

Towards

fire is love, water is sorrow – a distant fire

Azza El Siddique and Teto Elsidique

September 23–October 23, 2021

Towards is pleased to present *fire is love, water is sorrow – a distant fire*, a two-person exhibition by Azza El Siddique and Teto Elsidique.

“We invent powerful magical stories which say that dying was only a transition to another, more real existence.” — Email to students, Teto Elsidique, Sep. 29, 2016.

There is an impossibility inherent in the act of returning — to something, or someone, to an event, or even to one’s own self. Time produces change, if even merely in the position of the object in space as the Earth rotates on its own axis within its orbit. Even in the act of remembering, memory is altered with each recall. How, then, to preserve whole truths?

Traces provide a reference point, an evidence of existence, a resonance. In *fire is love, water is sorrow – a distant fire*, the work of Azza El Siddique and Teto Elsidique explores the energies generated by engagements with objects that add history and intrigue. Teto’s work playfully considers possible interpretations and new juxtapositions, while Azza — with a Janus-like focus on both past and future — engages in a close study to maintain, converse with, coax, and reproduce both Teto’s productions and hers.

“Reconfigured pasts and possible futures are drawn,” Teto writes in an artist statement for the Rema Hort Mann Foundation. “It is in this improvisational, contingent space between the two that my work so singularly points.”

The liminal spaces — negative, outlines, and otherwise — whisper potential and possibility. In the opening sentence of his statement, Teto references the index as suggesting “a kind of connective tissue through history.” His work’s preoccupation with resonance, histories, and the grammar of objects is on full display here, as Azza extends these themes into her engagements with Teto’s work that still “resonate[s] with traces of a still-trembling past.”

But back to the transmutation of memory into our contemporaneous present. Azza’s dexterity with the immaterial is visible in her work with and through shadows and spaces between layers and objects, reflecting a comfort and fluency with the shape of the gaps between. This dexterity is apparent in her extension of the work into machine learning, which she informs through virtual and material source objects.

The aether body — visible as one’s aura — is the energy that one transmits, and it leaves traces on the objects and people we encounter. Aether is what the sky is made of above Earth. Alchemists believed that aether was the fifth element — the other four being fire, water, earth, and air — that astronomical bodies like stars were made from. It’s tempting to think of wireless networks as a form of aether, the invisible and untouchable resonances of our data surrounding us as we breathe it in. That this new aether can contain more than traces of our existence, to include our memories, thoughts, and expressions that can then be shifted and moved into a multitude of other forms, both digital and material.

Gallery Hours
Thurs–Sat, 12–6pm
or by appointment

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“Allow me to see you, now that you have left me and I have left you, safe and sound like pure prose on a stone that may turn green or yellow in your absence. Allow me to gather you and your name, just as passersby gather the olives that harvesters forgot under pebbles. Let us then go together, you and I, on two paths: You, to a second life promised to you by language, in a reader who might survive the fall of a comet on earth.”

— In the Presence of Absence, Mahmoud Darwish (tr. Sinan Antoon)

—Exhibition text by Nehal El-Hadi

Azza El Siddique (b. Khartoum, Sudan) received an MFA from Yale University School of Art in 2019 and a BFA from Ontario College of Art and Design University in 2014. She was a participant at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2019. Her work has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *CanadianArt* and *Border Crossings*. Past exhibitions include *Begin in smoke*, *End in Ashes I*, Helena Anrather, New York; *let me hear you sweat*, Cooper Cole, Toronto; *Material Tells*, Oakville Galleries, Ontario and *RAW*, The Gardiner Museum, Toronto.

Teto Elsiddique (1982–2017) was born in Manchester, England and raised in Sudan and Canada. He received his B.F.A. from Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University and his M.F.A from Yale University School of Art, New Haven, Connecticut. Elsiddique’s work was the subject of solo exhibitions at 6BASE, New York, NY (2017); and at Reynolds Gallery, Richmond, Virginia (2017). He was in numerous group exhibitions including those held at Abrons Arts Center, New York (2016); Green Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut (2016); Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Weeks Gallery, Jamestown Community College, New York (both 2014) among others. He was a finalist for the 2017 Royal Bank of Canada, Canadian Painting Competition and a recipient of the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant; Ralph Meyer Prize, Yale University School of Art, New Haven, Connecticut (both 2016); Nova Scotia Arts Equity Grant, Halifax (2014); and Chautauqua School of Art Residency Scholarship, New York (2013). In 2016, Elisddique received a Fountainhead Fellowship from the Virginia Commonwealth University where he served as an adjunct in the Painting and Printmaking Department.

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