

CAMPLE—LINE

KIRA FREIJE
RIVER BY NIGHT
25.03 - 10.06.23



*distant sounds of latches closing, echo
as warmth leaves slatted doors, 2023*

Kira Freije: *river by night*
– Francesca Wade

*Perhaps an angel looks like everything
We have forgotten, I mean forgotten
Things that don't seem familiar when
We meet them again, lost beyond telling,
Which were ours once.*

John Ashbery, 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror'¹

Among the scenes in Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse* – a series of fifteen woodcuts, published in 1498, depicting stories from the Book of Revelation – is an image titled *Four Avenging Angels of Euphrates*. In the Bible, St John describes hearing a deafening trumpet blast and a voice, attributed to God, cry out to the horn-blowing angel, instructing them to release the four angels bound in the river Euphrates, whose liberation heralds the destruction of a third of the earth's population. In Dürer's vision, the scene is depicted from several levels: a serene divinity looks down from amid the swirling clouds, while down below, riders tumble from their horses and trampled souls gaze pitifully upwards in hope of unlikely salvation. In the middle, the avenging angels appear in diamond formation, swords raised aloft, while fire-breathing lions soar overhead.

In recent months, the Euphrates has been the subject of frenzied online speculation among contemporary apocalypse-watchers. Some YouTube videos detail noises believed to be screams from beneath the riverbed, indicating that the angels are preparing to surface. Others argue anxiously that extreme drought in Iraq has left stretches of the ancient river almost entirely dry, fulfilling the prophecy's conditions. Whether or not the sword-bearing angels rise from the river bed, the Euphrates is symptom and symbol of an apocalypse no less urgent than the one Dürer represented: environmental groups have warned that the Tigris-Euphrates basin is losing water at devastatingly fast rates, with horrific consequences for food supplies and national industry, with its levels predicted to fall even further as temperatures rise due to global warming.

Francesca Wade is the author of Square Haunting: Five Women, Freedom and London Between the Wars. She is a 2022-23 fellow at the New York Public Library's Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, where she is working on a book about Gertrude Stein.



Rivers contain myths, life, death and mystery: they can be calming or threatening, harbingers of secrets or essential cargo. *Camp Water* offers a kind of guiding principle to Kira Freije's haunting exhibition, its invisible imprint felt inside the gallery as the ghostly double of the river flowing outside. In a way, the works in this show form elements in a fragmentary narrative, glimpsed yet never fully formed. Wandering among these enigmatic figures – shards of light glancing off their steel forms – there's a sense of something otherworldly, something not quite decipherable about their relationships to each other, to time, and to us. Is this kneeling body reaching upwards in desperate supplication – like Dürer's condemned – or in a gesture of euphoric joy? Are they in need of comfort, or secure in their solitude? Are the lamps that punctuate the space, connecting the separate figures like points on a map, a welcome guide, or a warning?

Freije's work invites such wondering: boundaries of time and place dissolve, as she forges almost supernatural creations using ancient, deeply skilled crafting processes, from glass-blowing to metalwork. These forms bear within them the labour of their making: the frames, skeletal yet sturdy, beneath their garments render them somewhere beyond the human, whether machine, angel, or simply material incarnated as something new, rare and enlivened. They cast back into the past just as they create something afresh: we meet them in the process of becoming, seeking guidance, testing their strength, looking upwards or outwards for presences only they can see.

If the river forms one pathway through this show, another is created by the lamps that light the way: the beacons that serve both to guide and to warn, to reveal – for better or worse – dangers looming in the distance. In medieval London, walkers could hire torch-bearers to light their way home through the winding streets; even into the Victorian era, these walking streetlights were a familiar sight in the nocturnal city. Before London was electrified, street lighting formed part of civic duty, and to hang a lantern outside one's door was an act of community: the lights were extinguished by municipal order in moments when the city was under threat, while in times of public mourning, streets were left unlit as a mark of respect.

fireworks (detail), 2022



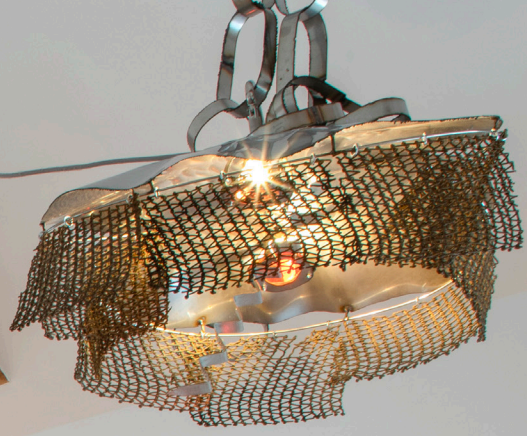
Here, lights make a community of these separate figures, anchored to the floor, each in their own world, yet sharing space as if in solidarity. Freije's lights are beautiful creations: *Butterfly* opening like a winged oyster to reveal hidden crevices; *river by night* rising up tall like a tree, a lighthouse, a globular tower of Babel; *Autumn dusk* dropping down from the ceiling in counterpoint, tethered to the building's structure by steel chains that call to mind the bodies that surround it. *memory of the voyager* recalls the shape of an indoor reading lamp, yet the glow emanating from the neck of a bottle – and the weathering on the glass that clasps it tight – brings the unmistakable scent of the beach, as if this strange object, only partially tamed, was washed up to shore by a forgiving tide. *Weary travellers gather, in unison eyes scour the dusty ground* peers down, its bulbous protrusions like a single many-eyed creature, or a mass of huddled bodies, come together in the act of looking for something precious to catch the faint trickle of light.

There's a talismanic quality to Freije's artworks: they are not quite of this world, and – like the ambiguous prophecies of myth – we can't be entirely sure whether the scene we are entering is one of calm or desperation, waving or drowning. Night is a time of shapeshifting: animals venture forth in confidence, streetlamps flicker on, stars become visible, things disappear or recede into silhouettes, the river flows and reflects the moon from its iridescent surface, occasionally expelling its detritus to be found on the banks amid the morning dew. We don't know when avenging angels might burst forth from the riverbed ready to wreak destruction on earth; if these are angels among us in the gallery, I like to think of them as benign presences, perhaps not averse to apocalyptic thinking, yet ready also to extend a comforting arm and offer a beacon of solace, like a drop of glowing amber in the hazy distance, lighting the weary traveller's way home.



Recognition of the world behind at nightfall (detail), 2022

1. from John Ashbery, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, 1975, New York: Viking Press





river by night (detail), 2022



Passages (detail), 2019





*Moving towards the calm one, whose arms open,
the breadth of happiness in measurable form, 2021*

List of works

1. **river by night**, 2022
stainless steel, mouth-blown glass,
lightbulb 250 x 50 x 50 cm
2. **Butterfly**, 2022
stainless steel, steel, glass roundels,
lightbulbs 28 x 58 x 50 cm
3. **Autumn dusk**, 2022
stainless steel, mouth-blown glass,
coiled wire, lightbulb
85 x 42 x 42 cm
4. **permanence of a sacred tongue**
2022, stainless steel, cast aluminium,
cotton 122 x 65 x 98 cm
5. **fireworks**, 2022
stainless steel, cast aluminium, wool
felt 180 x 135 x 56 cm
6. **memory of the voyager**, 2022
stainless steel, beach weathered
glass, coiled wire, lightbulb
45 x 37 x 37 cm
7. **Carousel**, 2022
stainless steel, mouth-blown glass,
coiled wire, lightbulb
109 x 41 x 41 cm
8. **Weary travellers gather, in
unison eyes scour the dusty
ground**, 2021
stainless steel, cast aluminium,
mouth blown glass, LED lamp
80 x 36 x 50 cm
9. **Moving towards the calm one,
whose arms open, the breadth
of happiness in measurable
form**, 2021
stainless steel, cast aluminium
166 x 67 x 85 cm
10. **Recognition of the world behind
at nightfall**, 2022
Stainless steel, cast aluminium
200 x 64 x 120 cm
11. **bleached haze scrapes rooftops,
rising morning**, 2023
stainless steel, mouth blown glass,
LED light
53 x 38 x 21 cm
12. **ripples congregate on the surface
at dusk**, 2023
stainless steel, mouth blown glass,
LED light 53 x 38 x 21 cm
13. **distant sounds of latches closing,
echo as warmth leaves slatted
doors**, 2023
stainless steel, mouth blown glass,
LED light
42 x 51 x 17 cm
14. **Passages**, 2019
stainless steel, mouth blown glass,
LED light
135 x 46 x 23 cm
15. **Awakes to ask did they decide**,
2019
stainless steel, mouth blown glass,
LED light
52 x 21.5 x 20 cm

Dimensions are given H x W x D



bleached haze scrapes rooftops, rising morning, 2023

Kira Frieje (b 1985, London) lives and works in London. She employs metal, fabric and found materials to produce materially rich sculptures that set out surreal landscapes that slip between time and place, but keep the figure, and emotive signalling at the centre. She studied at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, University of Oxford (2008-2011) and the Royal Academy Schools, graduating in 2016. After graduating from the Ruskin, Frieje worked with local blacksmiths in Sussex, acquiring metalwork skills such as cold forming and sand casting that have informed her subsequent work.

Frieje has a solo exhibition, *The Throat is a Threaded Melody*, at E-WERK Luckenwalde, Germany April–July 2023. Her work is included in *Trickster Figures: Sculpture and the Body*, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes Feb–May 2023, curated by Jes Fernie.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Meteorites*, the Approach (2022); *Mouthing the living, undetected, on breeze or breath*, Soft Opening, London (2019); *Companion to a Fall*, Turf Projects, London (2018); *The Violence of an Imagined Dusk*, Mackintosh Lane, London (2018). Recent group exhibitions include: *To the River*, Gianni Manhattan, Vienna (2020); *Via dell'Inferno*, Herald St at Galleria Spazia, Bologna, Italy (2020); *Far Back Must Go Who Wants to Do A Big Jump*, ChertLüdde, Berlin (2019).



Autumn Dusk (detail), 2022

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