

At the Gate of Dawn

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Chapter 1

Artist Statement

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I am a Lebanese transnational artist who makes installations that are coded with tactics for endurance, fortitude, and presence. These immersive environments evoke journeying through inter-cultural landscapes. I use gestural shapes, vivid colors, and sculpture placement to reflect discussions of self-hood, dialogue, and be/longing to an ever-shifting global culture.

In authoring my work, I am synthesizing notions of intelligent design in cultural leadership and meaning making. I honor the ceramic tradition with my colorful and symbolic expressionist sculptures while upholding the latest findings in psychology of perception, viewer experience, migration study, and immersive algorithmic realities.

My research in mathematics and Sufism is coupled with a studio based research, both inform my ceramic forms, choice of texture, matching of vibrant colors, and suspensive compositions, in cycles of mutual constitution.

Exhibition Statement

“Taking everything into account, love and writing are one and the same thing.

Both arouse the same mistrust.”

Abdelfattah Kilito

In "At the Gate of Dawn" I am researching various stages of exploration, and negotiating the reality of journeying. Those ideas became characters in a story that is taking place in one place and at the same time. At the gate of dawn, we will meet the wanderer, the intruder, the lovers, the beggar, the guard, the servants, the technician, and witnesses of the opening of the Gate of Dawn.

In this time-space continuum, Journeying is enacted from different lenses, mainly of Sufism and mathematics, both celebrated in my part of the world, the middle east. I am reconsidering notions of intelligent design in cultural leadership and meaning making, offering a re-presentation of historical notions using the latest findings in principles of design, psychology of perception, migration study, and immersive experiences. I cloak my story with a veil or two, to challenge the reader to tame this wild text by placing themselves among the characters sitting at the Gate of Dawn.

Chapter 2

Wanderer at the Gate of Dawn

" The number of us who live outside the old nation-state categories is increasing so quickly, by 64 million just in the last 12 years, that soon there will be more of us than there are Americans. Already, we represent the fifth-largest nation on Earth."

Pico Iyer

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I left home and I never looked back, that was 11 years ago. I have traveled far and found myself walking, aimlessly at first. I left what is familiar to me, my father and mother, my brother, and even my dog, I left and never looked back. I like lying to myself. Correction: I looked back often, and i went back, forever changed.

When I walk, I do not like to walk the same way back to my point of departure. I walk, and walk, only to find myself visiting and revisiting myself, changed through unfamiliar places, growing older, wiser, and carrying myself lighter.

Everywhere I went I stopped and examined myself and those who lived in that place. People's customs, hopes and dreams. As if my destiny was written for me, I was staying in every place, geographic (external) or emotional (internal) for 3 years. It takes 2 years for the dust of each transition to settle, then a year of experiencing the local culture, and I am back on the road.

Ah the road, that is where I belong, and to the campfires of heart-to-heart conversations that the burning flames kindle in those who are seeking warmth and companionship.

قال العرب : إذا نزلت في أرضهم فارضهم، وإذا نزلت في حبيهم فحيهم، وإذا نزلت في دارهم فدارهم

I left to break free, to confirm who I was, who I answer to, who governs me, who nourishes me, and who loves me. I knew the answer all along; I wanted to live it wholeheartedly, with all its discomforts.

On my journey, I am shifting my center, in space and in time. Like a circle, I am situated in relation to my own needs (my center) and in relation to the needs of the systems I inhabit (the periphery of myself). When I look deeper, I become a sphere.

Wanderers as spheres, we are defined by the intrinsic need of our being. Ideally, balanced and still in our interactions with/in an ecosystem. Until then, we are bound to keep shifting our centers, carrying our individual sphere, however expanded it is, between powers and tensions until we find an optimal still position. We find ourselves expanding from the narrow individual sphere, passing through a cultural one that we leave towards a global perspective, In an ever-expanding notion of self, If we are lucky.

Whenever I was able to catch my breath and listen to my thoughts, I wondered about what constituted culture. What reinforced a culture beyond conversation that initiated it through a series of passed down agreements and boundaries? I wondered about whether a culture is rooted in a certain geographical reality, and the possibility of a

culture to be negotiated beyond that person/nature relationship that stamps its genesis. Lastly, I wondered if a culture can break free from the mistakes that it made in the past, and how might that forgiveness look like.

I learn the names of each culture's flora and fauna, or the distinct types of sands that each of its emirates has, I learn the culture's holidays and when invited, join in celebration.

Since leaving my motherland, I have traveled southeast, then northwest then east, a swinging global pendulum until a global pandemic and an ever-crumbling post-global pandemic world threw a stick in my revolving life, to reflect on my journey's purpose and what has been essential to me.

I then decided to put myself in a position where I am asking myself and answering an academic institution's request to tell my story in fulfillment of a thesis in Fine Arts, with a concentration in ceramics as its main medium. That was in 2023.

It was only a matter of time before my journey led me to stand at the Gate of Dawn. Confronted with this obstacle, I looked over my shoulder to contemplate my past and present, feverishly anticipating a clearing to an ever-unfolding journey. I examine the majestic dark-colored gate, it looks abysmal, a mere void in the world. The more I look at it the more it stares back, until I begin to forget my past, my knowledge, and that I am standing at the edge of something greater than anything I experienced before.

I forget about the books I carried with me, and I forget about the little information device that is always in my left pocket, I forget about my mother and father, about my brother and my dog, my culture and how it is disintegrating.

I dwell at the gate of dawn, wondering if my journey ends here.

I take a deep breath and sit on the ground, patiently.

From the side of my eyes, I sensed a shift in the air that was creeping up on me.

He stood beside me gazing at the gate, hands on his hips, smiling wide, and says "What do you think is behind this gate?"

Intruder at the Gate of Dawn

“In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, — no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, — my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, — all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.”

Emerson, Ralph Waldo

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I stood there next to a traveler, I turned around and noticed he was entranced with an absent-minded look on his face. He must have been sitting in front of the gate for a while.

“It’s been 8 years” he said, “I thought I was only traveling from place to place. With every geographical transition I focused on assimilating, oftentimes forgetting that I was growing older”

I envy the lucky wanderer. He made a home wherever he went. He befriended thieves, renegades, and traitors who slipped between society’s cracks. Exiled they all are.

Me? I choose to dwell where I am not welcomed, an intruder.

I want to figure out this gate, why is it here? Why did it appear now?

I keep on staring at it, it is extremely hard to see any nuance, everything about it is pitch-black, it is as if it is a hole in the fabric of reality...and, it feels like it is breathing, as if it has a life of its own.

And if I squinted my eyes narrow enough?

...Still nothing to see.

I kept on getting closer until I could not go any further. I close my eyes, the blackness is distracting, and examine the black gate with my hands, the surface is velvety to the touch, warm, alive. The width of the gate is as wide as my open arms.

I then open my eyes and turn to my new friend, the wanderer. He has been repeating the same questions on connection, journeying, culture and finding oneself.

I sit next to him, wanting to answer his questions in the simplest way. His head is buzzing with these questions that would turn the sanest among us into a madman.

I reach to my left pocket, and I take out a page I have stolen from a book at a palace I invaded about a year ago. This page spoke on points, lines, and planes, and promised to teach its readers the ways of seeing.

From the page I read aloud as I turned to the wanderer:

“In geometry, there are 3 undefined terms. From these undefined terms, all other terms are defined.

The first is the point, which has a location and no size. The study of its properties and

capabilities is transferable to the animated center of a human being.

The second is the line, which is born from the moving point. A person who wanders around can set themselves free from the shackles of oppressive cultural expectations, and if they are lucky, journey a path of self-discovery and transcendence.

These lines may or may not choose to extend infinitely in either direction.

On the path they are “linear” and one dimensional but have no width.

Multiple paths may or may not interact to create the third, a plane.

Lines are bound to converge and diverge. The plane may or may not extend infinitely in 2 dimensions.

These co-planes that are created by those 2 lines are what we call culture.”

By now the wanderer has ceased to look at the gate of dawn, I have captured his attention, and he says:

“That which we call Identity, the way it has been initiated and defined has become too arrogant and callous to welcome new influences. What is an external influence but another path, another point (of view) who decided to go on its own journey. Seeking dialogue, creating planes, enriching conversations, and generating inter-sectional realities?”

He starred again at the Gate of Dawn and continued: “A culture that is suffering from stagnation, a barren plane, that limits its points from journeying, is a dying culture.”

Then he turned to me and said:” Where did you get that page from?”

I said: "The book of postulates, kept in the well-guarded vault of the city's library, specialized in safeguarding assumptions. They seek to conquer the undefined, to define it, to subdue it. Take what is written with a pinch of salt, I am."

Lovers at the Gate of Dawn

“Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate”,

“Plurality should not be posited without necessity.”

William of Ockham

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“For the love of wisdom,” said the Intruder to the wanderer “I simplified and abstracted travelers, each into a circle with and gave them the depth of spheres.

To study the sphere, we should position it in relationship to the forces affecting it, and the path of the journey that it is on.

The Wanderer finds a stick. In the mud, he draws an elliptical shape containing repeating foreign patterns, and says: “This is the circle of interpersonal realities, when the center becomes two, the circle becomes an ellipse. Two individuals with two points of view stand apart, warping what could have been, with the condition of a common center and distance to the periphery, a perfect circle.

Let’s call this elliptical mud drawing the plane of finite and infinite games.

The playground to all games.

Where If God and Devil were football players, this would be the football field.

Without this plane there are no games, no players. No Devil, No God”

He then reaches to his right pocket and grabs sticks that he planted in the mud where

the drawing was. "These linear paths on the grounds of the game are player, yielding to either pole"

The intruder interrupted and said: "I like this ellipse, but how about we make an opening in the middle, a passage. I like being able to go where my heart desires. Sometimes the calmest of places are in the eye of the storm."

The wanderer splits the ellipse diagonally in half with a narrower ellipse, for the intruder to be able to imagine himself walking to the center of the action and interfering with the game.

"For the love of science," continued the wanderer "I acknowledge that of the physical forces affecting these journeying spheres, we note gravity, exerted by a bigger sphere, the plane they roll on, planet earth, with its fiery core; raising and breaking mountains, directing water back to its source, charting roads, and passages. All which humans in turn shaped and cultivated as cultures.

These forces are bottom-up animators as forces influencing the sphere and its movement. These forces are what distort the game's floor and its flow.

For the love of science, I acknowledge that of the physical forces affecting the journeying spheres, we note gravity, exerted by a bigger sphere, a celestial body, intimate with water, one pulling the liquid plane towards it reaching a local maximum we call high tide, and where the water stops falling, we call local minimum or low tide. This spherical mirror, our moon, is a top-down animator as a force defining the floor of this installation and its flow. These forces are what carve the blue streams on earth's plane.

For the love of science, I acknowledge that of the physical forces affecting the journeying sphere, we note gravity, exerted by an even bigger sphere, a blazing fire, breathing life in all other spheres.

Other celestial bodies desire its warmth and are drawn to it, only to cautiously propel away from it in a cyclical orbit, the frequency at which the celestial bodies come closer and move away from the bigger sphere depends on the ebbs and flow of that desire.

These ebbs and flows animate planets, moons, our earth. That which we call the sun is a force which gives planets their shape and shapes the heart of flora and fauna.

Acknowledged, and celebrated, it creates culture on the surface of earth. This force is what dries our mud here and our elliptical plane to its ochre color.”

The wanderer looked up at The Gate of Dawn and said “Between the Earth we walk on and the sun and moon that animates us, between the two fiery spheres and the moon to pacify them,

“We are moving towards something that does not exist. The voyage is infinite. The passenger is not.”

Beggar at the Gate of Dawn

*This
Path to God
Made me such
a sweet old beggar
I was starving until one night
My love tricked God Himself
To fall
into my bowl.
Now Hafiz is infinitely rich,
But all I ever want to do
Is keep emptying out
My emerald filled
Pockets
Upon
This tear stained
World."

Hafiz*

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Casting a shadow on the intruder and wanderer's drawing, approaches a slim figure. He looks up at the black hole in the fabric of the world, and sweetly says "At last, The Gate of Dawn!"

He then looks down and examines the drawing. Lays down what looks like an ax and boat-shaped bowl, smiles and asks to sit down across from the lovers. They gently nod, he sits down and says:

"I traveled through many lands, oceans, and plenty of roads in search of the truth.

The reason I kept on moving forward is because I had nothing to hold on to. Nothing to hold me back. No one to ask me to stay. I tried giving my heart away, my body, my time,

and my soul.

Only to find that my soul was the only thing that is not mine to give.

I overheard you speaking about the sun, the moon, and the earth that shape us. You speak about the external forces exerting pressure on the surface and making each one of us a sphere.

Remember that these assumptions try defining the undefined.

Given that each of us are spheres or segments of a whole sphere. Did you stop to think about the light and colors that emanate from those spheres? Is it carrying to the surface the center's color and temperature? The essential content of each core?

I see your pawns on this elliptical game board slightly bent, yielding to the board game's poles. Could they all be answering to a center? a n invisible center that we are not able to locate because it is everywhere?

Are they reflecting that everything is in flux? That beyond the infinite fixed qualities that God has, the hundredth name of God almighty, is change?

The lovers by now were captivated by the slim figure's sweet blasphemous voice.

The beggar added: "Let us talk about love. Within us we lays a fire, given to us when we are born, extinguishing, and leaving our bodies as we decay and rot. That fire grows with kindness and is dampened by which doesn't belong to us.

From the moment we are born we are dependent on love, our mothers and fathers warming us, feeding us, and answering our cries.

We are born powerless, and we die powerless. To many extends, we depend on each other.

Like you, wanderer, I left my home and my city, and just like you, intruder, I am met with

distrust and shunned in the alleys where thieves and outcasts dwell.

I am always given what I need, and I am taken care of. When a passerby lays in my bowl money or food, their generosity becomes my gratitude.”

The skeptic intruder says: “But what of false generosity? Not all acts of giving qualify as generosity. What if their act was false generosity?”

“That exchange is happening regardless of the interpretation. In this exchange, despite being bestowed with inconsideration, that the highest forms of generosity are based .”

The wanderer who kept on eyeing the ax and the boat shaped vessel, points at the vessels, and says, “Is that all that you have?”

The slim figure says: Yes, this is my ax, symbolizing my detachment from the material world, and this a bowl, a kashkul that a craftsman once gave me. Sometimes, two old friends visit me in my dreams, a lion, and a hare.

About this kashkul. The name comes of the words konash (کنش) meaning “to make” and kol (کل) meaning “complete” or “full”.

Together it indicates that all the dervish's worldly assets are in the container and therefore asking people to fill it through donations and gifts.

This boat-shaped vessel was made from varied materials, originally a coco-de-mer shell from Seychelles, an archipelago of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, off East Africa.

A craftsman found a husk washing on the shores of the city, made a mold of it and cast this bowl out of clay. I use it to collect alms, usually after street sessions of poetry recitation, religious eulogies, advice, or entertainment.

When empty, this kashkul can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the voiding of our ego, which is required of us before we can nourish ourselves with divine knowledge.”

The wanderer who has collected hundreds of stories from his travels, felt compelled and said: “So, you are a Sufi beggar! I know about your kin. I once heard this story from a spiritual leader about a Sufi saint and a wandering dervish.

“Would you share some of those stories with me?” said the beggar “My bowl fills with stories well told”

The wanderer smiles, nods, and says:

“Ibrahim was a great Sufi saint who had once been a king. Once, Ibrahim was traveling to Mecca with a caravan of camels and a large retinue of servants. He was travelling in utmost luxury, to the maximum extent that was possible in a desert camp. He had the most luxurious tents pitched with golden pegs. Everything that could be gold-braided was gold-braided, and he wore clothes which were of the most luxurious kind.

Another Sufi, a wandering dervish, happened to pass by, and looking at all the luxury, thought, “This cannot be a spiritual person.” When he had the opportunity to meet Ibrahim, he chided him, “What kind of a Sufi are you? You are still holding on to your material wealth, your gold pegs!” Ibrahim simply nodded and asked him to rest for a while.

Then, in the night when they met again, Ibrahim said, “Early tomorrow morning, let us walk to Mecca, the two of us.” The man said, “Okay, that is where I am heading too.”

They woke up early in the morning and left together. After walking for a few hours in the desert, suddenly the other man remembered that he had left his begging bowl behind in the sleeping quarters. He told Ibrahim, "I have forgotten my begging bowl. Let me return and get it." He started to walk back.

Ibrahim looked at the man and replied, "I have left all that material wealth, the camels, the gold tent pegs and everything else, and I am walking without looking back. But you want to go back for a begging bowl? I want you to know, the gold pegs were only piercing the sand, not my heart. Whether it is steel or gold, it makes no difference to me, so I made it gold. But you? You cannot leave your begging bowl and walk away. You are walking towards Mecca which is supposed to be the holiest of the holiest, but you are turning back because of a begging bowl. I am not even carrying a begging bowl with me." And Ibrahim walked on.

"I love that story" said the beggar "Externally, we can live whichever way we want. But how we keep ourselves within is more important. Otherwise, we may gather everything and still have nothing. A generous reminder indeed... as Sufi our specific world view is bound to a character shaping disciplined ascetism, consistent with the adherence to clear and defined sets of principles and ethics, we call truths.

Before someone needs to be buried, he or she needs to be identified, otherwise the alleged corpse might resume business after the funeral. When I mention the subject, I am talking about a point of view, the individual, the subject of biography, the subject of knowledge, the political subject, the moral subject, the person, the personality, the Ego, the subject as will, the subject as sovereignty, or simply, the sphere of "I".

In relation to the concept of the subject, we use the term journey because of its key role in achieving mystical aspirations. The term has been used to discuss the pilgrimage of the soul, a metaphor for death, and to privilege a state of transition influenced by mystical sources.

The term journey as a term for a transition of one's state is considered literal and coined through the linguistic method of metaphysicalization of sensual concepts.

In our ethical and mystical sources of the tradition, the word Journey (Safar), which means transfer from one place to another, is used to describe death, the transient nature of life, and our devotee's mystical transition. Safar unveils the faces of the travelers and their characters, revealing matters that are hidden. A journey has a lot of hardship, and dangers including insecurity, robbery, and the possibility of losing one's way and wandering" says the beggar as he turned to the wanderer.

"Journey in Sufism is considered it to be one of the ten pillars of transcendence (taṣawwuf) and Sufis typically understood the notion of journey in relation to two aspects:

The purposes of the journey; and the benefits obtained from the process itself.

According to the Sufis, a journey can only be made with purposes such as making the pilgrimage (ḥajj), to address relationships with relatives, or meeting a Sufi shaykh.

Sufis traveled widely for the sake of study, and they collected the sayings of the great teachers.

Wayfarers cannot achieve the benefits of a journey without traveling. Abû Ṭālib al-Makkî

(d. 386/996) analyzed the meaning of journey in terms of indicating the effect of the process of the journey itself on purifying our soul, which is the foundation of ethics and transcendence.

Our soul may appear to be serene and have noble traits such as resignation (*tawwakul*), consent (*riḍā*) and submission (*taslīm*) in the presence of those who are close to Him. However, once confronted with the hardships of travel and being homesick, negative aspects of our soul are inevitably revealed.

Similarly, al Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) believed the journey can purify our moral evil, by depriving the spirit of lasciviousness (*nafs al-ammāra*) and weakening it.

The other benefit of the journey is to be cut off from anything except God. This kind of benefit relates the journey to the religious notion of emigration (*hijra*), with leaving one place for another disconnecting the soul of the wayfarer from creatures and connecting it instead to God.

Traditionally, the etiquette of the Sufi journey is carefully considered in mystical life. The ethical considerations of a Sufi are: Traveling for the pleasure of God, to witness God in its creations, to travel not for one's own desires and passions, cleanliness, respecting locals, behaving well with other wayfarers, helping fellow travelers, and not abusing others." says the beggar while looking at the intruder.

"To the Sufi, that journey had an end, and the Wayfarer should not be distracted by charms along the way, but be one with their goals, the final station of the hereafter.

The investment of this journey is time, whereas the carnal, sensual passions are lurking to rob this capital away from person to make them deprived of any profit of their journey, which is the vision of God. Such is the attitude and moral character of the Sufi wayfarer.

Mustamlî Bukhârî emphasized the necessity of an outward journey for the purification of the soul, as well as emphasizing the necessity of the inward journey. Hârî believed that Sufis travel so much because their interiors undergo transition. It is a devotional calling towards the Beloved and since that Beloved is everywhere and in everything, if it is a path of asceticism, the Sufi, liberated in God, is expected to experience a state of oneness with the world.

In Bukhârî's opinion, the inward states of those who are not Sufi depend on their outward states, and when their outward states are calm, their inward states become serene too. However, for Sufis the converse is true: Their inward is principal, and their outward states become dependent on their inward selves.

From the dua of light:

اللَّهُمَّ اجْعَلْ فِي قَلْبِي نُورًا ، وَفِي لِسَانِي نُورًا ، وَاجْعَلْ فِي سَمْعِي نُورًا ، وَاجْعَلْ فِي بَصَرِي نُورًا ، وَاجْعَلْ مِنْ خَلْفِي نُورًا ، وَمِنْ أَمَامِي نُورًا ، وَاجْعَلْ مِنْ فَوْقِي نُورًا ، وَمِنْ تَحْتِي نُورًا ، اللَّهُمَّ أَعْطِنِي نُورًا

Which translates to: Oh Allah, place light in my heart, light on my tongue, light in my hearing, light in my sight, light behind me, light in front of me, light in front of me and light below me. Oh Allah, give me light.

In this dua, the light of God protecting, and enveloping is also a moral compass, guiding

internally and externally as the Sufi ventures out into the wilderness of the world.

The goal of the journey is to self-liberation, the other goal is to reach a state which is delightful and gentle and is in harmony with God's creation. This is related to the notion of deliverance.

Guard at the Gate of Dawn

“An indefinite boundary is not really a boundary.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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A fourth joins the wanderer, the intruder, and the beggar at the Gate of Dawn. He is a tall man, wearing a shiny armor, chinned up. Through this shiny armor and erect posture, kind features rested between the cold sides of his helmet.

“Are we all waiting for the gate to open?” he said,

“For deliverance” said the 3 in an eerie unison.

“For what purpose?” said the guard.

“So, we may cross and continue our journey,” said the wanderer.

The guard chuckled and sat down, with his left hand on his sword.

He says:

“I reside at boundaries. The extremities of anything, the first point beyond which it is not possible to find any part, and the first point within which every part is. Just like us right now, unable to cross.

A boundary separates two entities, two places. The great master Leonardo in his Notebook asked: “What is it that separates the atmosphere from the water? Is it the air or is it the water?”

Does this gate belong where we are dwelling or to the hereafter? What will happen when the gate of dawn open and we are able to cross? Do we belong to the now or to the hereafter?”

He continued: "Regarding temporal boundaries, Aristotle asked: "When a moving body comes to rest, is it in motion or is it at rest?" Does the transitional moment belong to the motion interval or to the rest interval?"

I protected boundaries and I have observed how people feel anxious or at peace when encountering an obstacle. Boundaries make sense and are deeply problematic at the same time. In all bounds, there is something positive, whereas limits contain mere negations.

I look at boundaries as veils, some of us are initiated beyond all veils, if they are lucky. Others are bound to the first layers.

Through a single layer we can still see the other side, at least enough to suspect that there is another side. A multitude of layers will make the hereafter look opaque, like this gate here.

"That's it!" said the intruder "When I examined it, the gate did feel velvety to the touch."

Servants at the Gate of Dawn

[...] God Appears & God is Light

To those poor Souls who dwell in Night

But does a Human Form Display

To those who Dwell in Realms of day

William Blake

“What might be bringing us together?” asked the wanderer.

“We are waiting to see what’s behind this gate,” said the intruder.

“And accept whatever might come out of it,” said the beggar.

“Gate? are we still talking of gate?” said the guard.

The four servants said incandescently: “Each one of us is of service to understanding, wisdom, science, and tradition. We see this black gate, each from his corner of the world and we want to approach it with our own senses and learn from it.

By experiencing it, we will be of service to those who come after us. We learn so we can transmit, we live so we can initiate.

Through our curiosity and ability to endure uncertainty, we can hold space. We consider who has access, who is invited to the campfires of heart-to-heart conversations, and who is shunned behind closed doors and is exiled where waste lands.

Verily, being present in our bodies is essential, it allows us to be compassionate, to ourselves, and to those who are deprived of being themselves fully.

We are souls living embodied experiences because life is delicious.

And we are of service to others.

Like sponges, we take in knowledge and squeeze it out to clean surfaces that have accumulated the dust of neglect, alienation, and estrangement.

We are patient and serve those we chose to live among. We break bread with them, we study their ways, we say hi to them at the market, in the classroom, on a nature's trail, or at stop signs.

Those who get this, become our people.

Safety is of utmost importance to us, physical and emotional.

Security comes from within the infrastructure on which any kind of transmission of a way of being, what we call education, is founded.

To see and hear, be seen, heard, and acknowledged, to show up for others even when they cannot show up for us. This is love.

Warmly and generously receiving those who need a mentor and role model, as much as we are their friends and mentees.

What is at the core of our methodology, is what we see essential increasingly since the global pandemic, dialogues.

We serve by moving our bodies to meet people where they are, gravitating towards one another. Meeting them where the two seas meet.

We speak with authority, for no one else can author our stories for us, as much as we cannot author anyone else's story or dictate their reality for them.

Differentiating our methods is another central element to our approach, where we find solace in keeping up with the seasons. Reminding whoever we cross paths with of the power that emanates from within, to foster it the way and they see fit to learn how to lead and lead through learning.

What we want those we serve to know is that they are valid, that their stories matter and should matter to those who are around them.

We each are special because we are the same.

To belong is to find a place or a group where a sense of individual and collective purpose is celebrated. We who belong everywhere, belong nowhere.

We understand that one cannot be oneself by oneself. That the question of cultural influence is not a question of if the self is able to influence, but a question of when and how the self is able to influence culture. Self is interchangeable with agency and authorship, therefore the confidence that a self acquires, cannot but be from their capacity to be an agent of change and an author of their own narrative.

To be oneself includes the politics of ethical self-management, whom it affects, and the range of its effect.

People are the products of their dialogues, lateral with other people, flora, and fauna, with land, rivers, and seas. They chart territories we call culture and consolidate them through the transmission of values about those dialogues. Longitudinal dialogues are also at play, with a system of values, rules of governance, and beliefs.

To establish any dialogue, lateral or longitudinal, one must recognize one's center, the point of origin, the 0 that each journey starts and ends with.

One must examine ways of seeing, procession, and perceiving. What one is attentive to, emotions, motivations, leadership, and group processes in their cycles of mutual constitution.

Culture is not a set of beliefs that reside inside of people. Culture happens in the world, in patterns of ideas, and behaviors, in cities and rural areas, in products and artifacts. Culture is dynamic as much as selves are dynamic.

Every person has both independence and interdependence, and every context acknowledges and celebrates both. What we are seeing increasingly more of in the world is not dispersion, for we are humans who are bound to move, but disconnections. Limiting the warden, and the prisoner.

To measure ourselves is to learn how we think about ourselves, and the unconscious ways that self-regulate our emotions and our behaviors, these are implicit. Most do not possess the tools to directly speak about their feelings and thoughts about themselves.

The measurement of culture cannot exclusively rely on self-reporting. Not everyone is completely conscious of their belief system in a way that they can report it accurately for a fair assessment.

Cultures are different in terms of collective artifacts. Assessing artifacts, proofs of action

and dialogue is far greater than often unreliable self-assessed beliefs and values.

And for any meaningful change, personal or collective, change requires perseverance, creativity, and acts of love.

Technician at the Gate of Dawn

"True beauty results from that repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affections, are satisfied from the absence of any want."

- Owens Jones

"I recognize that Kashkul" said a voice as soon as the servants at the gate of dawn finished their sermon.

The beggar recognizes his voice, quickly turns around, stands up, and rushes to welcome a dear friend. He invites him to join the party.

The guest sit down and introduced himself:

"Of Journeyman we note the titles of master, artist, maker, technician, shaper, artificer, craftsman, a worker who learned a trade and works for another person by the day. The journey refers to a day's labor. This sense of journey was used in the 14th century. It refers to a person, who learned a trade inside and out through an apprenticeship and worked for daily wages.

With the support of chosen family and friends and generous opportunities, I started learning the craft on the job. I entered a dialogue with a material as malleable as the humans who shape it. My craft is the second oldest in the history of humanity.

My art creates me as much as I create it. In cycles of mutual constitution."

He then turns to the beggar and adds: "You are taking great care of that Kashkul, dear friend."

He turns to the others and continues:

The Installation

“In my work I make manifest answers to questions of influence and perception. Different angles to any phenomenon allow us to experience the phenomena from different vantage points. Like in the parable of the 5 blind men and the elephant, it is best to walk around anything and examine it to take it in.”

The technician looks at the sketch in the mud, “There is always a way around the rules of any game. For the sake of our precious time” *looks at the pawns' shadow* “I am limiting these ways to 3.”

The Individual:

Each sculptural form is warped by one center that influences it.

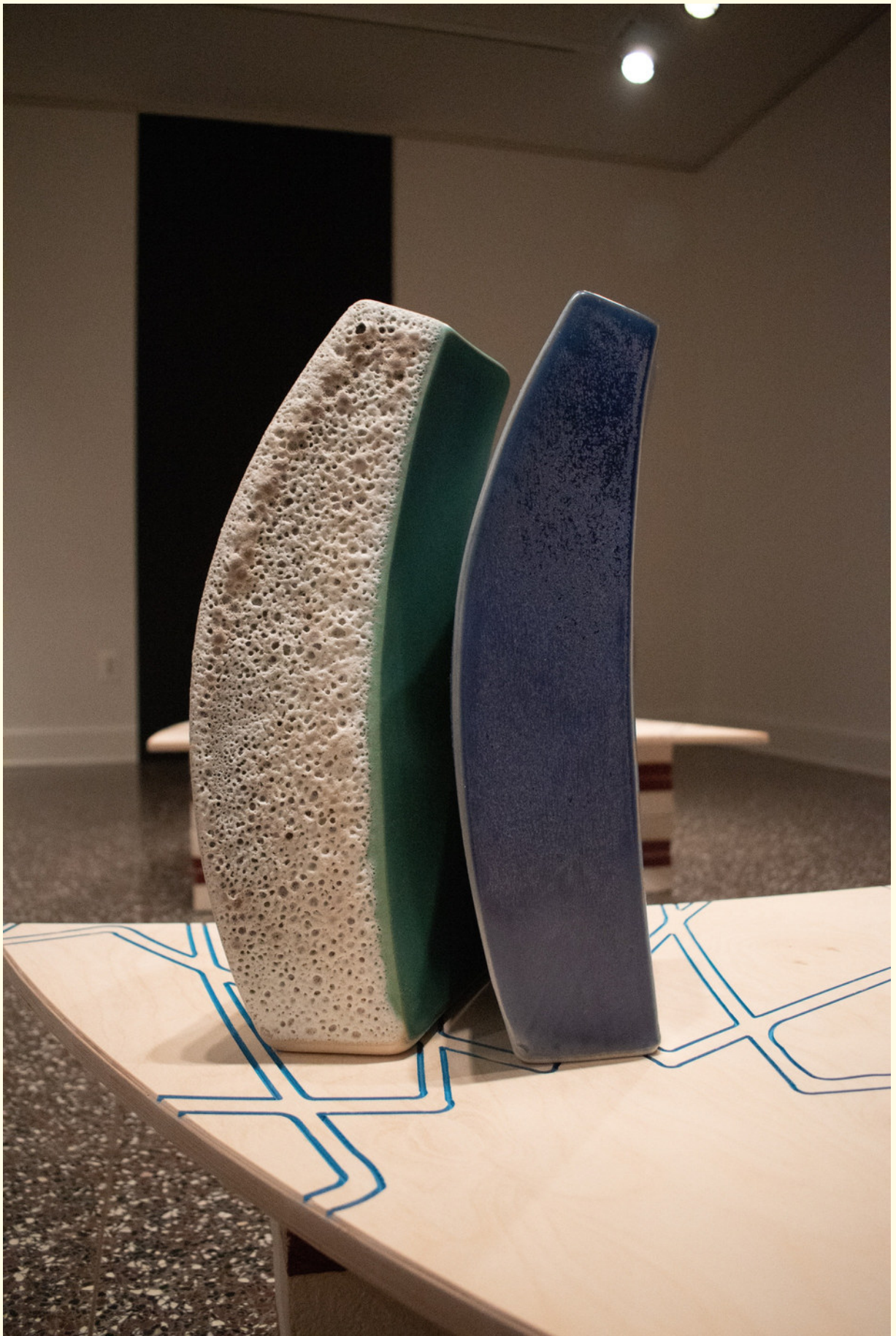
What you see in this setting are individuals as symbols yielding towards or away from each other, reflecting fragments of a circle. Their dual colors reflect the internal dialogues present in every human being. They look like they are in the aftermath of a capital explosion.

The Cultural:

The space between each individual sculpture is shaped by the dialogue of the individual pieces. Two linear sculptures forming a space, a plane, also known as culture. Like human beings having conversations horizontally with each other, and vertically with their past and future self. These individual sculptures are involved in a conversation, happening not only in space but also in time.

The viewer, also known as wanderer, when journeying through the installation, will start seeing conversations between each individual sculpture that are exhibited through careful consideration of color, interaction and directions of individual sculpture weighed against the floor and walls of the museum, a wider culture. I am hoping for the viewer to be fully immersed in this thought-scape and be brought back full circle.

Viewers like travelers will stand where they feel still. Where the viewer's journey through the installation ends is where our wanderer has reached their state of equilibrium, a state of standstill suspension. A state of distribution in which all movements and actions, internal and external, have come to a standstill.







The Kashkuls

In my third semester at SUNY NEW Paltz, in Fall 2022, I was instructor of record for “Intro to Ceramics”. The last module was a historical pot module, where students were asked to research a historical pot and make one, but with their personal narratives embedded in or on the surface.

By then the partial reality of migrants as beggars was at the forefront of my exploration. Sparked by a paper for a methodology class, I wrote in my first semester of Fall 2021, detailing the artist's way of material and visual experience exploration as rooted in the marriage of developmental psychology and Sufism. Since then I have been studying the contemporary art scene in the Arab world, with a growing responsibility to archive and document what is essentially Arab from a decolonized perspective.

Concerning the Kashkul: In the Seychelles grows a palm tree with a most peculiar seed. The forbidden fruit can weigh up to 40 pounds. The largest seed in the world looks like a woman's thighs, because of which it was named: “Coco de fesse”

Coco de fesse, or *Lodoicea maldivica of the Vallée de Mai, Seychelles* has the largest fruit, the longest cotyledon, is the largest female flower of any palm and the most efficient plant in drawing up nutrients.

The fruit was also called “Coco de Mer” in French and is subject to numerous myths because of its peculiar shape. The Malay legend talks about the fruit having mystical powers.

Because of its size, the seed is unable to float and sinks to the bottom, where the outer husk of the nut withers and the inner parts of the plant rots. The gases released consequently push the bare seed to the top of the ocean, which is then washed up to distant shores by ocean currents. The seamen thought that this seed was falling upward from the ocean bed.

Seychelles was visited by General Charles George Gordon in 1881. He hailed the Vallée De Mai Reserve in Praslin (the home of Coco de Mer trees) as the original Garden of Eden, as mentioned in the Bible. The Coco de Mer, therefore, was the 'forbidden fruit' eaten by Eve.

Below is an example of a carved Coco de Mer dated A.H. 1210/1795–96 CE that is 33 cm 913 inch)

Making the kashkul:



A COCO-DE-MER BEGGAR'S BOWL (*KASHKUL*) QAJAR IRAN, DATED AH 1210/1795-96 AD Of typical form, the engraved decoration consisting of a wide calligraphic register in *nasta'liq* script, the base with a biblical scene of the sacrifice of Isaac 13 inch. (33 cm.) long

* I researched a 3-d scan of an archived Coco de Mer and I asked Jakob Lobel (BFA) to 3D print half of the scanned model.

* I then made a 5-part plaster mold to slip cast the Coco de Mer with the studio porcelain.

* I needed 2 for my installation but casted to have multiple results and have the option of choosing the best .

* I achieved good results with the historical glaze luster technique that i started researching 4 months before my show, with my first firing on February 19th 2023 and surprisingly good test tiles.











The Floor:

- * I made a mold out of a shape I slab built.
- * I slip cast the pieces and sanded them.
- * I formulated and mixed glazes that accentuate the corners of the sculpture.
- * I sprayed the glazes abundantly. Each sculpture carries 2 different glazes, following notions from “Interaction of Colors” by Josef Albers, differing either by color, or surface finish.
- * The pieces have different glaze finishes and effects, ranging from glossy to matte, to specialty glazes.



The plinths

Part one: The Tops



* In Adobe Illustrator, I drew an ellipse fitting to the museum floor considering 3 feet of separation from the walls of the installation.

* I then accounted for extra pieces of the same sheet of wood (the CNC machine's dimensions are 60 inches * 48 inches)

* The infill design is based on the Palestinian artist: Laila Shawa's, *Night and the City* (2008). Acrylic on canvas, 39 3/8 x 78 3/4 in.



From Shawa's Artist Statement:

"Once altered, the immutable laws of Islamic geometry lose their validity, resulting in chaos. The paintings ask what is left of Arab culture when the pattern of the culture itself goes awry. This series is about self-deception, about creating a superficial sense of order that, in pretending to be real, instead reveals its own emptiness and lack of core values."

* I then filled the carvings in the board with a blue paint that is indicating water channels, reflecting content explored in the first 3 chapters of my thesis.

* The distorted design, shown on this catalogue's cover, is distorted in a 5 point perspective manner, taking the center of the circles in the sacred geometry motif and distorting them to a point that is beyond the plinths towards the Gate of Dawn, as the black vinyl on the museum's wall. Rooting the conversation in the ambivalent and the unknown





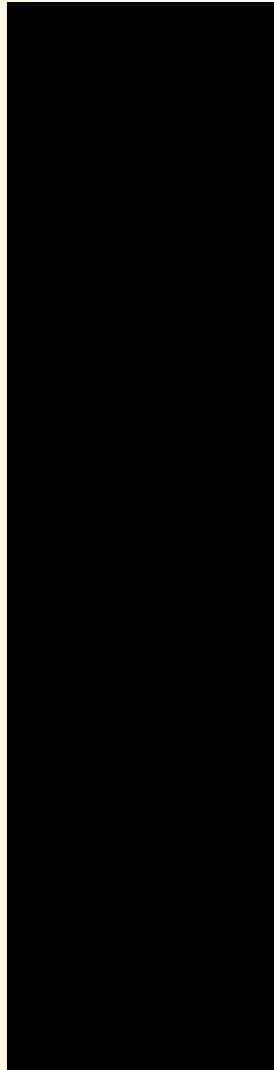
Part two: The bottom

The bottom of the plinths consists of 24 porcelain hollow bricks with a strip of sanguine burgundy glaze on 1/3 of each block. I wanted to reflect material hierarchy and root the narrative of the installation in a political reality. Growing up in Lebanon, when educators explained the symbolism of the Lebanese flag, told us that the two stripes of red are rivers of blood from martyrs who gave their lives for the nation. I wanted to reflect in my work on the possibility to break away from surrounding rivers of blood. What if the narrative is rooted in acknowledging tradition while imagining a different reality?

The linear sculptures on the pedestal symbolizes the lifting up of that top line in the Lebanese flag to a vertical position, as first step before negotiating any change.



The Gate



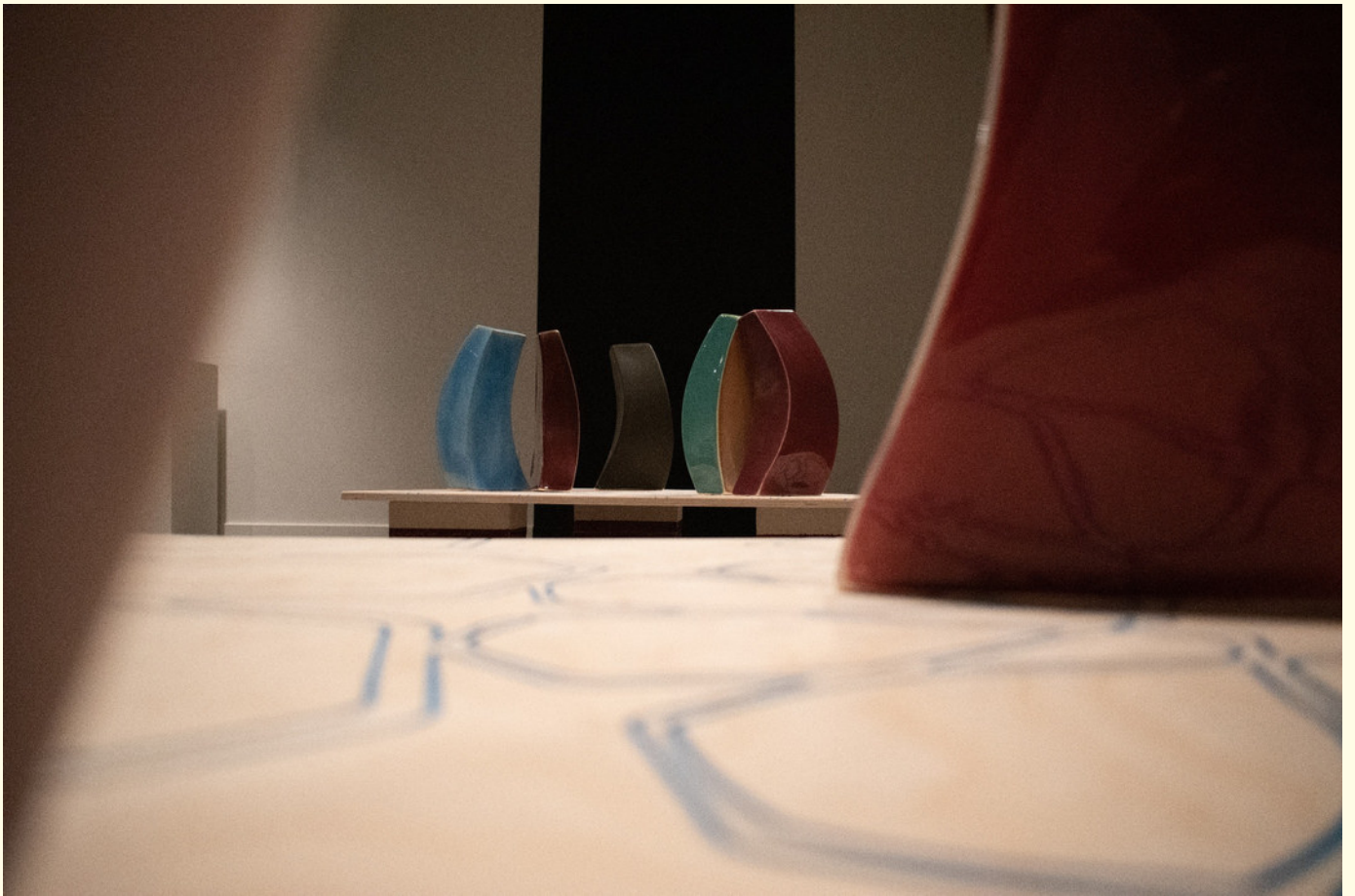
The gate or the veil of dawn is portrayed as a hole in the wall, reflecting a lack, a split and insinuating a longing to a hereafter, however uncertain it might be.

I took the opportunity to put paint safe, black vinyl on the museum's wall to indicate a split by breaking the wider wall in my designated museum spot. The vinyl added perspective and the sculptures strategically placed seemed to be bending towards it.

The ominous black split in this installation as an orientation towards the unknown and a rift is the consolidating third element that was mirroring the black sculpture on the museum floor and the black pedestal under the kashkuls. Thus completing the black character's arch in walking through the Gate of Dawn, only by carrying a kashkul that unlocks the traveler through humility towards openness and acceptance of the unknown.

This theme is found in Arabic stories of journeying and pilgrimage.

While the technician revealed his process, a wind blew stronger and stronger from the Gate of Dawn...



Opening the Gate of Dawn

"I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background."

Zora Neale Hurston

-

The Wanderer, the Intruder, the Beggar, the Guard, and the Technician stood up with infant joy. Could this be the clearing they have been waiting for?

The wind blew mightier and warmer, then to their surprise a familiar voice said:

Centered you stay, holding me in the palm of your hand,

while the world spins around us.

Centered you are, the one who centers me.

Centering, your love is on your way to join me.

I am your Orient.

I am holding you in the palm of my hand.

Within your heart, you watered me, clothed me,

with fire you fused me and delivered me.

Within me your sweat and tears are forever wet.

Within me your love is forever burning.

Enter the Gate of Dawn.

Hold me and carry us on.



Chapter 3

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SHOW CARD



At the Gate of Dawn

By Ibrahim Khazzaka

MFA Exhibition: **May 12 - May 21, 2023**
Opening reception: **Friday May 12th, 5 - 7 p.m**

A wanderer, an intruder, a beggar, a guard,
and a technician meet at the gate of dawn.

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