

Daniela Yohannes and Adelaide Bannerman in Conversation

Recorded live on 19 May 2020

For the exhibition 'I am a heart beating in the world: Diaspora Pavilion 2, Sydney'

Presented by International Curators Forum (ICF) & 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art

Summary keywords: paintings, work, film, daniela, fall, icf, meditation, 4a, narrative, collage, collaborator, moving, exhibition, started, walk, image, illustration, pushed, global pandemic, animation

Adelaide Bannerman: Hello, I'm Adelaide Bannerman, co producer at ICF and I'll shortly be speaking with artist Daniella Yohannes. I'd like to first take the opportunity to thank Outset Partners for their support of our Diaspora Pavilion programme 2020 to 2022, during which we'll be presenting a peripatetic programme of events, exhibitions and professional development opportunities for artists and curators. Daniela Yohannes is one such contributor to our program. More specifically, her inclusion in the exhibition I am a heart beating in the world, co-curated and presented in partnership with 4A Centre for Contemporary Art Sydney, Australia. In this moment, I will acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land where 4A is situated, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. In partnership ICF and 4A are currently tasked with understanding how we realize our programming together during a global pandemic and national adaptations to relaxing lockdown and travel restrictions pragmatically we are rescheduling our efforts responsively to bring I am a heartbeat beating in the world to as wide an audience as possible. So, introducing Daniela Yohannes who lives between Europe and the Caribbean. Daniela works with mixed media and has primarily been a studio-based practitioner working with painting, drawing, printed media, collage, and has recently incorporated film as part of her repertoire. Her visuals graphically portray worlds in the making - creation myths abstracted from lived experience or fantasy, which we'll glimpse through now with her. Hi Daniela!

Daniela Yohannes: Hello Adelaide. Just before we start, I would like to take this moment to also introduce myself in my words. My name is Daniela Yohannes, I'm an artist working with painting collage and film. I'm interested in questioning what constitutes home, how identities are formed and challenged, and conversations around migration, trauma, personal and collective healing. And I use my environment as a driving force in image making. I'm interested in the relationship between the landscape and the figure.

Adelaide Bannerman: So, shall we talk about your early work, shall we have a look at that and then move on to talking about the transition from stills to moving image?

Daniela Yohannes: Yes, I'm going to talk as well as pull up some images. I thought I would give a little context. So, my educational background is in illustration. So, my works are graphic by nature, but they're birthed out of solitude. I say that because I moved to France and didn't know many people, didn't speak the language. So, it was like the perfect condition I guess to turn inwards. So, I experimented and explored fictional narratives. So, my early works I kind of created an intuitive and visual approach. So, I didn't really limit myself in terms of color. I just allowed kind of the paintings to take the narrative. So, this resulted I guess, in a body of work that essentially depicts lone figures in this kind of semi abstract space. And it's if they're on some kind of journey, but they never really arrive. So, they're kind of meditations I would say, and from there, I started to explore with dream narratives, because I had some health issues. And that gave me I guess, the space to try to heal myself, and I did that by looking and considering the subconscious and there I found was an abundant place full of emotional treasures. And so, I started to develop the paintings into sculptural pieces, kind of building with canvases like trying to create a form with them, a work that I did, which is what you're seeing is four canvases that fold into a cube. And that's, it was an idea to try to push the paintings into synchrony where you walked around them and got to experience them from different angles. And also, at some point I had considered VR (Virtual Reality) as a way to bring these paintings to life but abandoned that idea.

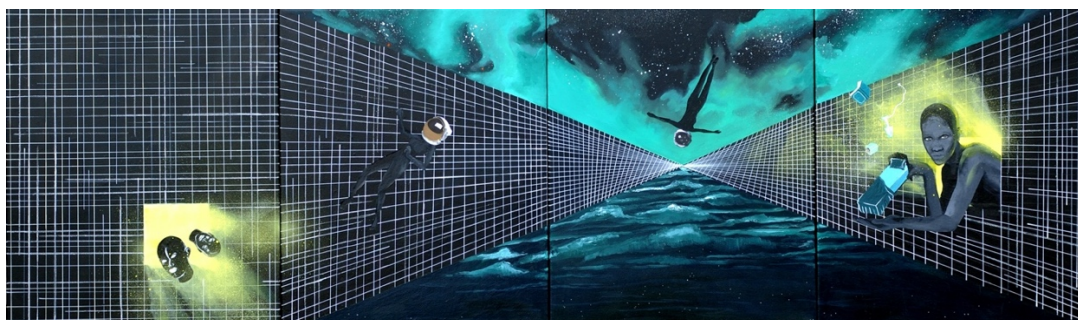


Image 1: *Source* (2016), Mixed medium and collage on linen, 89cm x 116cm.

Image 2: *Daniela, I'm your mother* (2016), Mixed medium and collage on 4 canvases, each 50cm x 61cm

Alt text: Image 1 features a woman floating with her legs pulled into her chest on a background of geometric shapes. Image 2 features 3 female figures and 2 heads floating amongst a blue landscape and a geometric background.

Adelaide Bannerman: So presumably, thinking about your background in illustration, it would have seemed to be a natural progression to go on to animation, but you've decided to utilize moving image. Do you want to perhaps talk about that decision?

Daniela Yohannes: Yes, initially what I did was I had this short pause from painting. And I began writing and drawing, still continued with the dream narrative and visions. And I started to come up with a narrative that essentially was a lone, black female figure falling, so it was a sequence of this continuous fall. And I didn't envision it as an animation, it just felt like that would be the natural direction to go in. But after I had written it, the fall was essentially a woman falling from the Oort Cloud on the outskirts of the solar system, that's where like long distance comets come from, and she was falling her trajectory was towards Earth, all the way through the different layers until she reached the center of the earth.



Image: *Dark Matter, Doorway to the centre* (2019), acrylic on linen 116cm x 178cm.

Alt text: A woman falls from the right-hand side of the painting into the middle of the canvas, which is divided by a line with a volcano on one side and a woman's head facing the other way.

So how was I going to do that? How was I going to film that? And I reached out to my community of friends and collaborators, filmmakers, and got lots of advice, but one person stuck out. I spoke to a filmmaker and he had said that if I wanted to film a fall, then I needed to film a jump. And if I wanted to film the protagonist entering a raging sea, then I needed to get her to go in. And that's all because unless I had a great deal of money to do post-

production, it was just not going to be very convincing. And so, the idea of filming from reality, I started to consider it more. And actually, was interesting because it pushed me to think about how to tell a story, how to create another world from the one we have, from this reality. And it pushed me to my gaze out towards nature, towards the environment around me. I had been such a lonely painter for so long, this opened me up to the world. So that's one of the transitions. One other important person is Julian Beramis who's my partner and collaborator. And he's the one who has suggested this kind of shift in movement so that instead of a fall, it's a walk. And at this point, I think I've gone so far into the story in trying to find ways to make it that it didn't really matter whether she was falling swimming, climbing, you know that none of that mattered it was this journey, and the walk offered a kind of meditation and there's something about walking, that is confrontational, and it also ties in with crossing borders, freedom of movement, survival. It's a meditation. It's a lament and also like a silent scream.



Images: Stills from *Atopias: I Have Left that Dark Cave Forever, My Body has Blended with Hers* (2019), Single Channel, colour, stereo, 22:01 minutes.

Alt text: A woman shrouded in darkness traverses a landscape of shrubbery and flowers in one image and in the other walks into the ocean.

Images courtesy Daniela Yohannes. For more information on the discussed works, please visit <https://danielayohannes.space/>