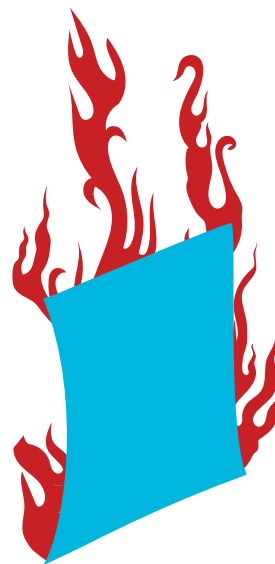


Warts
of the
shining
face

06 FEB 2025
06 JUN 2025



HUSSEIN NASSEREDDINE

“But a day of God’s days is indeed like a thousand years by your counting.” — Surat Al-Hajj (47)

These are perhaps years cast into time—time that feels both near and distant, as it descends from its strange and bitter heights. A thousand years pass like a nightfall or its forenoon, and the horizon, ablaze, opens up briefly: the singer’s face shines in the grass like a planet. Something in these years of the shining face could explain the endless longings. [I have been here for a thousand years, arranging this space for you to inhabit.] The tireless songs, sung with the sorrow of yesterday or the day before, echo what has passed almost two thousand years ago.

What occupies me now? This moment in the days of God consumes me.
I claim my right to take my share from it—seventy years count like five minutes in the days of my beloved.

Hussein Nassereddine’s solo show at Beirut Art Center presents the artist’s profound exploration of time and memory. It delves into the fates of the years, both near and far, through the lens of language, song, and personal history. The works evoke villages where horizons bloom, the fires in the desolate stretches of flesh and time, and the enduring songs that resonate across centuries.

Nassereddine’s art draws from the margins of language and the lost works of poets. By intertwining these with personal narratives from his ancestral village in southern Lebanon—a land that has been razed over time by Israeli violence—he reimagines Time and the landscape through sound, video, text, and sculptural works. The exhibition seeks to uncover layers of personal and political histories, creating a symphony of words and sounds that echo through remembrance and repetition. It invites visitors to inhabit a space where the past and present converge, offering a poignant reflection on the passage of time.











Years of the Shining Face: You were right, O Heart

2025

Installation | wood, elm burl, glass, fabric

500 cm x 265 cm x 190 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

Years of the Shining Face: You Were Right, O Heart stages an encounter with time as both a material and a metaphysical threshold. Drawing from historical poetics, oral traditions, and contemporary grief, the installation evokes a space of transit—between song and silence, past and present, prophecy and fate.

At its core is the notion of “entering time,” a liminal moment where the singer’s voice merges with history, dissolving the boundaries between lived and mythical time. The architectural framework, reminiscent of a stage or threshold, invites viewers to inhabit a scene of both revelation and loss. Mirrored surfaces fracture perception, while rich wood textures and deep red curtains allude to the weight of memory, performance, and the inescapable movement of destiny.

Nassereddine’s work traverses histories of conquest, lamentation, and the enduring power of song—where language and voice contend with the inevitability of time’s passage.

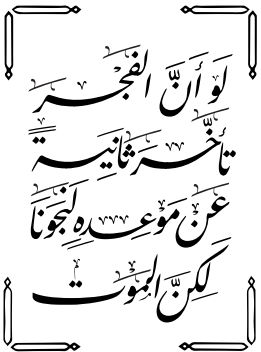


Years of the Shining Face: You were right, O Heart

Work Text:

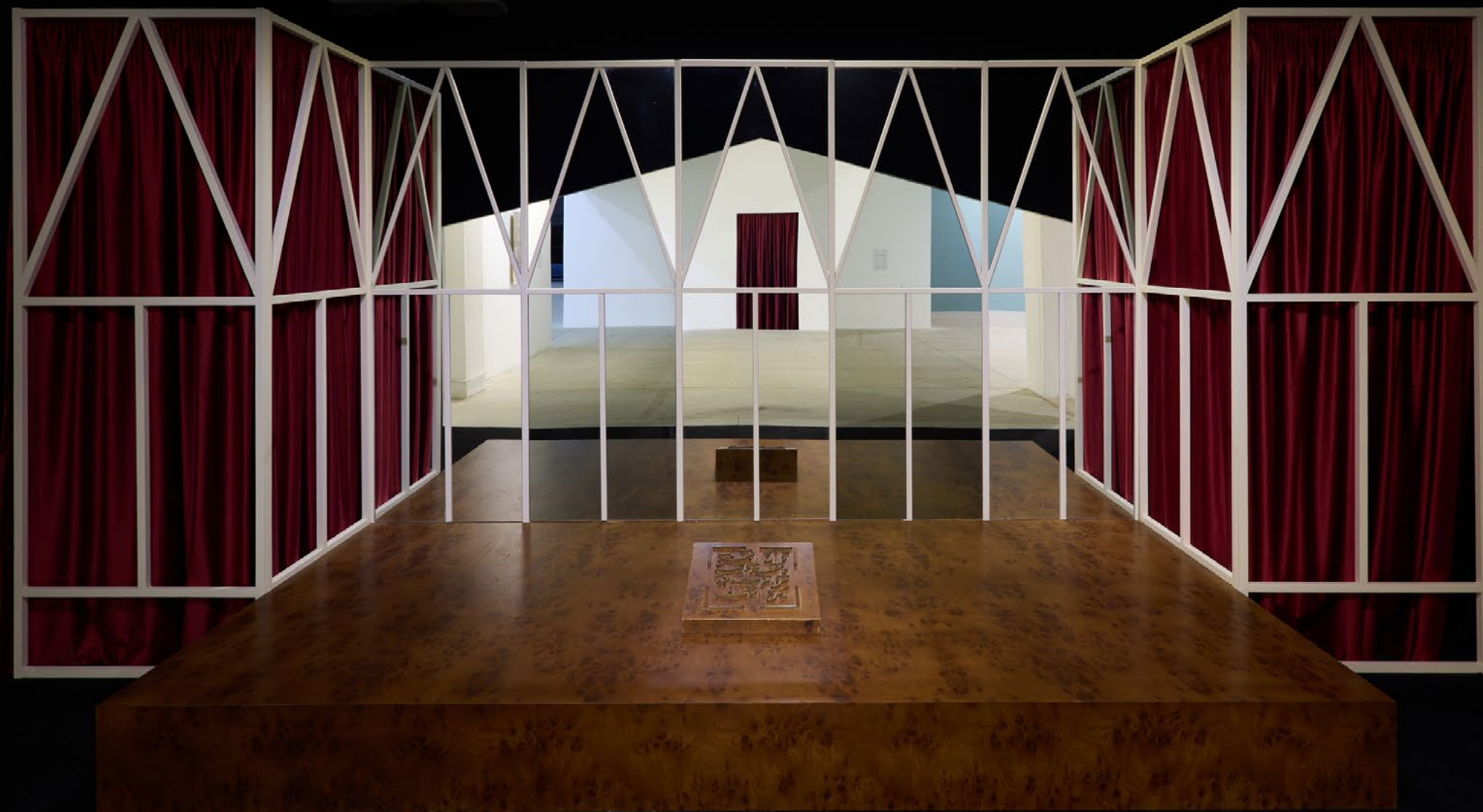
- 1- ***“But a day of God’s days is indeed like a thousand years by your counting.”***
—Surat Al-Hajj (47)
- 2- The door of time would only open for the singer, whose voice echoed the revelry of conquerors.
- 3- The face lights up in the trees like the singer’s voice: “The time of the heart and that of the ticking bomb are in sync”.
- 4- What was said about “entering time,” i.e. there will be a mere moment where the singer must enter time. Various opinions exist concerning this time and how it might differ from time as experienced by ordinary people. It is a moment where they must either retreat, and watch their song recede, or enter, and therein they might age in that moment countless years, so that they will find their time merge with that other time, until they are as one. From this there is no return.
- 5- ***And of a surety the Fates will overtake us
predestined for us, as we for them are predestined.***
(Amr Ibn Kulthūm - 526–584 A.D)

Everything is written one day you are defeated one day you will prevail
(George Wassouf - seconds before entering time)

6- 

“Had the dawn, been delayed for only a second, we would have survived, but death”







Years of the Shining Face: The Palm Tree Forest

2025

Installation | wood, red paint

Dimensions variable

With the support of Saradar Foundation

Years of the Shining Face: The Palm Tree Forest examines the instability of metaphors when time is disrupted. The installation references the poetic comparison between palm trees and architectural pillars, a motif in Arabic literature. However, these columns, resembling stage props, suggest a performative element rather than a stable structure.

The work draws from the story of 'Abd Al-Rahman the Entrant (731-788 AD), the first Arab ruler of Andalusia who, after thirty years in exile, died upon seeing a palm tree—a moment where time condensed into an instant. For Nassereddine, this collapse of time challenges the function of metaphor, which relies on continuity to operate. A lyric inscription from Syrian singer and Arab Pop icon George Wassouf (1961-), whom the artist considers a "Time Being," further reinforces this relationship between language, time, and perception. Set against a burning horizon, the work reflects on memory, displacement, and the conditions that shape historical narratives.



Years of the Shining Face: The Palm Tree Forest

Work Text:

5. “palm trees”: These were said to have been the palms of the Peninsula, or the palms of Al-Ha'il and its palaces. Others have identified them as: the palms of the Abbasids; palms along the Nile; the palm tree of 'Abd Al-Rahman the Entrant¹—or read perhaps “like the homesickness felt by 'Abd Al-Rahman before his palm tree”; the palm trees of the Syrians, which they planted in Syria but which blossomed in Spain. It was said that the pillars killed him—or rather, it was the palms², or the pillars of the palms. It is also said: the closer he got, the more the palms seemed to overflow³.

1. e.g. i.e. the story of 'Abd Al-Rahman, the Falcon of Quraysh, and his palm tree. And that he stopped in time for thirty years after he crossed the Euphrates from the Levant towards Andalusia. For thirty years, he did not see any palm trees in Andalusia. Then, when he saw a single palm tree in the Rusafa of Cordoba, for the first time in thirty years, he minded the time, and died—in a instant—under the shade of his palm tree.

2. According to some other interpretations, the palm tree moved in time. That is, it did not move in space, coming from the Levant, for example, since there were no palm trees in Andalusia at the time of Abd Al-Rahman. It might have come from another time, or from the Time that Abd Al-Rahman entered.

3.



“That someone else replaced me, that your heart is not mine”.







بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِنَّا نَعْبُدُكَ يَا رَبَّنَا
وَأَنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ مَا نَعْمَلُ
وَأَنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ مَا نَسْتَعِينُكَ
وَأَنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ مَا نَسْتَعِينُكَ
وَأَنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ مَا نَسْتَعِينُكَ

River Papers

2024

Carbon paper

100 x 70 cm (each)

Courtesy of the Artist

In *River Papers*, Hussein Nassereddine traces the passage of time through the physical act of mark-making. Using carbon paper—historically employed by Arab poetry scholars and annotators—the artist creates rubbings of his father’s grave, each imprint capturing the gravestone at a specific moment. The work transforms a gesture into a series of documents, suspended in time.

The papers, with their fragile, transient quality, evoke both presence and loss. They recall the transmission of knowledge, the act of inscribing and re-inscribing history, while also pointing to what fades with each reproduction. The deep blue surface, like water, holds memory yet constantly shifts, questioning whether anything can remain unchanged over time.

By embedding excerpts from historical and oral narratives—stories of celestial movements, eclipses, and omens—Nassereddine situates personal grief within a larger literary framework. These accounts, passed down through generations, function as unstable monuments to loss, much like the grave rubbings themselves. *River Papers* reflects on the fragility of remembrance and the ways in which time, like water, both erases and preserves.



River Papers

Work Text:

- 1- Al-Hamaoui narrated in his book, *Fara'id Al-Simtayn*, based on the stories of Asmaa Bint Amiss, that the prophet Muhammad had his head in Ali's lap when he slumbered until the sun had set. Upon waking, the prophet realized that he had not prayed Al-Asr prayer and mentioned it to Ali, then he asked God to return the sun to its earlier position. The sun returned to the place it was in before the prophet had slept. Asmaa said: He got up and prayed, and the sun descended again.
- 2- Ibn Qulawayh narrated the story of a man from Jerusalem, who had said: "We had a premonition about the death of Hussein Ibn Ali. So I said: How did you know? To which he replied: We did not lift a stone, or a rock, except that we saw beneath it blood boiling. The walls turned red like leeches. For three days sizzling blood poured from the sky. For three days the sun was eclipsed until it was blotted out."
- 4- The village's elderly in the South used to speak of a man whose siblings tossed him into the river. His eyes went dark as soon he touched the water. The boys used to burst out laughing at the eyes shut over the river's surface. They were rough, like the air in the village.
- 5- When a man dies in the villages, a photo is chosen to frame him in death. One photograph. It becomes his image, his entire life is contained in it. As if to be remembered after the event—that is after his other photos are forgotten, beyond those that remain in the imagination, even after the passage of time—he is remembered as he was in the photograph above his grave, or in his family's house over the couch on which the elderly lounge on a hot afternoon. One photograph becomes all the years.





Handwritten calligraphic text in a scroll, likely in Arabic or Persian script.

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A Few Decent Ways To Drown

2022

Limestone, steel, carbon paper and sunlight

Ø 350 cm

Courtesy of Art Design Lebanon

Does water ever remain the same? Is it the same water of bygone ages and their eroded landmarks?

Hussein Nassereddine's installations, texts and videos explore the potential of language to create unstable monuments, and poetry as a point of access to long disappeared places and people.

Drawing on Arabic poetry from the 6th century onwards, *A Few Decent Ways to Drown* explores the fragile relationship between poetry, water, and time. Presented here is one of three fountains whose floral shape recalls ornamental water features once found across cities, courtyards, and palaces throughout the region - their significance preserved through poems and texts. The fountain's surface is made of papers found tucked away between the pages of volumes that belonged to collectors and editors of poetry manuscripts, still retaining their inscriptions and observations. Exposure to the sun over time has altered the paper's colour and texture.



A Few Decent Ways To Drown

Work Text:

3- Literary editors and anthologists would write their notes on blue sheets of paper, blue as water, then they would fold them in books and forget them, until the sun would shine on them for years, and dye their edges amber gold. Perhaps what the sun imprints on the papers is all that was lost in poetry, and perhaps it is the image of the sun on the surface of the water.





Even the Most Delicate of Hands Could Not Hold the River

2023

Foil stamping on leather covers

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the Artist

Even the Most Delicate of Hands Could Not Hold the River presents a series of book covers that exist without books—objects caught in a liminal state, always incomplete, always slipping into absence. Borrowing from Arabic literary traditions, these covers are crafted using the same leather and gold foil techniques as historical manuscripts. Yet, they remain empty shells, evoking the loss of entire texts, places, and histories.

The titles adorning the covers reference three historical literary books that have been lost to time. These works survive only in footnotes, alluded to in other texts but never fully present—mirroring the artist's experience of his family's village in southern Lebanon. Born after the Israeli occupation of the Lebanese south (1982–2000), Nassereddine grew up listening to displaced villagers as they gathered in his parents' home. Through their words, they rebuilt the village in memory, describing its trees, houses, and roads in intricate detail. But when Nassereddine finally set foot in the village, he found nothing remained. The landscape had been erased—only language preserved its presence.

The back covers of these works feature drawings created in collaboration with an art student, who sketched scenes based solely on Nassereddine's oral descriptions of his first encounter with the ruined village. This process echoes the practice of ancient Arab poets who translated lost places into verse, allowing their memory to persist in words rather than in sight.

Suspended between existence and disappearance, these covers blend into the color of the walls behind them, as if attempting to dissolve. In their material absence, they embody the paradox of memory: that which is lost can be spoken into presence, yet never fully reclaimed.



Even the Most Delicate of Hands Could Not Hold the River

Work Text:

Mohammad: They were sitting in our home, or were they in the houses they'd come to after they left the village? The rooms reverberated, as if fifty poets had gathered to chant, before slipping into slumber like birds. They sang of the village, and the tender trees and the meadows. Their voices painted its shapes, beckoning the listener to see. Their words birthed the village anew.

Did you know that ancient poets sang the castles and gardens? Their mouths would be filled with marble: their palms held what they had once seen. The buildings and the gardens vanished, leaving only the memory of what was once said. Do you think they were like these poets who had lived in ancient times?

Hussein: One does not have to be a poet to know the shape of things. Maybe they sang of the time they knew, because they did not know, when their mouths were churning with the taste of houses and the trees, that this place will only be seen by you and I, and those who'd been touched by the singing, but not by time or the distances.

Mohammad: It might have been written in the books of mortal poets and singers: Do you know what was written in *The Book of Lost Abbasid Songs*?

Hussein: It was written that "The door of the body would only open for the singer, whose voice echoed the revelry of conquerors".

Mohammad: And what was written in *The Book of Audible Palaces*? What happens to the orchards after the poets had sung them and before the books were lost?

Hussein: Their hands carried them. Ibn Hayyan wrote that "soft hands, no matter how delicate, could not hold the river".

Mohammad: He was right.

Hussein: Where do they go then, after they had left our house and the rooms they carried in their bodies? How could the singer deliver his last serenade?

Mohammad: They dwindle into the shade, one after the other...They retreat into slumber as birds.





Years of the Shining Face: She Walked On By

2024

2 channel video, color, sound

Infinite loop

Shot by the artist's mother - Noura Chamseddine

Courtesy of the Artist

In this work, Hussein Nassereddine stitches together sound and landscape, memory and myth, in a two-channel video filmed by his mother in their village in southern Lebanon. The work unfolds as a sonic and visual excavation of place, where the land is inscribed not only with histories of displacement and violence but also with the spectral presence of voices, apparitions, and the longing that lingers between them.

Here, the village exists in a dual register: one shaped by the persistence of memory and another by the unrelenting forces of geopolitics. The hills, the grass, the distant house—these are familiar coordinates, yet they tremble with uncertainty. The video's soundscape emerges from the village's loudspeakers, layering announcements with the wind, the distant echo of recitations, and the weight of the unsaid. In this polyphony, time folds: myth and testimony collapse into each other, rendering the past porous, the present haunted.

Nassereddine's practice often draws from the ruins of language, retrieving voices from the margins of poetry and history. His work meditates on how places persist in memory and how their absence is articulated—through song, through testimony, through the fragile architecture of words. *She Walked On By* extends this inquiry, charting a path between mourning and invocation, between that which vanishes and that which endures in the echoes of the land.



Years of the Shining Face: She Walked On By

Work Text:

I was there in the meadow near our house in the village, near that small hill, and Hussein, the grass was so tall it was touching my knees, and it was so green. I stood there and the cold wind was seeping under my shirt, are the hills moving from their places? I looked at our house which seemed so far, deserted from its inhabitants. There, in the distance was a man on a horse, a shining man, the grass blossomed under the palms of his hands. His face was shining in the field like a planet.

-You will take my sight away!

-*"Don't be afraid, Hajjeh"* (His hand on my shoulder, shining like the face of God)

- *"I am the shining face"* (The trees turn on their heads)

-Who is shaking the trees from their ribs?

-*"Your son Mahdi says hello"*

I answered, then I answered, and I kept answering until she walked on by. Then I forgot -my soul- then I woke up, I noticed that she had taken the sun and faded away.

The heads of the tall grasses almost touched the ground, Hussein, as if the man were moving them from their roots.

-*"Your son Mahdi says hello"*

-Did you see him?

-*"His face is like a moon, Hajjeh"* (the red sun stops in its place)

-And do you know all those who are there? (My heart slips out of my hands like a ball)

-*"Do not be sad"*

The light wind was blowing on my face, the tears that escaped me were falling among the grass. I saw from there our little house burning, our house that I had not minded since Mahdi died, and the hill over there, and the edges of the green grass, all gone, and the shining face gone. The horizon was burning, the fires were red, their shapes were static, as if they were drawn by hand over the distant horizon, and they moved away every time I got closer to them, I ran towards them, and they were still there, not getting any closer.





Two Birds, Sleeping

2022

3 Channel sound installation

9'37"

Recorded with the artist's brother, Mohammad Nassereddine

Courtesy of the Artist

Hussein Nassereddine's *Two Birds, Sleeping* layers the voices of the artist and his brother, Mohammad, as they recount fragments of stories passed down by those who once inhabited their ancestral village in southern Lebanon—now a site of absence, erased by war and displacement. Their words unfold like echoes, conjuring the village in the minds of listeners, much like ancient Arab poets who revived lost places through verse.

In the background, the melancholic strains of Egyptian singer Abdel Halim Hafez's *She Walked On By* (1974) drift through the village's amplifiers—devices once used for prayers, death notices, and communal calls. Now, they disperse memory, distorting time and space. The artist describes this effect as a mythical sonic scape, where the past lingers in the air, untethered from chronology.

A duality courses through the piece: the artist and his brother mirror Abdel Halim Hafez and composer Mohamed Abdel Wahab, whose recorded rehearsal plays in the background. Just as the two singers wonder whom the girl in the song smiles at, the brothers grasp at a village that exists only in language, measuring it against the place that once stood. The title itself, *Two Birds, Sleeping*, suggests both presence and absence—a moment of rest hovering between wakefulness and forgetting.

The brothers recall how displaced villagers, gathered in new homes, would reconstruct their lost village through speech, preserving it in language. As the sound piece unfolds, the village is summoned and dissolved, its existence suspended between narration and silence. Like the poets of early Islamic eras, who transformed ruined landscapes into words, Nassereddine and his brother sing of a place they never truly knew, yet are bound to through echoes that refuse to fade.



Two Birds, Sleeping

Work Text:

She smiled the same smile once more, and walked on by, as if life gathered in a moment and then fell away in another.



The Image of Water

2024

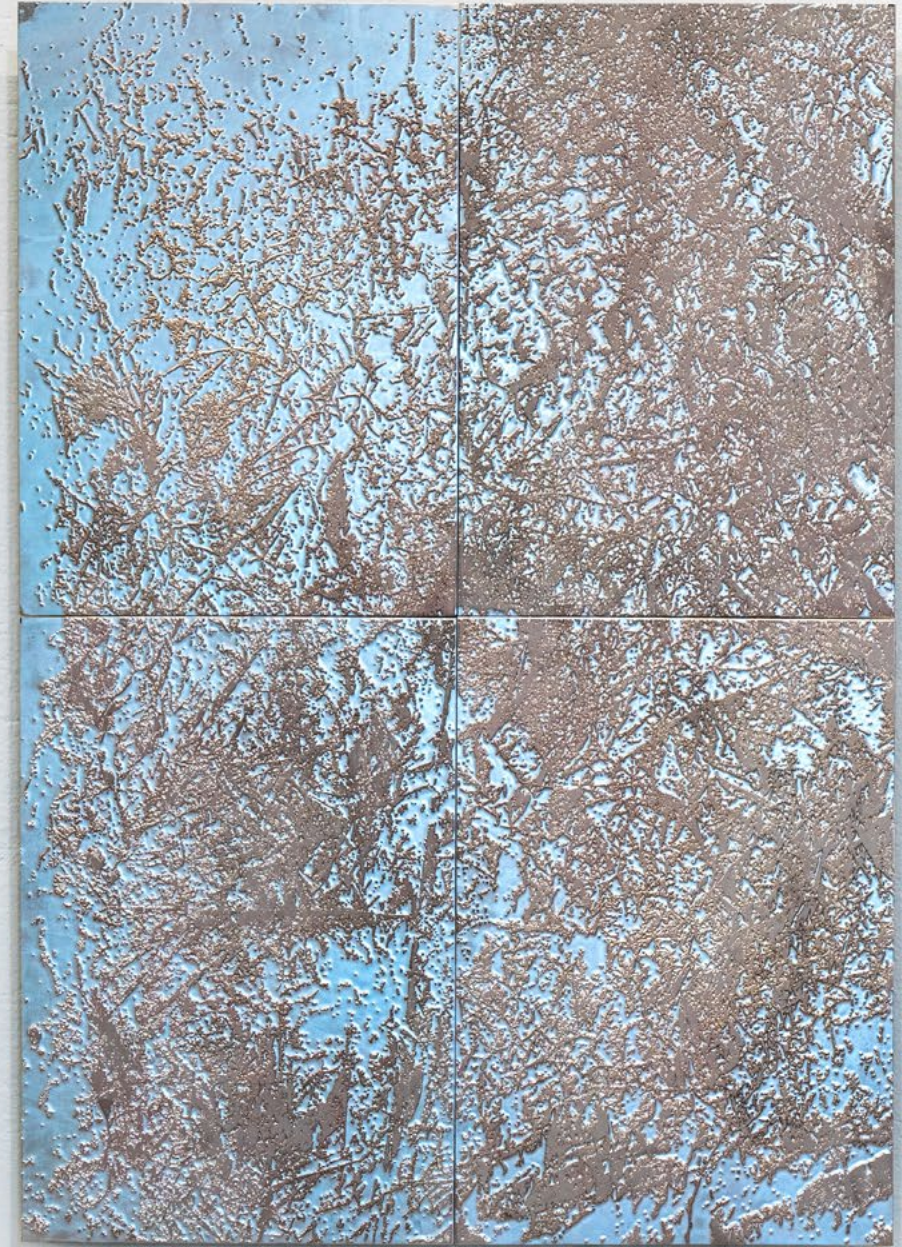
Printing plate - engraved zinc

100 x 70 cm

Courtesy of the Artist

The Image of the Water weaves together poetry, material history, and the act of reproduction. The engraved zinc plate—traditionally a tool for printing—is transformed into an artwork in itself, holding the ghostly imprint of water's shifting surface. This engraving emerges from carbon rubbings taken from various objects, a method that recalls the historical use of carbon paper by Arabic poetry anthologists for their notes.

By attempting to fix the ever-changing face of water, the work meditates on the tension between the ephemeral and the permanent, the singular and the infinitely reproducible. It reflects on the processes of printing and publishing in the Arab world, where words and images are continuously inscribed, erased, and reimagined.



The Image of Water

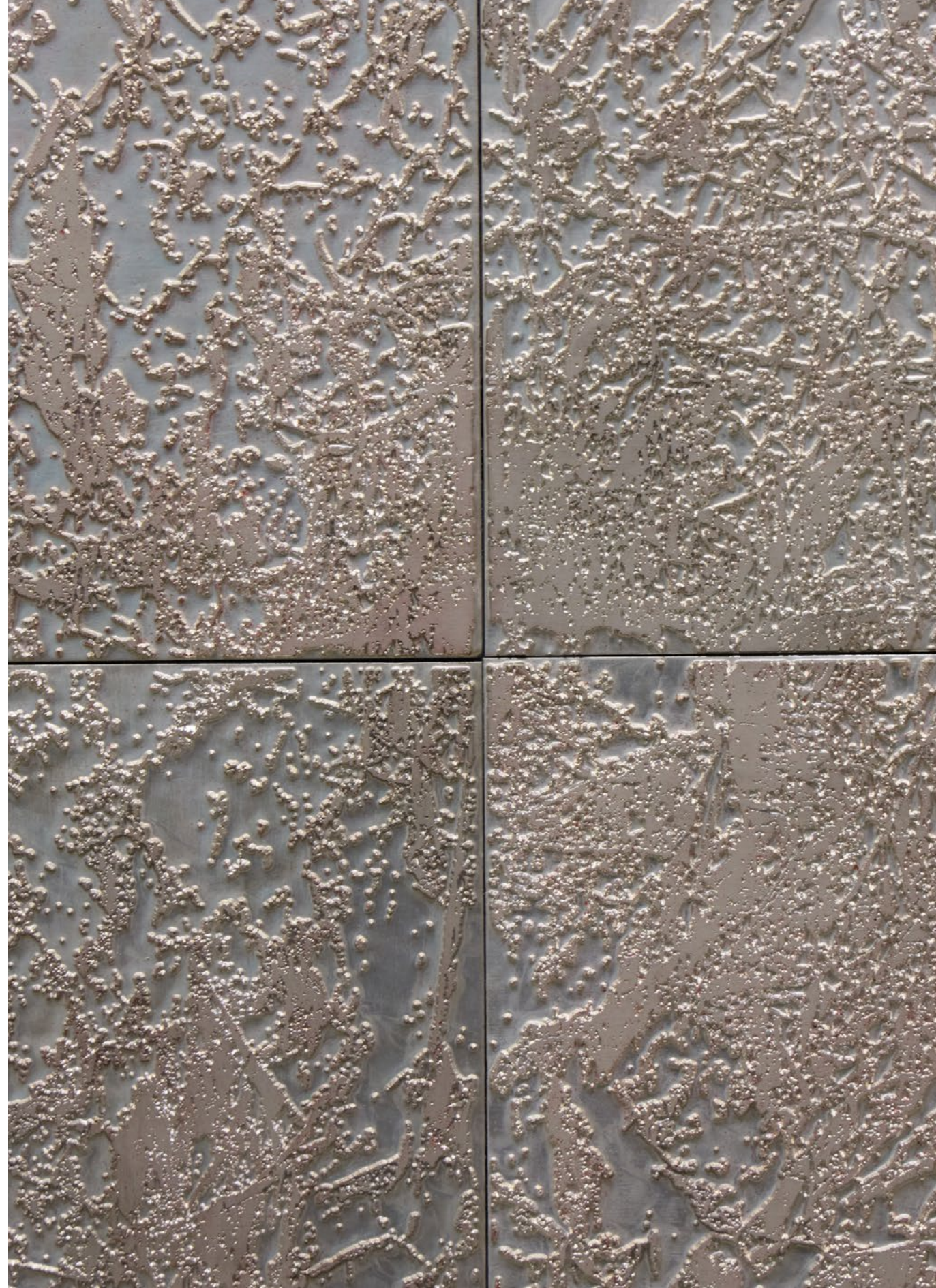
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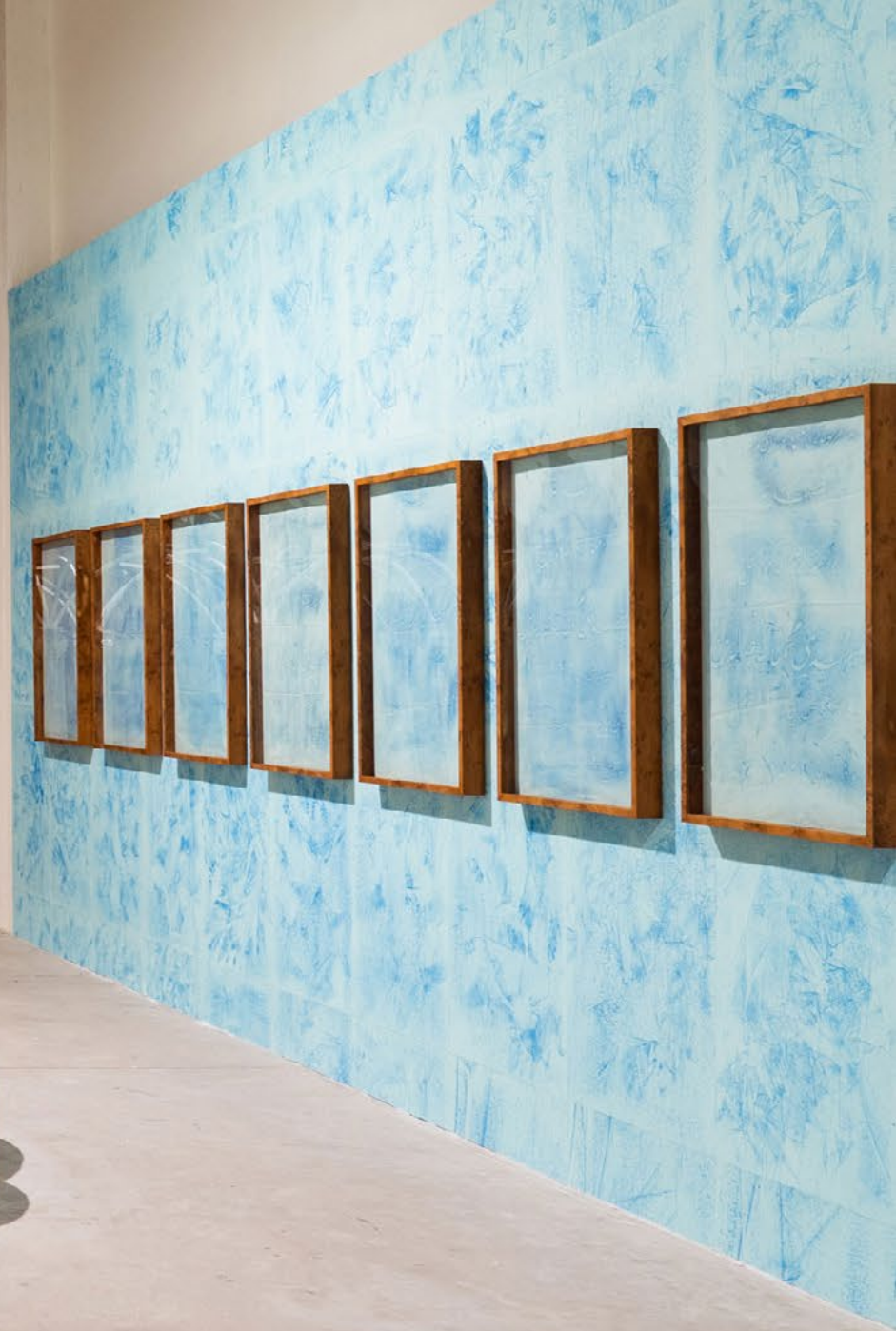
h. “all the pillars of all the palaces”. The verses of Al-Mutammim Ibn Nuwayra, in which he saw in his brother Malik’s tomb all the tombs of the world:

*Among the dead he judged me
for shedding all these tears.*

*“You cry at every tomb?” he said,
“Remembering that tomb between Liwa and Dakadek?”*

*“Sorrow begets sorrow,” I said,
“And every tomb is Malik’s.”*





Hussein Nassereddine is a multidisciplinary artist living and working between Beirut (Lebanon), and Paris (France). His work in installation, writing, video and performance originates from a practice around language that builds fragile monuments - some verbal, some sonic, some tactile - rooted in collective histories and resources of time, poetry, and ruins.

His works, performances and texts have been presented in museums, biennales and institutions around the world, including the Beirut Art Center (solo exhibition - 2025), Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (2024), Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2023), Jameel Art Center (2022), MISC Athens (solo exhibition - 2021) among others.

His first book *How to see the palace pillars as if they were palm trees* was published in Arabic in 2020 with Kayfa ta. The English translation was published in 2024.