

Alycia Pirmohamed

the water library

after Jumana Emil Abboud's  
*The Unbearable Halfness of Being*

CAMPLE—LINE

the water isn't ever just water  
'you know how it is in such stories'

told from one generation to another  
where lineage isn't only the same pair  
of ancient eyes passed down  
but also, the tenor of a voice that tells folktales.

the generation before and the generation after  
know the landscape is magic.  
know the landscape is infused with magic.  
know the landscape is the possibility of magic.

'you know how it is in such stories'

★

behind the olive wood sculpture  
there is a natural and endangered water source.  
*a spirited spring*  
all of its striking sibilance in a streaming mouthful.

behind the olive wood sculpture  
there is a secret door leading into the past.  
enter it, you are free.  
as you enter it, in your freedom,  
listen to the loose collection of echoes  
that rise from the spirited spring  
like the melodic range of a childhood folksong.

behind the olive wood sculpture  
hangs a tapestry of sea waves and hands,  
of hands in a spring, of the outward ripple  
as it moves closer to the knuckle,

to meet the hands, to be held.  
translucence and skin intermingle.  
water and body layer.  
hands within water, within memory,

hands within memorial–

in the topography  
of October

there is the memory of olive season  
and in the memory of olive season  
there propagates an intergenerational wisdom  
that cuts through the haunting.  
fruit becomes the vessel  
of one land memory to another,  
of one orator to another,  
of skin to lip to story.

the olive wood sculptures  
are the ‘guardians of everyone who is marginalised’

and behind the olive wood sculpture  
is the sacred olive tree.  
the olive tree is a portal into the past  
and future of Palestine.

★

with its clear neon eye  
each golden heirloom of the earth  
harbours the knowledge of a spring  
and spills out its earliest memory  
at once doubled and halved  
a mirrored gaze capturing two folktales

water overlooks a row of wax talismans  
okra wand and jewelled pomegranate half  
water teems beyond the shoreline of its frame  
onto each charmed object  
ein reflects eye / the fluorescent عين is  
the first ripple and its descendent

the water isn't ever just water  
'you know how it is in such stories'

told from one generation to another  
where lineage isn't only the ancient image  
of a once accessible spirited spring,  
but also, the collective recitation of poetry.

the generation before and the generation after  
know the landscape is love.  
know the landscape is infused with love.  
know the landscape is the possibility of love.

'you know how it is in such stories'

★

in the water there are traces of last  
night's empire.

intangible artefacts, narratives, footsteps  
overrun by the residue of materials  
loosened by displacement.

who is left to prepare for the advancing tideline  
of a written colonial map?

the landscape is pleating sleep  
into dream fragments

and when water descends down the earth's  
living pathways, it finds a home  
in the lamination of a story told and told  
and told again,

a story stratified throughout time,  
a story that lands in the cupped palms

of a child and her imagination.

★

is homeland a halfling?  
is water a halfling?  
is memory a halfling?  
is history a halfling?  
is landscape a halfling?  
is a ghost a halfling?  
is harvest a halfling?  
is language a halfling?  
is the hero a halfling?  
is this body a halfling?  
it is unbearable to halve.

*the water library* is a poem written by Alycia Pirmohamed in response to Jumana Emil Abboud's exhibition *The Unbearable Halfness of Being*, held at CAMPLE LINE from 7 October to 17 December 2023.

Alycia read an initial draft of *the water library* at CAMPLE LINE, alongside poems from her collection *Another Way to Split Water*, as part of Book Week Scotland 2023.

**Alycia Pirmohamed** is a Canadian-born poet based in Scotland. She is the author of *Another Way to Split Water*, published by Polygon (UK) and YesYes Books (US). In this collection of poems, she explores how ancestral memory reforms and transforms throughout generations, through stories told and retold, imagined and reimagined. Alycia is the co-founder of the Scottish BPOC Writers Network, a co-organiser of the Ledbury Poetry Critics Program, and she currently teaches on the MSt Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge. She was also winner of the 2020 Edwin Morgan Poetry Prize, and in 2023 won the Nan Shepherd Prize for underrepresented voices in nature writing.

**Jumana Emil Abboud** is a Palestinian artist based between Jerusalem and London where she is completing her PhD. Her practice is grounded in the Palestinian cultural landscape and she draws on the traditions of folklore, myth-making and storytelling that once animated community life. For more than a decade, Jumana has focused on oral histories relating to water sources, springs, wells and rivers, waters she refers to as 'spirited sites'. Her work has been presented widely in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including Thessaloniki Biennale of Contemporary Art (2023), Biennale of Sydney (2022), documenta 15 (2022) and *Common Grounds: Story / Heritage*, Casco Art Institute, Utrecht (2020).

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