

MOUNIRA AL SOLH 'Is right not always victorious? Perhaps not.' This concise and conversational jotting is inscribed as a handwritten note in Arabic on Mounira Al Solh's portrait of a young woman, sketched on yellow, lined legal paper, which forms part of *I strongly believe in our right to be frivolous*, an ongoing suite of biographical mini portraits of refugees begun in 2012. Blotches of paint, a red-stained mouth and searing eyes, set within a few deft lines suggesting her headscarf, engage the viewer. Another portrait depicts an older woman also wearing a headscarf, the mother of five daughters, her face covered in wrinkles rendered in dense, black gouache. Raised in Beirut, Lebanese-Dutch artist Al Solh works across video, installation and socially engaged community projects, but deploys drawing as a mode to tell stories of forced migration, conflict, assassination and struggle alongside everyday occurrences such as watching TV and eating walnut cake at Starbucks. Her intimate portraits and accompanying written notations capture the plight of displaced migrants by intertwining personal accounts with political scenarios: 'you left on 07/12/2011. We understood you are with the revolution and there are people dying.' The title of *I strongly believe in our right to be frivolous* is derived from a statement by Mahmoud Darwish, a Palestinian poet known for writing about the turmoil of exile. In an interview with Eva Heiser in *Asymptote*, Al Solh commented: 'I personally wanted to recollect my Syria through the stories of the people, but also to live its diversity, its love stories, and its little unwritten matters that happen on the side of the war. When people came over, we spoke about everything! Also, we spoke about frivolous matters.' The series numbers more than 450 portraits or conversational sketches and up-close depictions in pen, pencil, ink and watercolour. Al Solh invited refugees to her studio to share their experiences, hearing their stories and drawing their portraits. Mainly Syrians but also Afghans, Bengalis, Somalis and Ethiopians, her sitters recounted personal, political and social narratives, alluded to in the artist's handwritten annotations. The series of drawings has been exhibited in Documenta 14 (2017) in Kassel, Germany and as part of the artist's first solo exhibition in the United States, at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2018. Whether using bureaucratic, yellow lined paper or a graph pad, Al Solh's image and text portraits are intimate and immediate, part of an exchange and sharing of histories that reflects the artist's personal plight. Her maternal family was from Syria and her paternal family from Lebanon, but in 1958 her grandfather was assassinated. In her work displacement, war, torture, danger, detention and massacre are interwoven with everyday reflections and ordinary accounts. Natalie King



1.



2.

..... Born 1978, Beirut. Lives and works in the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon, and the IJssel River, the Netherlands.

1-6. *I strongly believe in our right to be frivolous*, 2012–ongoing, mixed media on legal paper, 1: 22 × 32 cm (8 ½ × 12 ½ in); 2: 35 × 22 cm (13 ¾ × 8 ¾ in); 3 & 4: 28.6 × 21 cm (11 ¼ × 8 ¼ in); 5: 28 × 21.4 cm (11 × 8 ½ in); 6: 28.6 × 21 cm (11 ¼ × 8 ¼ in)

N A D I A H B A M A D H A J When Nadiah Bamadhaj delivered her lecture-performance *A King in a Republic* as part of 'FIELD MEETING Take 5: Thinking Projects' at Asia Contemporary Art Week in New York in 2017, she stridently critiqued the archipelago of Indonesia and the district of Yogyakarta where she lives with her husband and son. Bamadhaj's practice explores the socio-political issues confronting South East Asia, such as propaganda, independence, ruling versus the unruly, land, governance, status and Javanese cosmology. As such, her cultural context seeps into her densely rendered charcoal and collage drawings. She implicitly interrogates the region's restrictive societal mores in her large-scale drawings and detailed observations of the social intricacies of Yogyakarta's society, melding myth, monarchy, patterns and female forms. Born to a Malaysian father and New Zealander mother, Bamadhaj studied weekly life-drawing classes as part of her degree at Canterbury University's School of Fine Arts in Christchurch, New Zealand. Even though she has a foundation in drawing, her practice spans digital media, performance lectures, installations and collage. Her drawings are distinctly sculptural, with heavy shading, weighty contours, dense figures and drapery set against stark white backgrounds. In *No Really, I'm Fine I* (2014) she interrogates the role of women and patriarchy with a Medusa-like head shaded with topographical contours and an anguished look of defiance. Surrounded by menacing and monstrous snakes in place of hair, Bamadhaj's Medusa incarnates female rage and authority. In an interview with Naima Morelli in *Qantara* in 2019, Bamadhaj elaborated on her ongoing exploration of gender, sexuality and taboos in marginalized communities while working in a transgender-run shelter for people living with HIV: 'My exposure to issues of sex and sexuality of people with different genders and sexual orientation, and the stigma and shaming they face, has encouraged me to do more reading and research on the subject, the ideas of which have made their way into my work. I have met some amazing, resourceful and resilient people at the shelter, and I'm better off for it, not only as an artist, but in my life in general' Another image that explores power and dominance is *The Misogynist's Throne I* (2015), a depiction of an ornately carved throne whose seat and legs become a human form draped in heavy cloth. Bamadhaj metaphorically references the position of the sultan and governance within a South East Asian cultural context. In doing so, she alludes to dominant moralities, discipline and religion in Indonesia. Based in the cultural city of Yogyakarta, a monarchy within a republic, Bamadhaj was awarded the Nippon Foundation's Asian Public Intellectual Fellowship in 2002 to spend a year in this communal and creative place where she now resides. Here, she can undertake fieldwork and scrutinize gender structures, power imbalances and overlooked histories. Natalie King



1.



2.

NIKOLAUS GANSTERER.....Viennese artist, performer and researcher Nikolaus Gansterer produces intricate drawings that resemble scientific networks and structures. He incorporates performance, blackboard assemblages and large banners or maps of what he terms 'bodying' as part of a practice that investigates micro and macro systems. Drawing, thinking and action are intertwined in dynamic astrophysical markings and diagrams, as evident in *Choreographic Figures Diagrams, Figure of Vibrating Affinity II* (2017). Here flourishes and entangled lines sweep across black paper: the effect is cosmological. Gansterer's compositions are not literal; rather each drawing is sensory and dynamic, alluding to different states and interrelationships. In a studio conversation with Florian Langhammer for *Collectors Agenda* in 2017, Gansterer remarked on his preoccupation with drawing: 'For me personally, an extended drawing practice plays a central role, not so much in order to mimetically depict and explain the world, thus making it more controllable, but rather to make phenomena – things and the relationships between them that are not initially obvious – visible, and as precisely as possible, for both myself, and others.' His notation systems suggest dimensions, experience and space. Using mind maps and memory of places he has been, Gansterer deploys drawing as an experimental mode across time, space and movement. Not surprisingly, travel and residencies are occasions when he conceptualizes new work and hypotheses. Previously, he spent over a year charting the psychogeography of airports and drew his own recollections of the city of Damascus.

..... For Gansterer, drawing has an immediacy that requires little technical proficiency yet allows for an exploration of the sensory. For example, his 'Translectures' are ad hoc performative diagrams and recordings, made using a variety of materials including pencil, chalk, ink, stone and paper. He writes with chalk on a blackboard, where words like 'thinking' and 'drawing' are accompanied by diagrams with coordinates, dotted lines, measurements and notations, props, rubbings and cartoon outlines that infer a quasi-mathematical language. Ideas are rehearsed, rubbed out and reinstated. By co-opting the lecture format in a transdisciplinary way, Gansterer conjugates drawing, improvisation, choreography and performance. In 1998 he co-founded the Institute for Transacoustic Research, an organization that uses methodologies from the arts and science to host events, hearings, performances, workshops and installations. The series 'Maps of Bodying' uses marker, pencil and crayon on canvas to evoke action and ideas in motion, indicated in graphic notations across large-scale wall hangings that resemble banners. Exhibited in a number of shows, including a solo presentation 'Drawing as Thinking in Action' at the Drawing Lab in Paris (2019) and 'Con-notations' at Villa Arson in Nice, France (2018), Gansterer's notations and visual algorithms use drawing as a way to think schematically: a method to find an atmosphere with its own vocabulary, circuits and configurations.

..... Natalie King



1.



2.

1. *Translecture Untertagüberbau*, 2017, drawing performance, pencil, chalk, ink, stones, paper and various objects on blackboard, 70 × 100 cm (27 ½ × 39 ¾ in)
2. *Translecture on Con-notations*, 2018, drawing performance, pencil, chalk, ink, stones, paper and various objects on blackboard, 70 × 100 cm (27 ½ × 39 ¾ in), installation view, 'Con-notations', Villar Arson, Villa Arson Centre d'Art Contemporain, Nice, France
3. *Choreo-graphic Figures Diagrams, Figure of Vibrating Affinity II*, 2017, pencil and crayon on black paper, 31 × 40 cm (12 ¼ × 15 ½ in)
4. *Maps of Bodying (IV)*, 2018, marker, pencil and crayon on canvas, 222 × 144 cm (87 ¾ × 56 ¾ in)
5. *Maps of Bodying (VI)*, 2019, marker, pencil and crayon on canvas, 222 × 144 cm (87 ¾ × 56 ¾ in)

.....
Born 1974, Klosterneuburg, Austria. Lives and works in Vienna.
.....

MASSINISSA SELMANI Before embarking on an artistic career, Massinissa Selmani trained in computer science, a fact that offers a clue to the scientific precision of his delicate drawings. The methodical and painstaking qualities of the process are central to his practice, whether presented as animations, installations or as a series of graphite and coloured pencil drawings. His depictions comprise carefully rendered architectural settings populated by tiny figures and props in elusive locations. These incongruous perspectival arrangements are at once intriguing and absurd. Neat rows of chairs are immaculately arranged on a gradient leading towards a stage that resembles a swimming pool with a car tyre resting on it and two men gesticulating in the distance. Accompanied by a cryptic title, *L'aube insondable #3* (*The unfathomable dawn # 3*), (2018), Selmani poetically suggests the ineffable dimension of time. The artist grew up in Algiers and moved to France at the age of twenty-five to study art at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Tours. He has participated in numerous high-profile biennials, as well as presenting his distinctive drawings and paper configurations in a solo exhibition at Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2018. Importantly, Selmani was included in Okwui Enwezor's 2015 Venice Biennale exhibition, 'All the World's Futures', receiving a coveted special mention award for a suite of drawings and depictions in red notebooks as a tribute to Algerian rural communities and failed utopias. Selmani's predilection for drawing can be traced to his teens in Algeria in the 1990s, when he would be intrigued by political cartoons in the newspaper. His source material is derived from cutouts, newspaper clippings, texts and montages transformed into finely rendered drawings with exquisite detail. Influenced by South African artist William Kentridge (b. 1955), he discussed his scenographies in an interview in *Contemporary* in 2015: 'In my drawings, I like the idea of creating realistic situations that are unlikely to actually occur. The elements making up the drawings are very often copies from press clippings from different countries that I collect on an ongoing basis, dealing with different subjects without any link to my starting point. By associating them, I create scenarios that are frequently absurd.' His drawings are populated with stages, empty happenings, screens, theatres, doorways and ledges. *Soon #9* (2017) is a planar configuration comprising a platform propped up by a mound with an outdoor movie screen above it. Rich with drafting, shading and contouring, Selmani's uncanny and unlikely situations appear both comic and tragic by turns. His drawings meld documentary and fiction in a way that ultimately returns us to the photographs of the Belgian Surrealist poet and theorist Paul Nougé – who also had a scientific background as a biochemist – and his use of humour and surprise, as well as the surrealist character of arbitrariness. Natalie King



1.



2.

1. *L'aube insondable #3* (*The unfathomable dawn # 3*), 2018, graphite and coloured pencil on paper, 124 × 100 cm (48 ¾ × 39 ½ in)
2. *Soon #9*, 2017, graphite and coloured pencil on paper and tracing paper, 129.5 × 97 cm (51 × 38 in)
3. *Détour du lendemain* (*Next day detour*), 2019, graphite and coloured pencil on paper, 78 × 112 cm (30 ¾ × 44 ½ in)
4. *Untitled 1* (*no plan is foolproof*), 2019, graphite and coloured pencil on paper, 66 × 91 cm (26 × 35 ½ in)

.....
 Born 1980, Algiers. Lives and works in Tours, France.

HANNELORE VAN DIJCK..... In mid-2016 Belgian artist and draughtswoman Hannelore Van Dijck presented *Four Flags* as part of a group exhibition called 'Summer Dust' at the Verksmiðjan art centre in Hjalteyri, a town of thirty-five people in northern Iceland. Located in a massive concrete structure that was once the largest herring factory in all of Europe, the art centre featured the work of eleven artists responding to the site and to one another. Van Dijck's contribution was an adaption of her signature charcoal rubbings into a suite of billowing flags on an old building overlooking the water. Like drawing in the wind, her gentle marks become fleeting by responding to the weather and breeze. The flags don't designate place or nationality, rather they signal an ephemerality: a billowing flow of fabric and texture. Working outdoors provided a new setting for Van Dijck's meticulous rubbings and obsessive lines. Her delicate markings are signposts of place or non-place; large charcoal drawings and rubbings are often rendered in situ over architectural surfaces and interiors, walls and archways. Charcoal in hand, she can draw for days – part of an endurance practice, she marks domestic interiors with shadings and stains. Her drawings evoke permanence and impermanence, further suggested in the title of her 2018 solo exhibition at Gallery Sofie Van der Velde in Antwerp, Belgium, 'The lasting one, that didn't last, that still lasts', about the transience and passing of time. Van Dijck's shadings in charcoal and chalk cover vast surfaces in monochromatic markings that are integrated with the architecture that hosts them. Applied on walls, her smudges have a rhythm in their minutiae and delicate texture, and it comes as no surprise that Van Dijck studied illustration in Ghent, Belgium, ensuring that drawing is her preferred medium, subsequently adapted and modified to different settings. In an artist's statement for The Drawing Center, New York in 2012, she reflected on the subtlety of her practice and the importance of context and space: 'My drawings are composed of elements sourced from a variety of places close to my personal life. Dreams and reality are mixed. The images are often settings without characters or activity. It is the context that generates the tension. In the composition of a wall drawing, I start with what the original location offers me and try to comprehensively consider the effect of my installation on the essence of the space. Drawing, exhibition and context are one.' By working in close contact with her medium, Van Dijck produces fragile, tenuous and transient compositions that are elusive yet have deep psychological impact, her drawings and stained interiors suggesting erosion and fading memories.

..... Natalie King



1.

1. *Four Flags*, 2012–17, charcoal and fabric paint on textile, dimensions variable, installation view, 'Summer Dust', Verksmiðjan, Hjalteyri, Iceland, 2016
2. *Circulation de l'air*, 2019, charcoal wall drawing, dimensions variable installation view, 'Storytelling', MAC Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, France
3. *Walls*, 2015, charcoal wall drawing, dimensions variable installation view, 'Collection with loose ends', Kunsthaus NRW Kornelimünster, Aachen, Germany

.....
Born 1986, Wuustwezel, Belgium. Lives and works in Geel, Belgium.
.....