One large unscarsable feature.
My chest weights with the nightmare of days...
[Translated Adrian Vickers and Jeremy Reed, Jyssia, 1992, 16-17]
The grey years

I had friends and orchards
and stars that shed light to others
and steeped where time ran up and
down and wondered
and shoreless dreams on a voyage of
fear
What has become of my town
but dreariest rains,
vacant overwings and
the faces of the departed

'The first verse of the poem 'Glorious town', inscribed within the painting. The painting is one of a series of eight done for a book of Arabic poetry of the same name, written by the artist's father Ata Abdullah. He started writing poetry in prison in Iraq where he spent thirteen years between 1969 and 1973, a period he refers to as his 'grey years'. This title is inspired by a time when rain did not fall for a whole year, causing all the crops to die.'
Sulta Hashem

นาม/fortuneable land
INK AND GOUACHE ON CANVAS, 1991
M. 26.5 cm. W. 20.5 cm
BUCKS/UK
2005-7-22-62
BRICKS SKEWES PERMANENT FUND

From what breast rises the smoke
like a banner of the dead
haunted and made to you, Amara?
Which martyr, save you, my friend, has not returned
And been admitted into this abandoned garden?
Blind as I am, but our dry threats united us in West in exile.
Oh what agony your conquered land gives me.”
(Translated Rachel Adair)

From ‘O misfortuneable land’ by Iraqi poet Fawzi Karim.
Born in Baghdad in 1945, Karim has been living in Britain since 1978. In this dark poem, written in November 1982, Karim describes indirectly the tragedy of the Iraqi wars. In his drawings Hashem has tried to show the word and the image as part of this battlefield, not as a picture of it. He returned, he says, to the ancient Assyrian reliefs and mythology to mix them with our real and unreal lives (personal communication).

Bar Sina Ata
The grey years
INK ON PAPER, MOUNTED ON CANVAS, 1982
H. 46.0 cm. W. 31.5 cm
IRAQ/ISRAN
2005-7-21-30
BRICKS SKEWES PERMANENT FUND

In one glorious town
I had friends and orchards
and stairs that kindled to others
and vineyards where time ran up and
down and wondered
and sleepless dreams on a voyage of
honour
What has become of my town
but desertite ruins,
vacant evenings and
the faces of the departed.”
(Translated Sina Ata)

The first verse of the poem ‘Glorious
town’, inscribed within the painting. This painting is one of a series of eight
done for a book of Arabic poetry of the
same name, written by the artist’s
father Ata Abdul Wahab. He started
writing poetry in prison in Iraq where
he spent thirteen years between 1969
and 1975, during which he referred to as his
‘grey years’. This title is inspired by a
time when rain did not fall for a whole
year, causing all the crops to die.
On strips of coloured paper Wijdan has inscribed 'Rashm I' in English and French, a poem in several sections by Lebanese poet Charbel Daibar (the rest of the poem is in Arabic only). She describes the mode of script written here as 'Calligraphia': 'A style that has no known rule, belongs to no known school of calligraphy and differs from one handwriting to another' (Ali 1997: 162). Her theories about the use of Arabic script by modern Middle Eastern artists are articulated in her Modern Islamic Art (1997).
32 Wijdan
Rashem
WATERCOLOUR, CHINA INKS AND LIQUID GOLD ON PAPER, 39.5
H 145.0 x W 74.0 cm
JORDAN
2004.5.11.1
BROOKE SOWELL PERMANENT FUND

"Veiling their faces, a transient cover
Of impressions and shapes
Emerges from their ghosts,
And penetrates into their bodies..."
A hasty encounter
In the doorway:
Long enough
To define payment of accounts
And renew contract
Between passengers and captives.
(Translated Georges Cavelier and Jean Carolin
Gonner-Reau)

On strips of coloured paper Wijdan has inscribed Rashem I in English and French, a poem in several sections by Lebanese poet Charbel Doghri (the rest of the poem is in Arabic only). She describes the mode of script written here as "calligrapha", a style that has no known rule, belongs to no known school of calligraphy and differs from one handwriting to another. (Ali 1997: 167). Her theories about the use of Arabic script by modern Middle East artists are articulated in her Modern Islamic Art (1997).

33 Hassan Massoudy
Untitled
COLOURED INK ON PAPER, 2003
H 75.0 x W 55.0 cm
PAINTING
2005.7.15.52
BROOKE SOWELL PERMANENT FUND

"I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith." (al-'Ababi
Nicholson 1913: 66-70). Muhammad bin al-'Ababi bin Muhammad bin al-'Ababi (1251-1326), the influential Sufi master and writer, was born in Murcia in southern Spain and spent much of his life travelling in the Middle East. His tomb in Damascus is an important focus of pilgrimage. These lines are from the Ziyarun al-Ashwaq [The Interpreter of Desires], a collection of sixty-nine mystical odes. Written as love poems to a young girl, these were in fact allegories of divine love and addressed to God. In the painting, the single word al-'Ababi ("love") is isolated in blue, with the rest of the line inscribed in red in Kufic script."