

HIBA KALACHE

Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite

All works are acrylics on paper and canvas.

Photo: The artist in her atelier, 2016.





"I must also write to you because you harvest discursive words and not the directness of my painting. I know that my phrases are crude, I write them with too much love, and that love makes up for their faults, but too much love is bad for the work."

– *Agua Viva*, Clarice Lispector

"As when we are in love (another of Lispector's most basic motifs), we are constantly seduced and tortured by language, by doubts about the sincerity of the other, about reliability and meaning, by what the very language that we use to express our love, our sense of being and identity, leads us to hope for and desire, by the seductive but maddening skein of signifiers and signifieds that this language dangles eternally before us."

– *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector*, Earl E. Fitz

Hiba Kalache draws in her painting and she writes with her brush. Her gestures are vigorous yet intricate, scribbly à la Twombly. Her practice is one of *écriture*. To use Roland Barthes' now-old French neologism, her painting is *scriptible*: its hermeneutic, symbolic, historic, and semic codes open up to an indeterminacy in the reading of both her work and its own textual references. Grand in scale, layered and ambiguous, it does not reaffirm what is mythologized. There is no singular unity in its composition, no universe that is total or whole. Kalache's work demands a reception that is both distant and intimate, and in return, it promises *jouissance* akin, and yet antithetical to divine rapture.

Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite began as a project of the close translation of religious texts into a visual language. It was a slow, arduous and ultimately stifling process, that "proved its own failure"¹ to the artist. The set of propositions with which she started were predisposed to an eventual fragmentation. Principally among her concerns was the relationship between the text and the image – the imagery within a given text, as well as the reading of an image as a text – and the possibility of translation of one into the other. However, the thrust of her project rested in her preoccupation with 'hope', which is to say, in the allegories of redemption that are fallen back on in our era declared to be "post-truth", or supposedly after the end of history. For this, Kalache turned to textual representations of paradise and the heavens.

¹ Described as such by the artist in our correspondences.

The earliest trials in her process were long, scroll-like and hand-drawn works on paper. Intensely detailed and sumptuous, they were anachronistic in their magnificence. They were also the least abstract of her oeuvre. Working from a single text which she found herself effectively transcribing, her figures, *skies honeycomb milk fleshy ripe fruits beaks wings claws collapsing walls vegetation partial bodily objects* from various spaces and times – or rather, no-place and no-time – come to affirm and efface each other. Earlier in her process, Kalache wrote, this time in words, that it was "a playful dive into the psyche, an attempt at symbolic cohabitations in a space where all floats, collides and coexists."² With a growing sense of unease, she drifted from an accurate translation, abandoned the utopian narrative, and found that the structure of the work was breaking down. The imminent rupture in the language – in the loosening of gestures – was already inscribed in the content of her earliest drawings as the collapse of the heavens, and yet could only formally break in the process, with the exasperation, apprehension, and depletion that stemmed from language's inherent elusiveness. Having been stunted for months by the carving of an unattainable fantastical world – which was so evidently invested with corporeality in its images, and yet believed to be transcendent and entirely divested of the body – Kalache let her hand go.

She read *Agua Viva*, the least accessible of all of Clarice Lispector's works. Its fragmentary nature, lack of narrative and recognizable order was already resonant in her process. She was obsessively drawing on small sheets of paper in nude pinks and intensely bloodied reds, breasts and phalluses and flowers and thorns, all of which had already been in the earlier work but were now exploding. She was also reading the work of Hélène Cixous who herself wrote extensively on Lispector's writing. In her book, *Reading with Lispector* (1990), Cixous identifies themes in *Agua Viva* that were reverberating in Kalache's process. These were the problem of the word as that which dictates the law, wherein the latter does not exist without the former, and the problem of the law, or of that which is on the other side of the forbidden – *pleasure*. In her own process of *écriture*, Kalache was first constrained by the determinacy of her interpretation, but let herself go with the realization that she could write the law through a language imbued with her own pleasure. Then came the monumental paintings, all titled from *Agua Viva* fragments.

Kalache's work – the small and large drawings, the earliest and the most recent paintings, the connective body of sculptures, and the paper installation – all proceed from the premise of a *texte scriptible* as opposed to *lisible*, in which the narrative and the laws of its genre are dropped. It gives way, not to an expected pleasure or awe, but to *jouissance* that can only arise when the stability and unity of the text is undercut. Following Lispector, Kalache flaunts a semantic play in her work, in the slippages between signifiers and signifieds that foreclose a singular meaning. Closure is endlessly deferred.

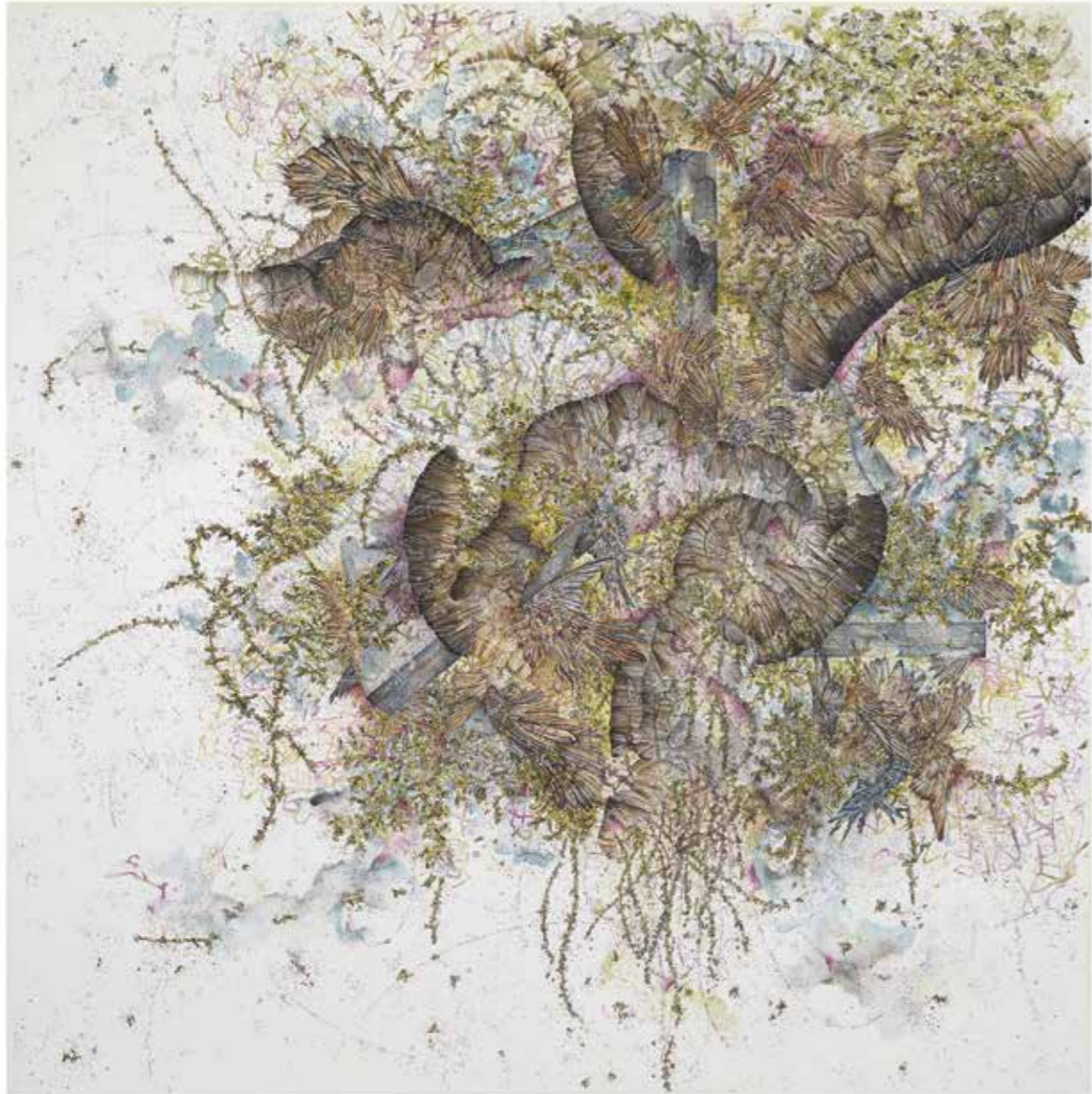
Natasha Gasparian - 2018

² Ibid.



56:10-40 | 150x310cm | 2017





47:15-21 | 100x100cm | 2017



38:49-54 | 100x100cm | 2017



but I also want inconsistency | 120x90cm | 2017





something that doesn't begin and doesn't end | diptych each 120x90cm | 2017



therefore the most profound thought is a beating heart | diptych, each 140x100cm | 2017



Lemonade Everything Was So Infinite is an exhibition in which the artist turned to religious scriptures in search of answers concerning existence and concepts of hope. She proclaimed a stance that allowed her to translate away from notions of “origin” and the “sacred.” The main series of paintings carries explosive and heavily symbolic elements which infiltrate the canvas with bright and unapologetic colours that emerge gradually as the text disappears. Kalache does not translate on the paper or canvas directly, rather, her artistic process is one of movement between different media from text, to paper, and on to canvases. Translation in this context is used to specify the act of transforming a text into an image as well as the movement from one medium to another. Through this intermedial journey, one could argue that a state of exile ensues when words have to be discarded for lines that form drawings. What is often considered to be lost in translation is found in the artist's subjective presence on each of the works.

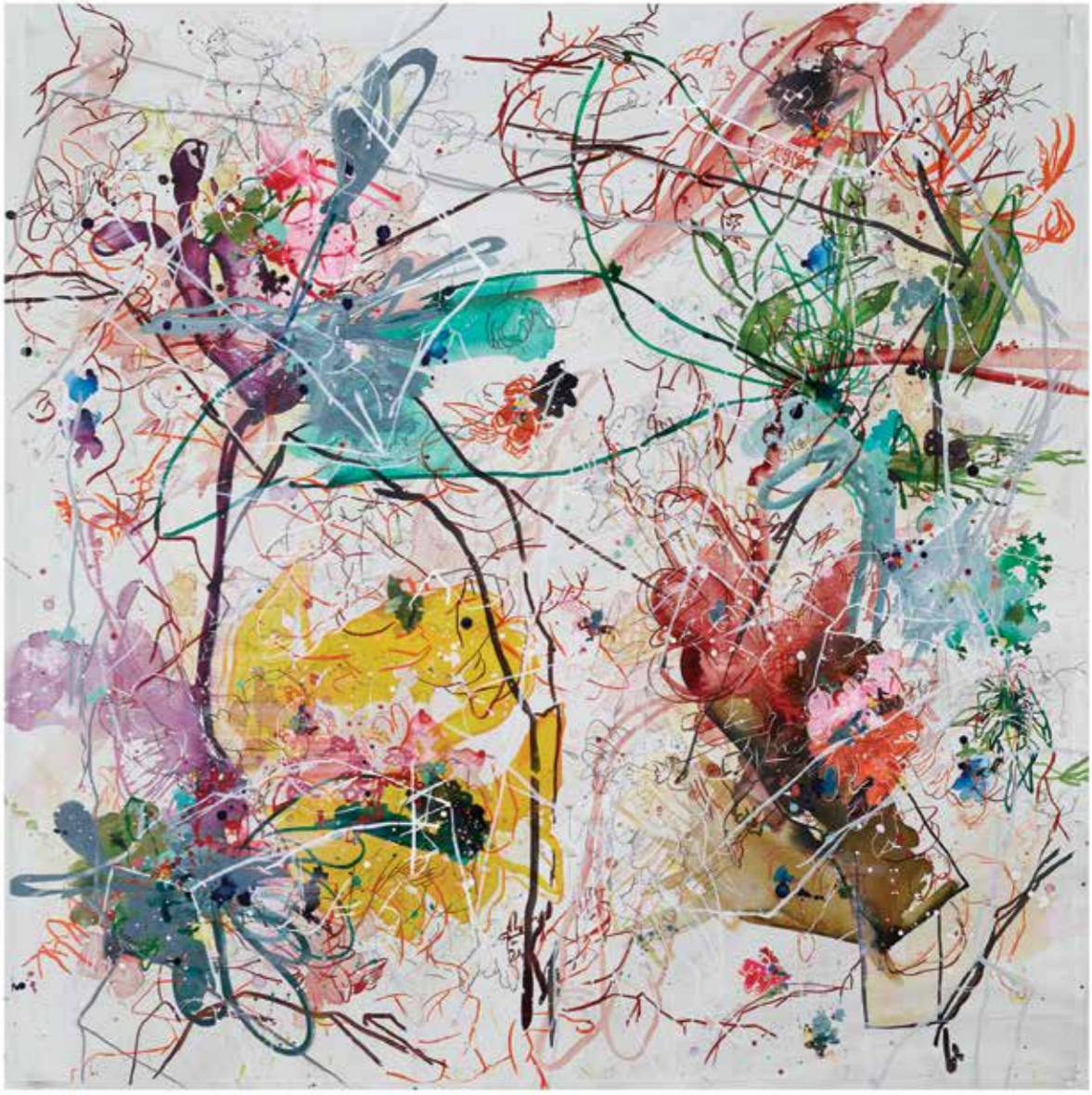
As the canvases begin to diverge from a point of origin, the scattering of the elements starts a different conversation that renders heavenly gardens, walls, and a female subjectivity that intensifies with each canvas as the colours become more vivid and the lines more defiant. The quest to translate textual descriptions of life after death falters as the works question other aspects of the body and the anxiety of human experience. Nature is abstracted, as one can easily spot flowers that are highly distorted, while, interruptions of peaceful gardens that depict the heavens are besieged by a galvanizing force proclaiming an exanimation of more minute and intimate details.

The works reveal what is underneath the skin or the layer protecting one's interior from the exterior world. Through the dialogue between different elements one faces hidden thoughts, imaginations, fantasies, desires, and the raw human carnal capacity to long for what's underneath the surface. For instance, the raw state of the banana sculptures is put into question as they linger in a state of the inedible and unbaked. They are raw and ready to be transformed. However, in choosing to leave the sculpted bananas exposed, the metaphor of both translation (from one media to another) and the raw state of existence are placed in opposition as the two main themes of the series: the uncooked and the untranslatable. The work has no need to remain faithful to the text and the long-running association of women's role as the baker or cook creating edible substances is put into question.

The original becomes an abstract and objective realm whereby the translation depicts the sensible, the proximate, what is hidden, what is imagined, and what is revealed underneath the layers. What the iterations contain is a memory of a place, details of an ambiguous body as well as a relationship to words, intentions, hope, and a possible future rather than the past. The transposed elements do not reference a journey back to a place, rather the movement is acknowledged as one that is necessary for transparency. Indeed, the transformations demonstrate an impossible return whereby the infinite renders a mode of perpetual translation and an ambivalent relationship between the past and the present.



I ate my own placenta | 120x120cm | 2017



I let the free horse run fiery | 120x120cm | 2017



I am a chair and two apples and I cannot be added up | 150x130cm | 2017



beyond thought there are no words: it is itself | 130x150cm | 2018



the sunflower is the great child of the sun | 190x160cm | 2018



you can always ask why and always get no answer | 190x160cm | 2018



I swallow a mouthful of blood | 190x160cm | 2018



is it a lot of work to look after the world? | 190x160cm | 2018



the instant is living seed | 190x160cm | 2018





in and out of adoration | 200x150cm | 2018



the inexplicable love makes the heart beat faster | 200x150cm | 2018



the sacred monster died | 200x150cm | 2018



what color is the spatial infinity? it is the color of air | 200x150cm | 2018



could the oyster when torn from its root feel anxiety? | 190x160cm | 2018



death washes away the traces of the waves in the sand | 190x160cm | 2018



and my song belongs to no one | 200x150cm | 2018



secret harmony of disharmony | diptych, each 200x200cm | 2018



Natasha Gasparian is a Beirut-based writer. She is pursuing a Master's degree in Art History and Curating at the American University of Beirut. She works in Agial Art Gallery and Saleh Barakat Gallery as a writer and occasional curator. She has co-curated several exhibitions, including Ziad Abillama's *The Twisted Wing of the Airplane King* (2017) at Saleh Barakat Gallery, *Mashrou' Proletkult* (2016), and *The Horror, The Horror, The Horror: Harald Szeemann & The Archive* (2018) at the American University of Beirut's Byblos Art Gallery.

Rania Jaber is a researcher working on the connections between contemporary art, gender, memory, diaspora, and translation. She has recently completed a PhD thesis titled *Art in Translation and Diaspora: The Work of Three Lebanese Women Artists* (2018). She is currently teaching in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Media studies at the American University of Beirut.



Born in Beirut, Hiba Kalache is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice spans installation, drawing, painting, and sculpture. Kalache draws on her daily life for her materials and process. She has used extra-artistic materials in her work, including food material, such as butter; dough; spices; rice; cake icing, as well as stockings, glass, metal wire, and drying machine lint. Kalache interrogates the separation between the private and public spheres, and more specifically, what she calls, “the banality of daily rituals”, as well as one’s definition of “home” and social belonging. Her recent interests include the relationship between texts and images, and the possibility of intermedial translation, as well as allegories of redemption and propositions of futurity in an era of perpetual presentism.

In 2005, Kalache received a Masters of Fine Arts from California College of the Arts (CCA) in San Francisco. She has since exhibited in Beirut, Berlin, Brussels, Istanbul, New Orleans, Oakland, San Jose (USA), San Francisco, and Tehran. Her work has also been shown at art fairs including Art Dubai, Drawing Now (Paris), and Gwangju Art (South Korea). Recent group exhibitions include *Mimesis Expression Construction* (2016) curated by Octavian Esanu at the American University of Beirut’s Rose and Shaheen Saleeby Museum, *Heartland* (2015) curated by Joanna Chevalier at the Beirut Exhibition Center, and *Under Construction, Exposure* (2014) curated by Marie Muracciole at the Beirut Art Center. In 2012, she had solo shows in Beirut with The Running Horse Contemporary Art Space, and the FFA Private Bank. In 2017, she taught fine arts at the Lebanese American University.

Heartfelt thanks to:

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SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY

ساليه باركات

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