

(Inter)(in)animating the Museum

Architecture, Place, Memory

In 2010, Yael Bartana was not the only (inter)(in)animator of art once named “degenerate” in the galleries of Berlin. In 2000, construction workers began extending Berlin’s U5 subway line, opened in 1930 and the only line to be located exclusively in the former East. Progress was slow, with the opening of the final stop, “Museuminsel” (Museum Island), occurring in December 2020.¹ But in 2010, it was art once designated as “degenerate” that halted construction when workers digging near the Rotes Rathaus found remains of the 1290 city hall, bringing archaeologists to the scene. In January 2010, they found first a small bronze bust and then more objects. By September 28, 2010, a collaborative research group established that these artworks had all been confiscated in 1937 through the Nazis’ degenerate art campaign.² On November 8, 2010, these unearthed objects were exhibited, quite surprisingly, in the Greek Courtyard of the Neues Museum.³

The Neues Museum specializes in ancient Egyptian, prehistoric, and classical objects. Though the catalogue and research projects contextualize these recovered works within the history of national socialism, the works’ reanimation as archaeological “finds” in some ways strips the sculptures of the very modernity for which they were condemned. The exhibition’s juxtaposition of works once labeled “degenerate” with ancient Greek statues could not help but recall Leni Riefenstahl’s celebration of Greek statuary in *Olympia* (1938).⁴ Without suppressing Nazi history, the installation and its accompanying catalogue nevertheless emphasize the museum as a place of salvage. They laud the gallery’s ability to illuminate these works’ “timeless worth” (*zeitlose Würde*) and claim that the modern works find their proper place amid “other archaeological finds from far distant past epochs” (*anderen archäologischen Funden aus weit länger vergangenen Epochen*).⁵ This

emphasis on timelessness risks deforming the specific history of genocidal violence to which the damage done to these recovered objects might testify by shunting that history into a more distant and/or mythologized past. The gallery environment further dissolves the specific history of these objects through the imperial museum ideology literally depicted in Hermann Schievelbein's nineteenth-century frieze on the walls of the Greek Courtyard. The frieze depicts ancient Pompeians escaping the eruption of Vesuvius. As people flee their homes, possessions in tow, they head, again surprisingly, for the Neues Museum, which originally opened its doors in 1859 as what Friedrich Wilhelm IV imagined as a "sanctuary for art and science."⁶ Thus the very walls of the museum seem impersonally to assert the similarities between and naturalness of all damaged objects, all catastrophes, all refugees, and all bygone times. In the catalogue, Matthias Wemhoff even explicitly invokes the frieze as celebrating the museum as refuge.⁷

This triumphalist museum narrative emerges contemporaneously and in tension with another museum initiative in Berlin (and elsewhere) that approaches the museum quite differently. As the website for the State Museums of Berlin reports, "The Benin Dialogue Group is an initiative that was brought to life in 2010, and brings together museums from Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden with partners from Nigeria and representatives of the royal court of Benin."⁸ In thinking across these parallel efforts to reanimate objects, museums, and the academic disciplines with which they are associated, it is helpful to turn to Dan Hicks's *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. In a chapter entitled "White Projection," Hicks, a member of the Benin Dialogue Group, introduces the museum less as a refuge from the logic of degeneracy than as the producer of it when he writes, "To this day, my academic disciplines—anthropology and archaeology—and my institutional workplace—the anthropology museum—are implicated in this history of racism, the degenerate display of supposedly 'savage' culture reduced to material form. Brute force, brutish displays."⁹ For Hicks, the understanding of how academic fields of study and museums have repressed knowledge of the brutality of colonial violence "shatters our image of the museum, forces us to question ourselves."¹⁰ Responding to attempts to redeem museums implicated in histories of violence through narratives of refuge, Hicks suggests, "Let us instead acknowledge the ongoing status of the museum as a weapon."¹¹

As museums and universities grapple with their (ongoing) implicatedness in life- and world-destroying ideologies and actions, often conducted in the name of education, research, and preservation, they frequently commission contemporary artists to participate in this process of institutional acknowledgment and self-reflection. (Inter)(in)animation plays an interesting role in museum efforts to reimagine themselves as more ethical, accountable spaces, to block some trajectories and open others. This chapter examines three contemporary art commissions

made by three distinct types of museums in three different countries. Each uses (inter)(in)animating tactics to engage violent histories that are embedded within the commissioning museums' walls, at times by imagining the world otherwise. First, I examine Canadian, New York-based artist Nancy Davenport's permanent installation in the Military Museum of the Bundeswehr in Dresden, *Der Koyote* (*Coyote*) (2011, 3:33, loop), a short looping digital photo animation that explicitly puts cartoon animation and militarism into conversation. The work's looping structure conceptually and temporally foregrounds Wile E. Coyote's symbolic associations with deathlessness, and through a series of tragicomic scenarios Davenport explores wartime phenomena such as pain, invulnerability, memory, victimhood, and guilt.¹² I then consider the anticolonial, community-building use of frame-by-frame animated tattoos in Trinidad and Tobago artist Gesiye's installation *The Wound Is a Portal*, commissioned by the Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum of Wales in Cardiff between August 2022 and January 2024 as part of the museum's "Reframing Picton Project."¹³ This youth-led project involving the Sub Sahara Advisory Panel (SSAP), led by Fadhili Maghiya, and Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum of Wales, responded to the Black Lives Matter movement by investigating the museum's relation to the brutal legacy of Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Picton (1758–1815), governor of Trinidad between 1797 and 1803. Wall labels also position the exhibition as a response to a 2020 Welsh government audit that found "over 200 Welsh statues, streets, and buildings connected to the slave trade, with [Thomas] Picton being the most commemorated figure."¹⁴ Finally, I turn my attention to Canadian, Philadelphia-based artist David Hartt's engagement of the hyperreal possibilities of CGI world making in *Et in Arcadia Ego* (2022, 15:13), a looping digital video made in conjunction with a separate site-specific work by Hartt, *A Colored Garden* (2021). Both works were commissioned by, and collaborations with, the Glass House, a National Trust Historic Site in New Canaan, Connecticut, and the earlier work plays a role in the later piece. The Glass House was built by the pioneering curator and architect Philip Johnson, and the historic site includes forty-nine acres of land, thirteen other structures, and a permanent art collection. These components all have roles to play in *Et in Arcadia Ego*. The Glass House's mission statement includes a rejection of racism and fascism; a commitment to Black lives, Black history, and the advancement of "justice and equity for all people"; and a pledge to engage in "frank dialogue and open exchange about all aspects of its history, including Philip Johnson's own history."¹⁵ This last phrase hotlinks to Johnson's biography, which notes how he contributed to architecture, design, and curation; that he lived "relatively openly as a gay man"; and that, while a journalist, "he made statements that included not only pro-fascist attitudes but also anti-Semitic commentary."¹⁶ Although this text provides useful context for the Glass House, in *Et in Arcadia Ego* Hartt refuses modes of institutional self-reflection that would recirculate or invest in Johnson's violence. Instead, Hartt activates the (inter)(in)animating capacities of sound, music, architecture, performance,

painting, and animation to explore relationally determined perceptions of scale and to catalyze “terraforming” interventions into place-based histories.

(INTER)(IN)ANIMATING THE MILITARY MUSEUM

Coyote (2011) was commissioned for a permanent installation conceptualized by artist-curator Klaus vom Bruch for Daniel Libeskind’s redesigned and expanded Military Museum of the Bundeswehr (hereafter MMBD) in Dresden, an expansion that, at twenty thousand square meters, made it the single largest history museum in Germany (figure 22).¹⁷ *Coyote* is one of three works commissioned for permanent, looping projection on screens that form the end wall of three gigantic rolling cases on the museum’s third floor, dedicated to the theme of “War and Memory.”¹⁸ Vom Bruch wanted these works to emphasize female perspectives on war.¹⁹ *Coyote* appropriates aesthetic strategies from both World War II animated propaganda films and Looney Tunes cartoons to activate the viewers’ critical reflections on the role of museum architecture in framing carefully curated histories of war. Bringing the comedic chaos of Wile E. Coyote into the museum’s building site, Davenport explodes the boundaries separating different elements of war history, including settler colonialism, medicine, and entertainment, and in doing so animates the possibilities of the museum understood as a permanent work in progress.

The MMBD has had a variety of uses since its founding in 1897 as a public military museum and arsenal. After the post–World War I demilitarization of Germany, it served both as living quarters and as the Royal Saxon Army Museum. It became first the “Army Museum of the Wehrmacht” in 1939 and then the “Armed Forced Museum” in 1940. As it withstood the 1945 bombings, survivors of the fire-bombing fled to it, giving the building an affective charge within politicized debates about postwar Dresden. In 1945, parts of the museum’s collection were given to the USSR; then they were returned in 1957 to the DDR; and in 1972, the “East German Armed Forces Museum” was opened. After reunification on October 3, 1990, the Bundeswehr acquired the museum along with the East German forces, and the space gradually became the newly conceptualized MMBD.²⁰ In 2002, after an international competition, Polish American architect Daniel Libeskind was commissioned for the project, a choice that produced strong responses, including from Libeskind himself. In one interview, Libeskind, who does not identify as a pacifist, states, “As someone who was born immediately after the war, whose parents survived the Holocaust, whose entire family disappeared in Polish concentration camps, I did not need to search the archives for history, it is part of my own life.”²¹

In Dresden, extreme right-wing factions united in their opposition to Libeskind’s intervention, invoking high costs and architectural tradition in support of their anti-Semitism-inflected position, describing the renovation as a “slap in the face of German architecture.”²² But critique of Libeskind did not come only from extreme right-wing positions. Comparing proposals for the development of



FIGURE 22. Military Museum of the Bundeswehr, Dresden.

the Ground Zero site, Lauren Kogod and Michael Osman resisted Libeskind's collective projects, which include the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Imperial War Museum in Manchester, and the rebuilding of the World Trade Center Site, for their effort to "represent abstractions like 'democracy' or the American Constitution in built form."²³ They argued, "Now that Libeskind's professional specialization has become the commemoration of historical crimes, his very presence also asks us to discern between memorialization and a maudlin spectacularization of grief that slides into jingoism."²⁴ These charged debates about memorial architecture provide an essential backdrop for the MMBD's contemporary art commissions.

Libeskind's website describes the architect's vision of inserting a 140-ton wedge of glass, concrete, and steel into the 130-year-old building through language that equates transparency and democracy: "The façade's openness and transparency is intended to contrast with the opacity and rigidity of the existing building. The latter represents the severity of the authoritarian past, while the former reflects the transparency of the military in a democratic society."²⁵ The steel-framed viewing platform at the point of the wedge is open to the elements, allowing viewers not only to look out onto Dresden but also to ponder the relationship between the museum, the city, and the body of the viewer. But why does this matter? And what is the relation between Libeskind's expansion, the museum's collection, and Davenport's *Coyote*?

Dresden plays a thorny role in historiographic debates about national socialism and Holocaust remembrance, and how those histories relate to other acts of violence in World War II. On February 13, 1945, British and American bombers firebombed Dresden, killing around twenty-five thousand people, an event that right-wing extremists denying or relativizing the Holocaust often take up. The bombing of Dresden is instrumentalized in other ways too. Most recently, as Raz Segal has shown, in the wake of Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians, Israeli television's "pro-Netanyahu Channel 14 called for Israel to 'turn Gaza to Dresden.'" ²⁶ Political debates about the restoration of the city's destroyed and damaged landmarks, many of which were left standing as memorial sites until the late twentieth century, coincided with the MMBD's expansion. ²⁷ While some viewed the desire for complete restoration as a sign of Germany's desire to "move on" from the Holocaust, others argued that it would remove architectural damage that served to sustain narratives of German victimhood. Theodor W. Adorno explicitly highlights this dangerous use of Dresden in "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," first delivered as a radio lecture on February 7, 1960: "The quite common move of drawing up a balance sheet of guilt is irrational, as though Dresden compensated for Auschwitz. Drawing up such calculations, the haste to produce counter-arguments in order to exempt oneself from self-reflection, already contain something inhuman, and military actions in the war . . . are scarcely comparable to the administrative murder of millions of people." ²⁸ In an insight of vital importance for the contemporary moment, Adorno adds: "I consider the survival of National Socialism *within* democracy to be potentially more menacing than the survival of fascist tendencies *against* democracy." ²⁹ The significance of Dresden's role in historiographic debates around World War II is further complicated by the city's having been part of the former East Germany, which, Susan Neiman argues, "did more, at every level, to denazify than its anti-Communist neighbor to the West." ³⁰ Today's architectural debates about Dresden within a united Germany must navigate these ideologically distinct German responses to the country's Nazi past. This makes Dresden a useful site for thinking about how memory institutions structure the relationship between the present and the past using nationalist war histories. ³¹

For some, the fact that animation's essence involves an ability to mobilize inanimate objects makes it ill-suited to mediating the finality of death. But perhaps this quality of American cartoon bodies that Ôtsuka Eiji describes as "deathlessness" and that Thomas Lamarre, drawing on Ôtsuka, describes as "bodies that undergo radical deformation without dying," is well-suited to visualizing the kinds of ideological revenants that Adorno describes, which are particularly hard to visualize because of their morphing entanglement with adjacent ideological formations. ³² This is Davenport's gambit as she puts Wile E. Coyote and Dresden's unfinished history into conversation within an endless, photo-animated loop that repeatedly references the museum's architectural expansion. In doing so, this work

(inter)(in)animates reflection on violence's repetitions and changes, and the relationship between perpetrators and victims.

There's tension between Adorno's statement on Dresden and Libeskind's architectural program. The architect claims that his intervention fosters collective thinking about violence by having the tip of the building's wedge be directly aligned with the coordinates at which the British dropped the first wave of bombs in 1945 and by designing the wedge with a 40.1 degree angle to mirror the angle of what is known as the "cone of destruction" imprinted on the cityscape by the Allied bombs in 1945.³³ These precise acts of design might seem to invite visitors to inhabit the museum from the perspective of German victimhood, although Libeskind emphatically denies this interpretive possibility, stating, "No, on no account. The building acquits no one of responsibility for his or her own history. On the contrary."³⁴ George Packer suggests that Libeskind's blunt design stands—in a good way—at odds with the city's recent erasure of most traces of the firebombing and the city's East German socialist history, but the signature viewing platform nevertheless still centers the sterilized and nostalgic restored cityscape.³⁵

The museum has proactively distanced itself from local neo-Nazi activity, first in July 2010, when a staff historian, Wolfgang Fleischer, published a book, *Sachsen 1945*, with the press of the racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Islamic National Democratic Party of Germany (NDP), and then again in February 2012, when a historian discovered three extreme right-wing magazines for sale in the museum's bookstore.³⁶ These and similar events catalyzed the opening of a 2013 exhibition on right-wing extremism, accompanied by public discussions.³⁷ Cristian Cercel describes such efforts as only "tentative steps" toward a fuller embrace of an "agonistic mode of remembering" that engages with perpetrators and victims in a non-relativizing and critical way. Cercel sees this mode of remembering as at odds with the museum's "authoritative voice," including as expressed through "Libeskind's penetrative architectural reinvention of the museum" and the museum's "relationship with the military and by its rather uncritical embrace of the current political order."³⁸ But where in this memory landscape does *Coyote* fit? Which histories, if any, are (inter)(in)animated by Davenport's Loony Tune-inspired work? And does the fact that *Coyote* is commissioned by a military-owned museum make it inescapably complicit with war making? This was certainly the position taken by Claes Danielsen, director of the Dokwoche Leipzig festival, who distanced himself from a film series curated by the MMBD's Jan Kindler and screened at the MMBD as part of the festival. "War," Danielsen explained, "is not a means of realizing peace. . . . Dok Leipzig will not let itself be politically instrumentalized."³⁹

Danielsen's refusal to collaborate with the military on principle begs important questions, especially when considered in the light of Coco Fusco's claim that "too many activists focus their attention exclusively on the victims . . . obfuscating our fundamental bonds with the victimizers who are our compatriots and who act in our name."⁴⁰ Just as Libeskind notes the "changed role" of the German military

in his original plan for the renovation, so Packer in his review of the renovation describes Germany as “one of the most pacifist countries on earth,” noting that this sentiment “in some quarters extends to hostility toward anything military.”⁴¹ And yet the opening of the renovated museum coincided with the year in which Germany ended conscription in January 2011 under the leadership of cool German defense minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg. In 2014, he stated, “In 10 years [i.e., in 2024] we will be more professional, faster and more flexible. We will have the potential to deploy our soldiers around the world and still not neglect our own defense.”⁴² Almost a decade later in November 2023, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced Germany’s new defense policy, known as the *Zeitenwende*, in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Defense minister Boris Pistorius described Germany’s obligation to “be the backbone of deterrence and collective defence in Europe” and to be “ready to fight a war” as becoming “a grown up country in terms of security policy,” thus aligning the pacifism and antimilitarism Packer celebrates with immaturity.⁴³

Davenport’s animation places at the museum’s heart an interminable refusal of both the military museum and its self-reflexive expansion. *Coyote* also puts the history of German warfare in dialogue with a longer global history of imperialism and the military-industrial complex, and in doing so, the work raises awareness about what Angela Davis describes as “a spectrum of violence” that includes state violence, war, police, torture, and capital punishment, noting that “while we cannot simultaneously eliminate the entire spectrum of violence, we can always insist on an awareness of these connections.”⁴⁴ *Coyote*’s animated loop adds museums, the pharmaceutical industry, the military-industrial complex, settler colonialism, cartoon animation, and capitalist speculation to the spectrum Davis lays out. Early in the creative process, Davenport envisioned her project in this way: “My piece will be a series of animated photographs/episodes featuring a character obsessed with carrying out a series of escalating schemes to stop the construction of the Libeskind building. . . . Like Jones’ coyote, my character is luckless, inept and his violence always bounces back to himself, back to a self-inflicted chaos. Unlike the Jones cartoons there will be no roadrunner, my coyote subject will operate schizophrenically from both sides; stalking himself and multiplied in every role.”⁴⁵

The finished version, which draws on Wile E. Coyote cartoons and animated war propaganda, opens with a jaunty soundtrack accompanying a shot of the MMBD’s construction site, followed by a sparkling cartoon title that overlays a photograph of the museum-in-process. The composited digital animation creates a jerky effect of artificial or uncanny motion as a humanoid Coyote mechanically blinks and zooms from one place to another. The work creates a sense of no real place or time as residual traces of “old media” and other temporal markers permeate the work, layering specific historical referents within photoshopped time and space. This use of animation to layer time provokes visitors to reflect on how their own sense of embodied time and place relates to these spatio-temporal coordinates collaged

into the loop. We time-travel via the expanding architecture of the 1871 Albertstadt garrison building, through the digital remediation of a grainy analog recording of crooner Al Bowlly's "I'll String Along with You" taken from the 1934 Warner Bros.'s musical *Twenty Million Sweethearts* (dir. Ray Enright), and through references to a Cold War-era Chuck Jones.⁴⁶ In *Coyote*, material traces of a historical past coexist alongside the unknown possibilities of a future continuously evoked through the installation's (in)animation of the museum as a permanent work in progress. Over the course of the loop's repetitions and through the familiar nonfatality of Coyote's disasters, however, the narrative uncertainties of the work diminish over time. In some ways, Coyote's looping, failing efforts to prevent the museum's expansion offer an analogue to the predicament of the contemporary artist commissioned to reanimate museums and raise the question of how to prevent Rose's critical embrace of failure as one antidote to war from slipping into despair.

Animation effects flip a sparkling title page from right to left, suggesting a tactile comic book, temporal disorder (beginning at the end?), or a perspective on the museum of war from outside left-to-right Latinized reading conventions. This reveals Coyote, a photo-animated white man holding a crash helmet under his arm. Another page turns reveals a bottle of pills, labeled Acetaminophen/Codeine, an opioid prescribed to Wile E. Coyote "FOR PAIN," foregrounding the role of the pharmaceutical industry in the imbricated worlds of museums and war, and recalling Frankfurt School debates about whether the cartoon body can prevent or simply manage suffering (figure 23).⁴⁷ As the lid pops off the bottle, a colorful array of Vicodin and pill-like candies inscribed with peace doves and butterflies fly into the atmosphere. The pills' movement mirrors the diagram of pills escaping a bottle that appears on an orange "Controlled Substances" sticker on the bottle, which strongly resembles an exploding cartoon stick of dynamite. Davenport (inter)(in)animates a resonance between pain-numbing, sleep-inducing pills and exploding cartoon dynamite, suggesting a confusion between problems and cures in this space of institutionalized war memory. These unleashed narcotic pain relievers seem to numb the sensitivity and consciousness of the museum depicted in the background.

While the prescription posits Coyote as a contradictory character both capable of feeling pain and numbed to it, these animated pills also recall the WT-Metall TH6/1300 dog transport trailer exhibited outside the museum, most recently used in Afghanistan and designed for "operations to locate ordnance, explosives, mines, and drugs," as well as the museum's display of a tube of the amphetamine-based drug/weapon Pervitin. The Wehrmacht consumed an estimated thirty-five million Pervitin tablets and also used this drug to test and stretch the labor-capacity threshold of concentration camp prisoners.⁴⁸ Though humanist film theories have often marginalized the immortal cartoon body in discussions of the moral and political capacity of different types of moving images, Davenport posits the cartoon body as well-suited to visualizing the inhumanity of human experiments at



FIGURE 23. Wile E. Coyote's pill bottle, in Nancy Davenport's *Coyote*, 2011.

and with the limit separating life from death, tolerable from intolerable. *Coyote* (inter)(in)animates the imbrication of military violence, capitalist aspirations for limitless labor and profit, and a medical-industrial complex focused on expanding what we are able to bear.⁴⁹

Over the course of the short loop, Davenport's "Coyote" ends up crashing into the ground head first when the zip-wire he is traveling along breaks; shooting himself in the head while trying to set up an Acme-assisted gizmo to kill a construction worker on the museum site (figure 24); and blowing himself high into the sky above Dresden during an attempt to dynamite the museum in progress. This last example gives viewers access to Coyote's bird's-eye view of Dresden, evoking the firebomber's perspective, before he crash-lands in the grounds of the military museum (figure 25). But what are we to make of this Coyote's self-destructive tendencies, his violent resistance to the museum's expansion, and his seeming capacity to withstand any amount of force? How are we to read this displacement of the American cartoon's body-without-risk by pixilated photographs of a deathless human body in this new, German context?⁵⁰

Chuck Jones began developing Wile E. Coyote for Warner Bros. in 1945, the same year as the bombings of Dresden, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima. The cartoon first appeared in 1948 amid the redistribution of global power and the emergence of the United States as the world's mightiest superpower. Jones's inspiration for Wile E.



FIGURE 24. Self-sabotage, in Nancy Davenport's *Coyote*, 2011.

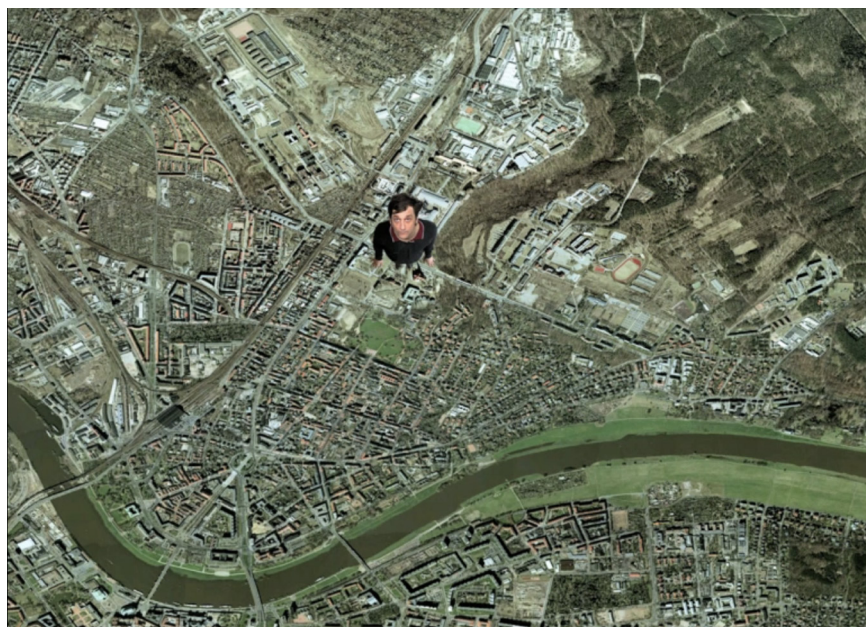


FIGURE 25. Crashing into Dresden, in Nancy Davenport's *Coyote*, 2011.

Coyote was Mark Twain's autobiographical Wild West narrative *Roughing It* (1872). In his autobiography, Jones quotes Twain's description of the coyote at length, and the title that accompanies Jones's Coyote / Roadrunner sketch reads, "The Coyote—Mark Twain discovered him first."⁵¹ Thus *Coyote* (inter)(in)animates a dialogue between European and North American histories of violence. In Twain, the coyote becomes entangled with settler colonial violence against Indigenous people and narratives of speculative risk and failure too. Twain writes that the coyote will "eat anything in the world that his first-cousins, the desert-frequenting Indians will, and they will eat anything they can bite," adding that these are "the only creatures known to history who will eat nitroglycerine and ask for more if they survive."⁵² *Roughing It* treats silver speculation and paper money at length. The front pages recall when Twain was a millionaire "for ten days," and the dreams of the silver miner are lavishly illustrated in the first American edition of the work. Dresden is one of Europe's primary centers of silver production, and the history of print reproduction, a history to which both Twain and Davenport belong, has roots in the speculative, extractive history of this place.⁵³ Twain inspires Coyote's comic self-destruction and supposedly harmless explosability, but this comedy has roots in a racist comparison of the coyote and Indigenous people with regard to supposed self-destructive tendencies. While Wile E. Coyote's literary roots evoke an entangled history of financial speculation, land exploitation, and genocide, Jones's animated shorts like *War and Pieces* (Jones, 1963; released 1964) depict a Coyote whose relation to the ACME corporation renders visible, in comic form, the effects of the intertwined military- and medical-industrial complexes on a body that is both victim of and embedded within these complexes, as well as the violence this body in turn produces. In *Coyote*, the ACME corporation logo appears throughout Libeskind's construction site, highlighting the capitalist face of both contemporary war and the contemporary museum.

Coyote invites viewers to ponder what becomes visible and thinkable when American cartoon violence and the international pharmaceutical industry are placed—permanently—at the heart of Germany's military museum. The work considers the histories of war, speculative finance, territorial expansion, medicine, and suicidal impulses, not as being in contrast to the animated world of comedy and the pleasures of Saturday morning cartoons, but as related to them. The critical potential of *Coyote* derives from, rather than transcends, the logic of the cartoon, and specifically the cartoon's negation of pain and death. It foregrounds the obscenity of treating people as cartoon bodies.⁵⁴ Coyote's targetless violence also mirrors the spatial and temporal disjunctions between perpetrators and victims in remote warfare, epitomized in the work's aerial point of view, which evokes both the Allied firebombing of Dresden and the role of vertical media in the overlapping spheres of contemporary war and media.⁵⁵ Coyote's self-targeting further analogizes a war in which the only clearly articulated enemy is a feeling, terror, and the museum's wall label encourages viewers to think in these terms:

"The coyote contextualizes the significance of architecture in war and terrorism using the shell of the museum and ironises it by means of the failing protagonist." This self-inflicted cartoon violence also registers the real risk of "self"-targeting within the contemporary military context, the high levels of suicide among military personnel during and after active service, and the domestic violence committed, particularly against women, by some returning veterans. These nonheroic acts of violence and deaths tend to be suppressed in official accountings of war. Davenport's satirical construction of an endless war with the self brings the boomerang effect of military violence into focus. But simultaneously, it mirrors the way the mainstream US media's statistical reports on war see only American lives and deaths. Feminist counterinformation sources such as Brown University's "Costs of War" project, codirected by Catherine Lutz, Neta Crawford, and Stephanie Savell, interrupt the self-enclosed loop that Davenport's architectural (inter)(in)animation highlights in the space of war memory and offer alternative methodologies for more justly appraising the pervasive costs of war.⁵⁶

ANIMATING THE ART MUSEUM

The Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum of Wales' tripartite project "Reframing Picton" included the reinstallation, in a less prominent location, of Sir Martin Archer Shee's *Portrait of Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Picton* (1810s). The painting was given to the museum in 1907 but was put into storage in November 2021 in response to Black Lives Matter protests. The reinstallation leaves the painting in its wooden travel crate, suggesting that it is "in motion" and only temporarily located. The label accompanying the crated painting challenges "the hero narrative" and illustrates the complicity between male heroism and colonial historiography by ironically citing a 1911 textbook, Jos. A. de Suze's *Trinidad* (1911), which states, "It is usual with those who do not know the character of Picton to hold him up as a harsh and brutal man. Shame! The brave and gallant Picton a harsh and brutal man? To say so is to utter a foul falsehood and calumnize the fair name of a great hero!"

The first part of the exhibition underscores that Picton was considered brutal and cruel in his own day, including for his execution of twelve enslaved people and his torture of the fourteen-year-old Louisa Calderón. Other labels detail Picton's sensational trial of 1806 for the "illegal torture" of Calderón, his defense, his conviction, and his 1808 retrial, through which his initial conviction was subsequently overturned.⁵⁷ The wall labels and display cases reproduce all kinds of Picton memorabilia, both heroizing and demonizing. Thus, even as this first part of the exhibition seeks to reflect on the museum's implicatedness in the construction of Picton's heroism, it simultaneously recirculates graphic spectacles of Calderón's suffering in the manner Saidiya Hartman critiques in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997). Questioning how viewers are "called upon to participate in such scenes" and how

such scenes hide from view the “habitual violence” that made the institution of slavery thinkable, Hartman asks:

Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of the world-destroying capacities of pain, the distortions of torture, the sheer unrepresentability of terror, and the repression of the dominant accounts? Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and suffering? What does the exposure of the violated body yield? Proof of black sentience or the inhumanity of the “peculiar institution”? Or does the pain of the other merely provide us with the opportunity for self-reflection? At issue here is the precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between witness and spectator.⁵⁸

While the two commissioned works that follow this early part of the exhibition explicitly avoid such remediations of torture, they take different approaches to this refusal. The Laku Neg collective’s installation, *Spirited*, begins with this text: “Thisbe, Present, and Luisa Calderon are three named victims of Picton’s brutal regime in Trinidad. What would they say if they were here? Our installation aims to transform their torture into dance, their scream into song in a yard of play and praise—to rise, despite confinement and oppression.” This work recognizes that historical violence is not past, noting, “We re-claim power from the devastation of their lives and ours.” It also recognizes those “who have so far been unnamed in the telling of colonial history.” By contrast, Gesiye’s *The Wound Is a Portal* prioritizes those living and inventing new life forms in the wake of colonialism and slavery, grappling with the perpetuation of oppressive structures and the transgenerational impact of secondary trauma. The introductory wall label for this (inter)(in)animating work states: “The trauma of slavery has deeply affected the African diaspora’s relationship to the earth. Under brutal colonists like Picton, Black people in Trinidad were tortured and forced to labour a land they were brought to against their will. This legacy of colonial violence was recorded in the body, turned into patterns of behaviour and passed down through generations.” Of their project’s relation to Picton, Gesiye acknowledges that, from the outset, they thought, “Yeah, I’m not even putting him in my film.” Instead, Gesiye describes her “offering” as “a portal through which shared joy forms a bridge to personal and collective liberation,” and it is animation, here inseparable from tattooing, that opens that portal up. Gesiye’s installation actively reclaims and reframes many of the features of what Krista A. Thompson describes as “the culture of vision” that participates in the colonial and postcolonial “tropicalization” and “whitening” of the Anglophone Caribbean.⁵⁹ This culture includes, Thompson suggests with reference to Jamaica, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperial naturalist images of nature, often magnified and presented from “a low vantage point,” endowing the plants of the islands with “an animated and larger-than-life appearance, exoticizing their presence”; and touristic, tropicalizing uses of photographic portraiture that present Caribbean residents as fantasy commodities outside of history.⁶⁰

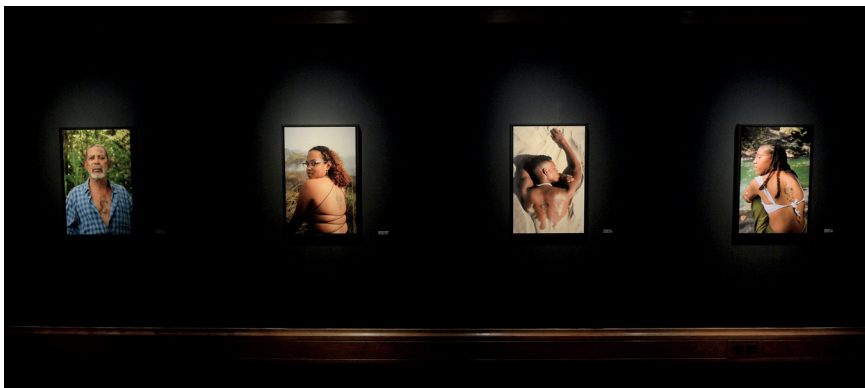


FIGURE 26. Installation shot for Gesiye's *The Wound Is a Portal*, 2022.

The Wound Is a Portal has three components within a single rectangular room that has a door at either end: portrait photography, live-action video, and photo-animation (figure 26). Four portraits of Trinidadians appear on each of the long, black-painted walls. These people were all strangers to each other when the project began, and all were willing to be tattooed by Gesiye. The call expressed interest in locating people of different generations and from different parts of the island to participate in a project focused on connection, healing, and joy. At the center of each portrait sits a similar but unique tattoo, placed over the heart of each sitter, some on the back, some on the chest.⁶¹ These tattoos link individuals across the photographic frames, and the tattoo's location determined the subject's pose in the image. Safiya Hoyte (Barataria, b. 1998) sits back to the camera, eyes closed behind glasses, against the backdrop of a green body of water; Kevon Samuels (Laventille, b. 1998) lies buried in the sand, back exposed, eyes closed, cheek resting on his left arm; Dawn-Marie Alexander (Point Fortin, 2002) looks askance through glasses and over her shoulder against a misty backdrop of trees and grasses; Robert Price (St. James, b. 1944) faces the camera against a backdrop of foliage, his blue check shirt open to reveal a tattooed chest; Nadine Marshall-Joseph (Piarco, b. 1976) also stares into the camera against a coastal backdrop of rocks and water, a tattoo appearing above the neckline of a black camisole alongside a second tattoo of a large, colored butterfly; Adam "Mar" Andrews (Chaguanas, b. 1980) smiles in profile against a wall of foliage, showing a tattooed back and standing in the shadow of anthurium flowers; Alicia Viarruel (St. Joseph, b. 1988) turns away from the camera, hands leaning on a giant agave plant; and Joan Ballantyne (Arima, b. 1959) faces the camera, smiling, waist deep in a river, the chest tattoo alongside others that adorn Ballantyne's left shoulder and arm.

The photographs are punctuated at each end of the gallery by a moving-image work, a live-action film, and an animated short, and the tattoos link these components as they do the participants in the project (figure 27). The live-action film



FIGURE 27. Live-action dance in Gesiye's *The Wound Is a Portal*, 2022.

opens with Gesiye dancing on the point where Columbus landed as a voice-over establishes the land, and not Columbus, as Trinidad's point of origin: "Every story starts with the land. It is the stage and the main character, without which none of us would exist. This story starts with an island, a portal in the water, a home. The land is a witness to all of our taking and having and owning." The voice-over then introduces the concept of the line, a central element of the tattoo linked to notions of property, boundaries, and containers: "We draw our line in the sand. This is mine, that is yours. Here: a fence, a wall, a border, a boundary. A container to make sense of the world." Subsequent scenes show one person making a clay vessel, another being tattooed by Gesiye, people gathering in various configurations, and interviews with participants about their lives on the island. The oldest member of the group, seventy-seven-year-old Robert Price, explains that there was much his father didn't tell him and notes that because he was born under colonial rule, "whatever we heard was what they put into our heads." Underscoring the importance of counternarratives to Gesiye's project, Price continues, "My father, he was totally against it. During the early days of Eric Williams, he taught us differently. He opened our eyes to really see the British just raped the Caribbean." Price describes his experience of studying mechanics in England in the 1960s as "very, very racial," and describes the legacy of educational violence as "something we have to live with for the rest of our lives."⁶² Yet even as Price and other participants describe the totality of world making that colonial violence attempts to impose, the work itself refuses those attempts. A soundtrack composed by Omar Jarra accompanies intercut images of waterfalls, landscapes, community, dance, and tattooing as the voice-over celebrates "a borderless belonging" and declares, "God is a Trini; we create whole worlds here."

In conversation, Gesiye discusses the duration of colonial and purportedly *post*-colonial violence that “resonates still in our bodies, in our space,” and asks, “What happened when so many spaces that were being colonized were not described as ‘war’?” Addressing the terminology used to periodize violence, they continue, “War is such a finite category. How do we describe what we’re feeling if it’s not that, even as we’re feeling it? What happens to something that doesn’t feel like it’s past? It feels like we’re in a constant stretch of time . . . this behavior, this looped pattern. . . . It’s almost like ‘post’ has taken us outside of time again.” These issues inform the animated loop at the other end of the gallery that treats each tattoo as an individual frame within what Gesiye describes as “a shared story” that links a group of strangers together and uses animated tattoos to bridge bodies, stories, and land.

Every tattoo is arguably always-already an animated image through its placement on the living ground of skin. It is, by definition, an image that moves, changes, morphs, and grows as it inhabits the living, aging body. As a medium in which the line emerges by ink permeating skin through thousands of tiny holes that together make the image, it is animation-like in its formal engagement with parts and wholes. The critical potential of this part-whole dynamic for thinking about the unruly temporalities, geographies, and effects of colonial warfare and slavery is explicitly activated by Gesiye through their exploration of the link between tattooing and animation (video 6). Frame-by-frame photographic processes thread together the eight tattoos in a potent looping form of “double animation” in which already-animate images take on collective movements. This slowly generates a virtual movement out of the art- and land-based community projects that Gesiye creates over time. Just as animation activates a tension between the static frame and the moving image, so here there is also a conceptual tension between the mobility of people, terrain, and images, and the work’s investment in place-based communities. Through its (inter)(in)animating qualities, the work mediates evolving ways of being in the midst of the challenges posed for members of Trinidad-based and diasporic communities affected by the island’s histories of forced displacement, migration driven by educational and economic inequity, disruptions in the cross-generational transmission of knowledge, and differing experiences of place under colonial and postcolonial regimes of governance.

Like Davenport’s *Coyote*, Gesiye’s animated loop is also deeply entangled with architecture. But the architecture set in motion by the animated tattoos is not that of a European, monumental museum but rather the vernacular architecture of Trinidadian homes, recalling Trinidadian artist Irénée Shaw’s insertion of the visual repertoire of ordinary domestic life in her *Gilded Cages* series. As Thompson explains, “In one work, *Neighborhood* (1992), Shaw presents a view of the island as it appeared from her home, a snapshot of the landscape as framed by her window. Struck by a sense that this accidental vista did not resemble any of the contemporaneous commercial or touristic landscape paintings of Trinidad, Shaw decided to represent this view and to pinpoint the precise elements that marred Trinidad’s



VIDEO 6. Tattoo animation. Gesiye, *The Wound Is a Portal*, 2022.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.228.6>



landscape aesthetics.”⁶³ While “home” might suggest walls that shut the body in, the architectural element Gesiye references via the basic outline of all eight tattoos is the concrete louvre ventilation block. This allows light and air to flow through built spaces even as it provides both privacy and protection from the rain. As Gesiye puts it, “It’s a ventilation system that helps let in light and some signs of nature from the outside to the inside; so you can be inside but still feel connected to the outside. You can see people passing. That was the idea—letting that space or connection to the land into your heart, to create a connection through all of the participants. It’s a kind of letting out the stuffiness too.” This sense of flow through portals and connection between the inside and outside, between a person and the rest of the world, is reinforced in the interaction of the animation with the live-action film’s depiction of the dancing body in dialogue with the flow of waterfalls and rivers, the rhythm of the ocean, scenes of intimacy and joy, and relaxed bodies, simply breathing in and out.

This combination of privacy and connection to the world occurs also in the dynamic process of tattooing. First, Gesiye explains, the pain involved with the tattooing process connects the person being tattooed “intensely to the body.”

"It's hard to be somewhere else!" they exclaim, laughing. Yet the pain involved, they argue, is both something "that you've consented to" and something that "you also know is transforming you; you're not going to physically be the same after the experience." Animation theory has often highlighted the violence embedded in the drawn animated body being squashed and stretched by the animator. Gesiye, however, structures the body-transforming experience of tattooing within frameworks of consent, connection, and privacy, as a one-to-one participatory partnership with the animator-tattooer that evolves over the course of a day of story sharing and dialogue to which museum visitors are not privy. For Gesiye, the combination of tattooing, animation, and the sharing of stories over time and across generations acknowledges the pain inflicted by the multiheaded violence of colonialism that includes blocking the flow of stories across generations. Just as the tattoo becomes a living image on and in the skin of the one who wears it, so, as the single frame depicting each person's tattoo is brought into contact with the other "frames," (inter)(in)animation visualizes life lived in community, where differences give rise to shimmering vibrations and lively pulsations.⁶⁴ The ventilation block remains consistent across all the tattoos, but Gesiye allows "all the elements within the space to be shifting and moving." They add, "This relates to the thing about breath. I told everyone that the movement would be very subtle, and I wanted it to look like there was just air blowing through the tattoo." Against the changing hues of different people's skin, a palm frond and an anthurium plant seem to dance in the wind. A hummingbird flies up to the top of the shape, then back down to a black circle, perhaps the sun. It dips its beak to feed while a butterfly, for Gesiye a symbol of transformation, flies around the circle.⁶⁵ A river flows through the length of the tattoo, graphically reiterating the strong presence of water in the photographs, the live-action film, and Trinidad itself. Gesiye notes, "I don't think I meant to include water as prominently as I did, but it became essential to the flow. Think of what passes through us and what we unintentionally hold on to—'bad flow,' or what can stagnate. I was intentionally thinking of the healing power of flow and water, so the tattoo contains a river." Discussing the tattoos' resonance with healing and flow, Gesiye notes that some white Trinidadians resisted the project, labeling it as "black magic," "blood-letting," or "obeah," and she compares their attitudes to Picton's own fearful, punishing response to West African spiritual practices.⁶⁶

Gesiye's (inter)(in)animation gives visual form to structural ventilation and flow as a dynamic interaction among nature, architecture, people, and history within the island. It is not just the flora and fauna that possess movement in this loop, for the outline of the shape of the tattoo also morphs subtly, as do the mountains from which the river flows. The animation of the land was a deliberate decision. Gesiye explains: "I included the mountain range on the island; it's what connects us to the Andes because we broke off and became our own island, separate." The tattoo-animation here activates a notion of the island as independent yet relational, not stranded. This puts Gesiye's work, and the frame-by-frame process

of animation itself, into dialogue with what Antonio Gómez and Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián describe as “the film archipelago.” Drawing on Édouard Glissant’s concept of “archipelagic thinking,” which breaks with fixed and “continental” ways of organizing “the History of human communities,” Gómez and Adrián seek to reclaim the possibilities for thought offered by Latin American islands.⁶⁷ Gesiye visualizes the mountains’ mobility by combining tattooing and animation in a collectively framed process that invites relational rather than nationalistic or fixed ways of thinking about land and body, part and whole. This in turn makes room for diasporic understandings of place and belonging. Tattooed (inter)(in)animation here generates senses of time, space, body, and community that resist Eurocentric models for representing time, place, and historical truth, fostering a dialogue, for example, between human and mountain time. Though Gesiye describes being “shocked” upon arrival at the Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum of Wales “by the scale of [Picton’s] portrait,” their work ultimately dwarfs the painting’s scale, even on a small screen, by mediating the movement of mountains and the world-making, (inter)(in)animating capacity of community.

ANIMATING THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION SITE: ISLANDS, GIANTS, AND RETERRITORIALIZATION

David Hartt opens his digital video *Et in Arcadia Ego* (2022) with bold white letters on a black screen spelling out the title’s words: ET IN/ARCADIA/EGO (“Even in Arcadia there am I”). The words directly cite the title and depicted tomb inscriptions of two different paintings of Arcadian shepherds by Nicolas Poussin, one at Chatsworth House (1627), the other in the Louvre (1637–38). The indeterminacy of these paintings, as Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey argue, has given rise to art historical debates about both which subject is being referenced by the inscription—who is this “I” in Arcadia?—and in which temporal register—historical/heroic or mythological—Poussin’s depiction of Arcadia resides.⁶⁸ By citing Poussin’s inscription in this contemporary video work, these questions also charge the landscape that Hartt at once represents and creates with an uncertainty that becomes its animating possibility. Meanwhile, the font, word arrangement, and underlining of the title’s words reference both the posters used by Black workers in the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers strikes that declared “I AM A MAN” and contemporary artists’ multiple citations of this phrase.⁶⁹ (Inter)(in)animation is well suited to mediating the nonsequential art historical temporalities that these references set in motion.

A sequence of crisp, static shots of nature—grasses, trees, bugs—is accompanied by an uncanny sonic fabric made up of denaturalized natural sounds. The rustles and footsteps loom so large on the soundtrack that they suggest an immense presence. Fragments of cello music occasionally appear. Not quite a minute into the work, we notice a glass house—the Glass House—the midcentury modern

residence built in 1949 in New Canaan, Connecticut, by one of the “fathers” of modern architecture, Philip Johnson, whose contributions to the vocabulary of modernism are inextricably bound up with his active embrace of Italian fascism and national socialism before and during World War II.

The movement implied by the rustling soundtrack is juxtaposed with views of the house from the far side of a pond below, as well as with multiple shots of Johnson’s 1962 “pavilion in the pond,” which sits, perfectly reflecting itself, on a small island in the water. A series of closeups foreground the flattened arches through which Johnson, looking backwards and forwards in time, was exploring the Renaissance design challenge of using columns for corners for a number of cultural center commissions, including the New York State Theater at the Lincoln Center.⁷⁰ These architectural views are intercut with shots showing a weed sprouting out of the cracks in the paving and the teeming insect life of the pond. As the rustling sounds of an unseen entity persist, only the movement of a dragonfly makes clear that these are moving images, not still photographs, continuing Hartt’s earlier dialogue with what Soveig Nelson describes as Michael Snow’s “gravity-defying, almost post-human perspective.”⁷¹ These high-definition shots of landscape with architecture are so sharp as to be uncanny, making the viewer wonder whether they are photographic images of real landscapes or digital renderings of imagined realities. This uncanniness is further activated by the fact that, though Hartt shot much of this footage at 120 frames per second (fps), he inserts it into *Et in Arcadia Ego* at 30 fps, stretching the registration of time through slow motion in both the sonic and visual dimensions, creating an uncanny sense of altered scale. The wild turkey calls registered during field recordings appear as eerie, unfamiliar sounds that are at once natural and electronic, paving a sonic path for the narrative to come, which brings the delusions of the real as well as the life-affirming possibilities of the speculative into focus.

Only after two minutes does the film offer a view of the concrete pavilion from the Glass House above it, as Johnson had designed and imagined it. Drawing on uses of “false scale” or “follies” in English gardens designed to increase the perceived size of a garden, Johnson states that he “deliberately made the scale of this little house about half of what it should be to be normal,” noting that the effect of this is “you feel very big”: “A child feels like a king because if you’re very short and very small and your scale is small too, then you feel bigger. Also, it’s an island because I love islands. If you step on an island you’re cut off from the world and you create your own world.”⁷² Comparing the effect of these scalar illusions with the sliding scales of *Alice in Wonderland*, Johnson asks, “Well, if you get big, what’s that do? It makes you feel important. So all of a sudden, you’re king of the whole pond, see. Well, I guess I am important—which is all you really need in life.”⁷³ Hartt’s work rescales and reimagines this landscape, imprinted by the European-derived delusions of grandeur that inform the visual traditions of both realism and reality. It redirects, often with humor, the creative possibilities that the site’s flexible



FIGURE 28. The giant Orion with the Glass House, in David Hartt's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 2022.

scales of time and space suggest, (inter)(in)animating, as Gesiye did, different trajectories, histories, and modes of world making.

Animation helps to activate the life-affirming potentialities of this site that Hartt visually, sonically, historically, mythologically, and physically unearths through a process he describes as “terraforming.”⁷⁴ A sudden close-up shot of the Glass House reveals the presence of a CGI-generated, barefoot, Black femme giant (figure 28). Draped in a long golden dress, she places her hands on the roof as she leans back against the house, standing almost twice as high as the building. As she turns her head from side to side, seemingly without seeing, she recasts Nicolas Poussin's *Blind Orion Searching for the Rising Sun* (1658). But this CGI giant directs her blind gaze not toward the viewer but toward another metallic figure who inhabits this remade modernist Arcadia: Olimpia.

For the fabrication of the giant, Hartt worked closely with Los Angeles-based artists and directors Claire Cochran and Rick Farin of Actual Objects, a creative studio cofounded with Nick Vernet in 2019 to explore the hyperreal and aesthetic possibilities of CGI world making, often through music and fashion videos. The company's philosophy reinforces *Et in Arcadia Ego*'s antiheroic and ensemble emphasis. They explain, “We think the concept of originality undermines the work of all of our influences, references, predecessors, colleagues, etc. In the age of the poor image, we consider the concept of originality, and the ‘hero artist’ to be irresponsible.”⁷⁵ Actual Objects uses the platform Unreal Engine, developed in 1998 for the design of computer games, including war games like *Call of Duty* and *Fortnite*.⁷⁶ Hartt was drawn to Actual Objects' “embrace of the uncanny” and how their creations disregard the rules of “scale, geometry, and the boundaries of specific objects.”⁷⁷ Hartt could have used other special effects to insert a giant

into the Glass House landscape more seamlessly and realistically. He turned to Cochran and Farin, however, in order to develop the giant in ways that would disrupt the coherence of the image and open up the historical narrative possibilities of the landscape beyond those made available by Johnson's fascism. Hartt explains, "I talked to Rick and Claire about trying to think about something from a video game cohabiting this fictitious space. I think in some ways it does alienate the environment from its historical specificity. By seeing the giant, and seeing the giant rendered in that way, it further pushes it away from the tyranny of the Johnson narrative."⁷⁸

Both Actual Objects and Unreal Engine resonate with the terraforming intentions of Hartt's practice within the space of the image. Actual Objects' name, for example, refuses separations between digital images and the real world and derives from the group's research into "the materiality of technology" within the context of "climate collapse."⁷⁹ Their approach to CGI image making underscores the physicality of the digital image and reflects their core interest in locating the digital inside of the physical. As Farin states, "People traditionally understand technology as this bottomless thing, the cloud or the silver sheen of Apple products. . . . But even a Word document is something that's legitimately physical—it's an etching on a piece of metal on a hard drive, or if you upload files to Google Drive, that's not actually the air in the atmosphere, that's a data center in North Dakota, so with every file you add you're increasing waste and space."⁸⁰ Asked if they think CGI can alter the way we perceive reality, they reply:

The larger question here is whether (or if) CGI can be considered something real, something with a material, or emotional knowledge. CGI certainly has a shape to it, a list of aesthetic and technical attributes, and maybe even some exciting or novel traits, but is it tangible? The highest achievement for game developers is creating something immersive, and I think what's more important to us as a studio is to create things that feel like they aren't trying to mimic reality, but rather an uncanny subversion, to create an alternate perspective through which to view our non-CGI existence.⁸¹

Unreal Engine similarly decenters the human and blurs the line between subjects and objects, challenging the vocabulary and history of image analysis as well as that discourse's imbrication with the sphere of ethics and raising important questions about representational systems' complicity with humanism's exclusions. As industry professionals Gonçalo Marques, Devin Sherry, David Pereira, and Hammad Fozi explain, "In Unreal Engine, all the objects that can be placed in a level are referred to as Actors. In a movie, an actor would be a human playing a character, but in UE5, every single object you see in your level, including walls, floors, weapons, and characters, is an Actor."⁸²

Hartt welcomed the way that the CGI aesthetic held the dominant Johnson narrative rooted in World War II at bay. But in the course of codesigning the giant

with Actual Objects, he simultaneously began to reintegrate new aspects of the Johnson story, reflected in the giant's light. Cochran came to the Glass House site to supervise all the special-effects shots to ensure, Hartt explains, that "the shots had enough headroom" (for the giant). Hartt determined the relative size of the giant by photoshopping models from Paco Rabanne runway shots and look-books at the appropriate scale into his storyboards for Actual Objects, sartorially linking the giant to *Et in Arcadia Ego*'s other major character, Olympia, who appears shortly after the giant. But the giant's golden dress also references the draping, color, and metallic qualities of the aluminum beaded chain curtains that line the Four Seasons Restaurant in Mies van der Rohe and Johnson's Seagram Building in New York City. Just as Hartt's camera-"tilling" redirects attention from Johnson's glass walls to the Annie Alpers curtain that hangs in the Glass House, centering attention on a female modernist designer, so here, Orion's shimmering dress echoes the Four Seasons work, not of Johnson, but of the weaver Marie Nichols, who designed the curtains. In doing so, Hartt (inter)(in)animates a less heroic, less singular, and more ensemblic history of modernism and design.⁸³

The film cuts from the giant to the quiet inside/outside space of the glass living room, furnished with Mies van der Rohe furniture and recalling Johnson's close collaborations with van der Rohe and other Bauhaus designers. The room houses a different painting attributed to Poussin, *Burial of Phocion* (ca. 1648–49), which depicts the humiliating and unjust denial of burial in the city to the Athenian general known as "Phocion the Good" on charges of treason. The painting's narrative of political shame might suggest Johnson's own embrace of Italian fascism and national socialism, which included a visit to a Hitler Youth rally and admiring reviews of *Mein Kampf*. Though Johnson later publicly renounced his affiliation with fascism, Nikil Saval argues he never had to bear full responsibility for his politics because of his leading role in modernism and MoMA, his proximity to Bauhaus architects such as Walter Gropius, his proximity to wealth, and his fashioning of "an architecture of unabashed capitalism."⁸⁴ The Glass House website explains that Alfred H. Barr Jr., the founding director of MoMA, suggested installing *Burial of Phocion* in the space. Given the painting's depiction of a falsely accused political figure, its presence could be read as an attempt to manage and diminish the legacy of Johnson's fascism, but the website notes only the way it "serves as a mediator between the interior geometry of the Glass House and the tamed exterior landscape seen through its transparent walls."⁸⁵

Hartt shows little interest in commenting on Johnson's politics. Doing so, he suggests, would only further aggrandize "the singularity and scale" of the boy-king within the history of modernism. He instead redirects our attention, in part through the invocation of the two other aforementioned Poussin paintings, housed elsewhere, toward the reimaged or "terraformed" landscape now occupied by the Black femme giant. If *Burial of Phocion*'s presence in the Glass House centers the posthumous political legacy of an individual man's unfair banishment,

reflecting what Lamster describes as Johnson's "coily self-aggrandizing reading" of the painting, *Blind Orion Searching for the Rising Sun* (1658) does not. This painting "breathes," as William Hazlitt wrote two hundred years ago, "the spirit of the morning, its moisture, its repose, its obscurity, waiting the miracle of light to kindle it into smiles," depicting nature as "full, solid, large, luxuriant, teeming with life and power."⁸⁶ Such a morning light infuses Hartt's work too, thanks to a shooting schedule that was narratively organized, with early morning scenes being shot as the sun rose.⁸⁷ For Hazlitt, writing in 1821, *Blind Orion* also exceeds the paradigm of realism and ventures out into the worlds of animation and speculation, allowing other possibilities of history, both natural and human, to come into view. The painting, Hazlitt states, gives "us nature, such as we have never seen, but have often wished to see," and in this version of nature, the landscape bears witness: "Even inanimate and dumb things speak a language of their own. . . . 'The very stones prate of their whereabouts.'"⁸⁸ Hazlitt's animated commentary on the giant-inhabited landscape (mis)cites the moment when Macbeth, about to murder King Duncan, dreads a future history. He appeals to the earth not to speak of his violence, fearing that the horror of his actions will fail to be contained in the present and will be unleashed into the future by what the earth itself knows and speaks of Macbeth's personal history of violence: "Thou [sure] and firm-set earth, / Hear not my steps, which [way they] walk, for fear / The very stones prate of my whereabouts, / And take the present horror from the time, / Which now suits with it."⁸⁹ Macbeth's fear of nature speaking infinitely of his infamy and violence reflects a view of history forged in the image of his own unbridled narcissism. Simply by replacing "my whereabouts" with "their [the stones'] whereabouts," Hazlitt discovers in Poussin a nonanthropocentric, ecological view of history. As in Gesiye's insistence that stories begin with the land, Hartt's (inter)(in)animation of Poussin's painting, like Hazlitt's, makes room for historical narratives organized around something other than the violent acts of white dwarfed men aspiring to be kings.

Hartt approaches mythologies not as fixed tales but as casts of characters that can be repurposed at different moments in time and space. In *Et in Arcadia Ego*, the cast includes Orion, the CGI giant, and Olympia, the mechanical, musical automaton from E.T.A. Hoffmann's story "The Sandman" (1817). In Hoffmann, Olympia is both an object of desire and a female character regarded as stupid. Hartt reimagines her as an experimental black, female composer and cellist who hangs out with giants. As with Marie Nichols and Annie Alpers, Hartt indirectly finds Olympia via Johnson's close association with the Bauhaus school and, more specifically, through Johnson's entanglement with the figure of Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), whose work the Nazis also exhibited as "degenerate art." In 1933, in part through the mediations of Barr, Johnson purchased Schlemmer's 1932 painting *Bauhaus Staircase*, made to honor the Bauhaus School at Dessau just before the Nazis closed it. Johnson lent it to MoMA, donating it permanently under controversial circumstances in 1943.⁹⁰

Hartt describes the ways in which Johnson's fascism is narrated as "patriarchal," suggesting that antiheroic models of postwar critique can sustain rather than dismantle belligerent historiographic frameworks. Commenting on the relationship of his speculative, (inter)(in)animating project to Johnson's fascism, Hartt states,

I'm very aware of, and understand the possibilities of, context informing the work because the work is research-based and not a blank slate; but I'm very careful in terms of where the work goes *not* to enact a kind of reification. A direct critique of Johnson simply reifies his position; reifies the authority; and so I always stop short of that. I address some of that, but I'm not going to stop there, which is why some of the catalysts for the areas I explore are ones I *found* there . . . you know, Poussin, and Schlemmer. They exist on their own and they have their own legacies that I'm just as interested in, but the catalyzing event or aspect of why they are present has to do with things that are present at the site. Rather than talking about Johnson, I wanted to talk about the narrative potential of these other things.⁹¹

Hartt engages Schlemmer not through Johnson's ownership of Schlemmer's work but rather by bringing to life a version of the automaton Olympia inspired by Schlemmer's 1922 geometric *Triadic Ballet*, which was loosely based on "The Sandman."⁹²

Made in the wake of World War I, *Triadic Ballet*, like Hoffmann's tale, raises questions central to animation scholarship about the differences and uncanny similarities between humans and machines, and the violence and desires to which these relationships give rise. Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny," one of the most well-known reflections on Hoffmann's story, remains largely uninterested in the figure of Olympia and, by extension, in the question of the liveliness of "object[s]." More interesting for Freud is the question of male castration. He writes, "Uncertainty whether an object is living or inanimate, which we must admit in regard to the doll Olympia, is quite irrelevant in connection with this other, more striking instance of uncanniness."⁹³ By contrast, Hartt's camera centers the viewer's attention on Olympia's everyday being and liveliness—sleeping, working, drinking tea, reflecting, walking in the garden—as well as her musicality. Her musicality intertwines creativity and technology—here, unlike in "The Sandman," they are not opposed—in ways that seem to restore Orion's sight. In Hoffmann's version, the main character, Nathaniel, perceives Olympia, in spite of her "angelic countenance," to have "something the matter with her" and to be "half-witted, perhaps, or something of the kind."⁹⁴ He is plagued by both his desire for Olympia and a "gloomy foreboding," which in his poems takes the form of fantasies of a dismembered animated blackness that robs the white heterosexual couple of its joy: "He represented himself and Clara as united by a true love, but occasionally threatened by a black hand, which appeared to dart into their lives, to snatch away some new joy just as it was born."⁹⁵ Nathaniel's Manichean fears also take the form of racialized, personified flames that threaten to eat him up, roaring like "the hurricane, when it fiercely

lashes the foaming waves, which rise up, like black giants with white heads, for the furious combat.”⁹⁶ Hartt abandons Nathaniel as the consciousness through which to view Olimpia, giants, and the relationship between female creativity and technology, perhaps in sympathy with Clara, Nathaniel’s fiancée, who finds his poems to induce “mental drowsiness” and to be “very tedious.”⁹⁷ Hartt (inter)(in)animates Olimpia in a new story alongside the giant Orion, transforming the narrative possibilities of both characters, who seem magnetically attracted toward each other, and perhaps of art and design too.

Olimpia appears three minutes into *Et in Arcadia Ego*, played by the MacArthur-winning Tomeka Reid. Reid is a composer and cellist whose improvisational genius is rooted in ensemble, community, and collaboration, including through her work with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.⁹⁸ By casting Reid in this role, Hartt emphasizes Olimpia’s embodied creativity and intelligence but without recourse to the language of singular greatness.⁹⁹ This Olimpia lies asleep in bed inside the Glass House, and from the outset her image is mirrored in the side table, nodding to the uncanny’s association with the doppelgänger and visually linking Olimpia to the mirrored island pavilion below. She gets up and dons jeans to accompany the reflective chain-mail top that she is already wearing. Hartt commissioned this item, like the giant’s dress, along with a chain-mail headdress and dress that appear later in the work, from Paco Rabanne. These gladiator-style protective clothes led Coco Chanel to call Rabanne, an architect by training, “the metal worker.” They link Olimpia to the giant and associate them both with high fashion and architectural design, power, and a future-oriented temporality. We hear voices singing in the soundscape of Olimpia’s mind as she begins to compose music with paper and pencil.¹⁰⁰

The film then cuts to Olimpia, now wearing a long Paco Rabanne silver chain-mail dress, sitting near the Poussin painting, and playing Reid’s custom-made black carbon-fiber cello (figure 29). The instrument’s materiality, like the chain-mail dress, seems futuristic, speculative, and resilient, perhaps another unreal object. A Nagra 4.2 recorder sits on the table, visualizing the music’s unknown possible futures as a reproducible element in this time-bending work. But the fullness of the composition is withheld at this point as the sounds and images of music making are not synchronized with each other. We hear fragments of cello music, but when Olimpia plays the cello alone we hear vocalizations that imply her musical imagination is at work on composing a more communal sound. Yet even as audience members hear snatches of Olimpia’s subjective soundscape, Hartt’s framing decisions create abstract images that simultaneously withhold full access to this scene of Black femme creativity. We see the textures and light-plays of black carbon fiber against chain mail until the chain mail gradually fills the screen, serving, like the rapid cuts, as a curtain protecting this figure’s creative process from visual possession. A moment later, Olimpia enters the garden with the Nagra and



FIGURE 29. Olympia with cello, in David Hartt's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 2022.

comes upon a vibrant circle of colorful flowers in the minimalist landscape that dance to the touch of the breeze and bees.

Hartt began thinking about *Et in Arcadia Ego* while working on his first collaboration with the Glass House, entitled *A Colored Garden* (2021), which might also be considered an (inter)(in)animated project in its transformation (or return) of painted images into living, moving things. This project was inspired by the still-life paintings of the African American artist Charles Ethan Porter (1847–1923), who spent most of his life in Connecticut, as well as by the queer “exuberant” gardens designed by Johnson’s longtime partner David Whitney, which Johnson ultimately removed in favor of a more stoic ideal. Hartt installed a circular, forty-foot-wide flower garden made up of the specific, now animated, flowers depicted, or inanimated, in Porter’s still-life paintings (figure 30).¹⁰¹ As Olympia stands within this animated still life, the giant Orion approaches, kneels down, and begins to look around. As composer and giant encounter each other, we hear singing, sometimes in harmony, as well as the sound of pizzicato cello, also playing two notes at once, musically echoing the double visual presence in this space. The scene cuts to the pavilion in the pond, accompanied by the sound of birds and insects. Olympia, now dressed in golden chain-mail dress and mask, stands on the island, her head nearly touching the roof of Johnson’s pavilion, with its built-in scalar distortions. It is occupied by new inhabitants who, in claiming the space’s magnifying scale and power for themselves, alter the world (figure 31). But the building, Olympia, and the Nagra are all dwarfed by another new presence, a sound system that brings international dub culture into this landscape, opening a sonic and material portal between this Connecticut island and Jamaica.¹⁰² Olympia



FIGURE 30. Olimpia and Orion in flower garden, in David Hartt's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 2022.



FIGURE 31. Olimpia with dub speakers, in David Hartt's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 2022.

switches on the Nagra, and the ethereal elements of her composition here unite as they appear to play back through the SoundSystem (in actuality, they don't). "It is a music of the masses," Hartt says of dub culture. "It is hyperdemocratic. It is of the street. So I loved the idea of taking the 'art music' that Tomeka was crafting and having it broadcast through this other system."¹⁰³ Gently haunting voices sing wordless, rising lines in ensemble, accompanied by pizzicato cello chords. As the giant makes her way through the landscape toward the sound, Olimpia sets off a road flare, and this combination of music, light, and companionship seems to restore Orion's



VIDEO 7. Orion and Olimpia with a road flare. David Hartt, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 2022.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.228.7>



sight. Olimpia holds the flare out powerfully in front of her: a protest, a call, a guide (video 7). The CGI giant enters the pond and reaches her left arm upward, palm open and outstretched before her. The two golden Black femmes stand side by side, as if to say, in defiance of white heroic singularity, “We too are in Arcadia.”

. . .

I am finalizing the manuscript of this book in the fifteenth month of Israel’s expanding military operations in first Gaza, then the West Bank and Lebanon, in response to the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on Israel. As of October 1, 2024, the U.N. estimates 1,579 Israeli fatalities as well as 101 remaining Israeli hostages; 42,308 Palestinian fatalities in Gaza and the West Bank; 10,000 Palestinians suspected dead under the rubble, and an additional 62,413 Palestinian deaths from starvation. Worldwide, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) calculates that “1 in 6 people are estimated to have been exposed to conflict so far in 2024.”¹⁰⁴ Of the countries listed in the “extreme” category of conflict, three—Palestine, Haiti, and Sudan—are described as having “worsening” conditions, which is hard to imagine.¹⁰⁵ These horrors have energized antiwar, anticapitalist, antiracist, anticolonial, and feminist movements around the world, and hegemonic governments and institutions have responded with fierce repression. My home university has indefinitely imposed “Temporary Standards and Procedures for Campus Events and Demonstrations,” undermining the open-expression policies it once specifically created in response to those protesting the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁶

The cacophony makes Olimpia's resilient music hard to hear, but this does not mean that there is no music. Orion's unreal hand seems hard to reach, and it is tempting to doubt the value of experimental, creative work. And it is precisely in such landscapes of death that (inter)(in)animation repeatedly appears, insisting on the right to claim life lived in community.

On March 1, 2024, the renowned Palestinian poet, novelist, and artist Ibrahim Nasrallah published an (inter)(in)animated "video poem" entitled "Mary of Gaza," translated into English by Huda Fakhreddine.¹⁰⁷ It appeared in *Mizna*, a "woman-led contemporary arts organization" that promotes "experimental approaches to art, literature, and film" and "work that questions and expands the forms and conceptual frameworks of Arab and SWANA culture."¹⁰⁸ As Nasrallah reads the words of the poem, the video moves across a series of photographs. These news images, all taken by Palestinian photographers in Gaza, depict leveled infrastructures, tent cities, and mounds of plastic-wrapped corpses, big and small, surrounded by mourning crowds. Nasrallah intervenes into these images using crayon drawing and animation effects, and these graphic-photos persist until the poem's final minute, when, in conjunction with the words "Peace is ours. Peace is ours," these trembling, photo-drawn, and colored-in images give way to live-action sepia footage of young Gazans making soundless music together. But what interests me at the conclusion of this book is how "Mary of Gaza" both invites and resists a simple alignment of the still photograph with death and of moving, cinematic images with life. With Fakhreddine's help, I invite Nasrallah to a dialogue about his use of what I have been calling (inter)(in)animation in the midst of this ongoing war on Gaza.

The early stanzas of the poem seem despairing, soaked in blood, mired in death, certain that "Peace on earth is not for us. / It is for tyrants, cock-headed leaders, / and all the armies of dust." Death suffuses the lives depicted here. As Nasrallah explains, "There is an occupation that insists on making death a part of our lives. Not a day passes without it throwing the corpse of one or more of our children on our doorsteps. Today, it is no longer content with just one or two; on some days, it kills and wounds a thousand of us, as has been happening for the past eight months. Therefore, none of us can deny the presence of death in our lives."¹⁰⁹ Yet the video poem also shimmers with (inter)(in)animating—inter-medial, communal, transnational, and transtemporal—effects that mediate what Nasrallah describes using a language of "resurrection" that acknowledges death but also challenges it through the invocation of political resistance and hope. He writes, "We Palestinians have always insisted on not allowing anyone to prevent our resurrection in its human meaning: the return of life, freedom, and hope. We as Palestinians insist on defending our human right to resurrection because the absence of this idea means our end. . . . We find that every time one revolution is crushed, another much stronger revolution rises. This is resurrection. It is many resurrections. We are incapable of dying. We refuse to die, especially in the face

of all this complicity against us.” I ask Nasrallah how he thinks about the task and possibilities of poems and images at this genocidal moment. He responds, “I use every creative means possible from poetry to images to articles, novels, painting, and music. When all this death is rushing toward you in a homeland where everything is being destroyed and you have no place to hide, you resort to everything you have. And if you have nothing material that can repel bullets or bombs, you take refuge in the immaterial—language, images, your anger, your memory, your love for life, and your belief that it is your right and the right of every person who rejects dying unjustly.”

Within the video poem, (inter)(in)animation operates as refusal of death, even as death barrels on, and this refusal takes several aesthetic forms. Verbally, it appears in Nasrallah’s invocation of, and response to, Refaat Alareer’s poem “If I Must Die.” Alareer was a forty-four-year-old poet and professor of comparative literature at the Islamic University of Gaza, killed in an airstrike in Shajaiya on December 6, 2023, along with six members of his family, shortly after writing this poem.¹¹⁰ Through the act of citation, the two poems and poets (inter)(in)animate each other across the line dividing life and death: “no place for the poem exulting its poet who writes, / ‘If I must die, you must live to tell my story.’”

Nasrallah also refuses the inevitability of Palestinian death in the way the video poem recirculates and transforms the news photographs that George Abraham describes as “necrotic images.”¹¹¹ In response to my question about his turn to an (inter)(in)animating aesthetic in the context of Gaza, Nasrallah explains,

I used very simple programs such as Movie Maker and Adobe Photoshop. The progression of the image from partial erasure to slightly clearer photographic images, then to the clearest images perhaps reflects my vision of what is happening. It is a coming out from darkness into light, the light we will reach despite everything. It is an insistence on the idea that we are unerasable. Every time an erasure attempt is made against us, we become clearer. Look at the world that was blind to us before, and how it sees us now. The revolution of the students and their professor alone is a great thing, as great as a miracle. As for the ending, the video did not need anything as much as it needed an ending where the breathtaking beauty of the Edward Said Conservatory Orchestra playing on a rooftop in Gaza is revealed. This is our true beauty that we defend to the world.

The (inter)(in)animating spirit of this video poem is contagious, expansive, morphing, finding its life in dynamic ways. In July 2024, the Aman Choir and Palestinian Youth Orchestra (PYO) performed what Nasrallah describes as “a long musical and vocal performance” based on “Mary of Gaza.”¹¹² “I did not expect this to happen,” Nasrallah comments, “but perhaps it expresses what I said in a previous answer: we are gathering, assembling. At first it was only the images and the poem, and then the video was a third presence or dimension. Now the music and the singing will be a fourth and a fifth dimension.”