

Splendid Isolation

How isolation inspires

Hélène Amouzou

°1969, Togo. Lives and works in Brussels, Belgium.

Hélène Amouzou was born in the West African republic Togo. In 2004 she went to study photography and video at the Sint-Jans-Molenbeek Academy of Drawing and Visual arts in Brussels, where she still lives and works today.

Over the course of the ten-year period that Amouzou spent waiting to be granted asylum in Belgium, she made a series of analogue self-portraits. These captivating works play with the notion of sight and invisibility, thus expressing the artist's uncertain existence. Her lack of recognition, stigmatisation and marginalised position sometimes translate into a blurring and haziness. In other images, the artist shuts away herself or her possessions – for example clothing or suitcases – in an empty attic room, waiting for the moment when she will once again be able to reinsert these into a home. Finally, she also tries to explore her changing relationship to African culture through traditional costume and objects. The slow method of the photography chimes with the meditative nature of Amouzou's practice and the limited resources with which these photographs were created.

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, in spring 2020 the Photography Museum of Antwerp (FOMU) nominated Amouzou for a grant that took her back to her native country Togo for the first time in 25 years. This trip resulted in the exhibition *Entre Temps* (2021), which not only documented her Togolese family and friends, but was also a self-portrait of a migrant who is imprisoned between two worlds. Just like her previously acclaimed work, collected in the book *Entre le papier peint et le mur* (2009), published by the Belgian label Husson Editeur, this series was a reflection on identity and on belonging somewhere. Amouzou's self-portraits have been exhibited in Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

Shuvinai Ashoona

°1961, Kinngait (formerly Cape Dorset), Canada

Shuvinai Ashoona is a third-generation Inuit artist from Kinngait, Nunavut, Canada. Here she spent her formative years, followed by a decade of living independently in remote outpost camps with her family. The Arctic landscape and its wildlife had a deep impact on Ashoona, which was later reflected in her artistic practice. Toward the end of the 1980s, when she was in her late twenties, Shuvinai Ashoona's family settled back into Kinngait, but the transition to community life proved difficult for her. Shuvinai Ashoona began artmaking without formal training but through observing her elders; her grandmother Pitseolak Ashoona, and her cousin Annie Pootoogook were particularly influential. Thanks to access to the renowned drawing, printing and carving studios of the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative, she started to experiment and developed a distinctive style. While in her early drawings she captured the natural world that surrounded her, the subject matter of her later work became more personal and combined elements derived from Inuit culture and mythology, Christianity and Western commercial imagery. She thereby defied preconceived notions of what Inuit art should look like and helped to expand the definition of contemporary Inuit art.

Ashoona's work came to the broader attention of galleries and institutions in the South in the early 2000s. In recent years, her work has been selected for international exhibitions of contemporary art. Ashoona's work was represented at the Biennale of Sydney (2012) and is shown at the central exhibition of the 59th edition of the Venice Biennale (2022).

Danny Bergeman

°1960, Izegem (BE) † 2020

As an artist with Down's syndrome, Danny Bergeman worked in De Zandberg art workshop from 1994 to 2018. There, he patiently examined pictures from art books, catalogues and magazines. In an attempt to write his own commentary on his findings, he developed an abstract, geometric notation system.

Image after image was inventoried in this non-hierarchical system that was structured from left to right, and line by line, just like a text. Danny Bergeman spent seven years of intense drawing time on the book *The Zandberg Drawing*. Page after page, both on the front and the back, his sketchbook and life's work was filled with drawings as a chronological diary of his discoveries and fascinations. Initially, a recognisable shape, such as a bottle, a vase, a house or a real word would appear here and there among the abstract characters. Over the years, the characters became smaller and more abstract, and Danny tended to focus more on colour than on form.

In 2018 *The Zandberg Drawing / 2011-2018* was published as a facsimile of the original book. In recent years, the drawings of Danny Bergeman have been exhibited at the S.M.A.K. (Ghent), Croxhapox (Ghent), Bozar (Brussels), Deweer gallery (Harelbeke) and in the exhibition 'The New Genius' at Cultuurcentrum Mechelen (2022).

Forrest Bess (1911-1977)

°1911, Bay City, Texas †1977, Bay City, Texas

Forrest Bess was an American visionary painter who lived most of his life at a fishing camp in Chinquapin, near Bay City, Texas. Growing up with an oil worker father and a creative-minded mother, the family was constantly on the move in his early childhood. From his childhood experiences, Bess learned early on that art could help him escape from harsh surroundings.

Most of the time, Bess worked as a commercial fisherman, painting in his spare time small, abstract but intense, symbol-laden paintings which he called "visions". Dreams and philosophy were important in his artistic practice. Bess based his thinking on an amalgam of ideas he found in Carl Jung's teachings, Kundalini yoga, alchemy, Australian Aboriginal culture. They inspired him to believe that the path to completeness and immortality could only be achieved through what he called hermaphroditism. "Art is a search for beauty" he wrote to his gallerist Betty Parsons in 1954, "but not a superficial beauty—a very deep longing for a uniting of lost parts." Parsons was one of Bess' most important supporters. She gave him his first solo exhibition in New York City, represented him until 1967 and showed his work alongside artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. It was only in the late 20th century that the work by Forrest Bess gained international recognition and was exhibited in numerous museums, including solo exhibitions at: the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1981); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1988); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (1989), and the Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (2020).

Irma Blank

°1934, Celle, Germany. Lives and works in Milan, Italy.

Irma Blank was born in Northern Germany and moved to Italy in her early twenties. Her oeuvre unfolds via a series of central lines like a solitary journey through the complex relationship between writing and image. She develops her own drawing systems that attempt to transcend the limitations of a verbal language and to communicate visually. Instead of using words to express meaning, the artist explores ways in which marks can portray existence and the passing of time in a universal manner. Her practice, which is fully immersed in strict precision – almost like a meditative ritual – has developed into an embodied, solely sensory cycle.

Blank defined her visual language in *Eigenschriften*, an early series of pastel-coloured drawings on paper that she made shortly after her arrival in Sicily. The confrontation with an unfamiliar language and culture elicited a sense of isolation. By turning her gaze inwards, she sought out new, individual forms of self-expression. In 1973, she went to Milan and encountered concrete poetry, a style that would have a profound influence on her. The following cycle of works, entitled *Trascrizioni* (Transcripts), comprised typographic layouts drawn in black ink of texts that she found interesting. In *Radical Writings* (1996) she links the rhythmic duration of her breathing to the linear gesture of writing as a repetitive act.

After an exploration of digital possibilities, she returned to the ritual form of handwriting with the series *Avant-testo*. The work *Global Writings* is built up of varying combinations of identical letter sequences. In 2017, she started on a new collection entitled *Gehen, Second Life*, which she made with her left hand after the right-hand side of her body was paralysed, and in which her work and life become tightly intertwined.

Blank has exhibited internationally and participated in Venice Biennale in 1978 and 2017. In 2019-2021 a retrospective exhibition of her work was organised by MAMCO, Genève; CCA – Center for Contemporary Art Tel Aviv and the Bauhaus Foundation, Tel Aviv; CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux; Bombas Gens Centre d'art, Valencia and Museo Villa Dei Cedri, Bellinzona.

Louise Joséphine Bourgeois

°1911, Paris, France †2010, USA

Louise Joséphine Bourgeois was born in Paris in 1911.

Her parents ran a tapestry restoration workshop and gallery and young Louise soon became involved, helping to draw missing elements in tapestries. First studying geometry, Bourgeois turned fully to art in the early 1930s. She took classes at various art schools and ateliers, and art history at the Ecole du Louvre.

In 1938, she met and married American art historian Robert Goldwater and moved to New York, where they raised three sons. During the first decade of her practice, Bourgeois focused on painting and printmaking. She turned definitively to sculpture in the late 1940s. Between the 1950s and early 1960s, she became immersed in psychoanalysis, which deeply affected her work.

During her long artistic career, she explored sensitive subjects such as death, familial traumas, isolation and solitude, the female body and sexuality through materials sourced from her personal history. Bourgeois said that all her works and subjects found their origin in her early childhood: the relationship with her parents and siblings, as well as her experiences in the family business with tapestries and fabrics.

Bourgeois's works evade easy classification; she exhibited with the Surrealists, Abstract Expressionists, and Feminist artists of the 1970s. Her monumental works, such as her Cells series and spider sculptures, for which is she well-known, were made in the 1990s and 2000s. Bourgeois had her first retrospective at MoMA in New York in 1982 when the artist was seventy-one years old.

David Byrd

°1926, Springfield, Illinois †2013 Oxford, New York (USA)

David Byrd (b.1926) was an American artist born in Springfield, Illinois. He spent most of his creative life living as a recluse in upstate New York. Although he was extremely prolific, he rarely showed his work to anyone and only exhibited publicly a few months before his death in 2013 at the age of 87, following a chance encounter with a neighbour. His work has since been exhibited posthumously through the establishment of the David Byrd Estate.

Byrd had a tumultuous childhood and spent many years in foster care due to his father's struggle with mental health and consequent economic hardship in the family. Despite an early interest in pursuing art, he was drafted into the US Army during World War II. During this time, he filled sketchbooks with maritime-themed drawings, and portraits of his fellow sailors and officers. As a returning veteran, he was able to study, first in Philadelphia, and later at the Ozenfant School of Fine Arts in New York City under the French painter Amédée Ozenfant, an influential mentor.

Throughout the 1950s, Byrd worked a series of odd jobs that allowed him time to paint. In 1958, he was hired as a psychiatric ward attendant at a Veterans hospital in Montrose. Daily experiences gathered over the next 30 years inspired his most defining paintings that related to the hospital patients and his daily commute. In 2020, this oeuvre, which is also a socio-political document about the tragedy of mental illness, was published as a book titled "Montrose VA, 1958-1988". During his retirement years, Byrd also began a series of wood sculptures combining found objects and devoted himself to painting past and present experiences largely from memory.

Eugenio Dittborn

°1943, Santiago de Chile, lives and work in Chile

Eugenio Dittborn is a Chilean painter, printmaker and video artist. In the early 1960s, Dittborn studied art at the Escuela de Bellas Artes of the Universidad de Chile in Santiago and later in Madrid, Berlin and Paris. Dittborn stayed in Chile during the military coup in the mid-1970s, when many decided to leave the country. This period affected Dittborn's work and the concepts of home, travel and the notion of displacement became present in his practice.

As of the 1980s, Dittborn started to paint his so-called Airmail Paintings, paintings on large sheets of brown paper which were folded and sent in envelopes through the international mail system. This technique allowed the artist to participate in international exhibitions from within a society whose artistic production had diminished. The Airmail Paintings stand as an allegory for exile and allowed the artist to express his position freely in a country ruled by Augusto Pinochet from 1973 until 1990. The essence of the Airmail Paintings is the fact that the artworks are meant to be sent, in other words, their transit constitutes their only possibility of preservation.

In his works, Dittborn sees the relatively recent and violent history of Chile and South America as it is engraved on the country's psyche as well as the collision of indigenous and colonial cultures as part of the continent's history. By using metaphors of home and travel, he brings these histories closer together in his art.

Dittborn's work has been shown internationally since the early 1980s. The first survey exhibition of his work took place in 1993 at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam and the Institute of Contemporary Art, London.

Zehra Doğan

°1989, Diyarbakır, Turkey.

Zehra Doğan is an artist, journalist and author from Diyarbakır, Turkey. She co-founded the first all-women press agency JINHA, which reported both during the war in Iraq and Syria, and during the ongoing Kurdish-Turkish conflict. In 2016, Doğan was accused of terrorist propaganda for posting drawings on social media that depicted the destruction of the town Nusaybin by the Turkish army. Following her arrest, she was sentenced and detained. From Diyarbakır, she was transferred to the higher security penitentiary of Tarsus in 2018 and subsequently released in 2019.

Her artistic oeuvre emerges from the experience of hiding and incarceration, translating imposed conditions of confinement into drawings and paintings, made with whatever makeshift material she could find. *Clandestine days* is a series that Doğan produced while being sought by the police in Istanbul. Whilst awaiting trial after her first detention, the artist organised an exhibition of the paintings entitled *141*, the number of days spent in jail. In November 2019, the correspondence she conducted with a friend during her detention entitled *Nous aurons aussi de beaux jours* (We will also have good days) was published by Editions des Femmes. The result of immeasurable determination and resistance, her graphic novel *Prison N°5* published in 2021, depicts Doğan's daily prison life.

Doğan currently resides in Berlin, exhibiting her work in and around Europe and participating in international art initiatives. She is the recipient of several international art and journalism awards and recognitions. In 2018, she was nominated honorary member of PEN International.

Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe

°1971, Sheroana, Amazonas, Venezuela.

Lives and works in El Alto Orinoco, Venezuela

Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe is an indigenous Yanomami artist from Pori Pori, a remote community located in the Alto Orinoco, in the Venezuelan Amazon. Under the guidance of Mexican artist Laura Anderson Barbata, his practice began in the 1990s after learning to make paper using native fibres. This allowed imagery traditionally destined to the body to travel outside the Amazon, as Yanomami people do not normally draw on paper. This is linked to the belief that knowledge belongs to the community and to the territory.

The artist keeps a notebook of sketches until he is able to translate them into different techniques when he spends time in Caracas. Using drawing, painting and screen-printing onto paper and fabric, Hakihiiwe's work is a very personal interpretation of Yanomami tradition and identity; his drawings and paintings speak to his rites and beliefs, observations of the jungle and concern for the ecosystem. His practice aims to protect the oral memory of his people, their cosmogony and ancestral traditions from Westerners' continued and pervasive attempts to erase indigenous cultures. Together with Laura Anderson Barbata, the two artists founded the Yanomami Owëmamotima community project, a self-sustaining initiative whose first handmade books were written, illustrated and published from a collective community experience.

Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe's work has been shown extensively in Venezuela and abroad. It was presented at the XII Shanghai Biennale, China (2018), at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney (2022) and at the central exhibition of the 59th edition of the Venice Biennale (2022).

Majd Abdel Hamid

°1988 Damascus (Syria),

lives and works between Beirut and Ramallah

Majd Abdel Hamid (°1988) is a Palestinian visual artist from Damascus. In 2010, he graduated from Malmö Art Academy and is currently based between Beirut and Ramallah.

A self-taught embroiderer, Hamid creates small-scale pieces employing humble materials. Conceived as “sculptures in time”, the artist focuses on a laborious and lengthy act of making which empowers him to confront the turbulence of current events. Ranging from monochrome works to geometric abstraction, his colourful embroideries derive from the history of modern art. More figurative motifs such as portraits evoke scenes from documentary news footage reconstituted stitch by stitch as if pixelated. Through his practice, Hamid offers a profound, open-ended reflection on his role as a mediator of social issues.

In *Double Sheet* (2021) Majd Abdel Hamid is unraveling a bedsheet while listening in the background, to the soundtrack of an interview of Riad al-Turk, extract from a film by Mohamad Ali Al Atassi, *Ibn El-Am* (2001, Documentary). Majd Abdel Hamid's work is haunted by the image of the Syrian opposition leader Riad al-Turk who, throughout his 17 years in solitary confinement as a prisoner, executed and destroyed geometric designs on the floor of his cell using lentils picked from his soup – a creative act that reappropriated sense of inner freedom, if only for its maker, and which left no trace.

As part of the exhibition series *Matters Of Concern* at La Verrière, Fondation D'Enterprise Hermès (FR), his solo *A Stitch in Times* (2021) displayed meticulous and inherently fragile graphic work which paradoxically arouses resilience in the face of a chaotic and unpredictable world.

Hessie

°1936, Santiago, Cuba †2017, Pontoise, France

Hessie (née Carmen Igartua Pelot) is a Cuban self-taught artist who is known for her embroidery works on fabrics and multifaceted collages on paper. She left her native country in 1960 and was first employed as a copyist of works of art in New York City. There she met the Montenegrin artist Dado (Miodrag Duric) in 1962 and moved with him to a small village in the countryside near Paris where she lived and worked until her death. Wanting to participate in the change of society, she joined an informal group of militant feminist artists and critics in the 1970s and worked with them on exhibitions that promoted feminist art from Europe and the United States.

Hessie worked in the margins of the art world for the most part of her life. She developed a personal, minimal vocabulary based on easily available, cheap materials and techniques relating to household chores taken up by women like sewing, embroidering and repairing. Disproving the reputation of feminine handicraft as a simplistic and archaic practice, she developed a complex body of works that combine vulnerability and resistance. As such, her urge to create lead to radical innovation.

Hessie's first solo exhibition *Survival Art* was held in 1975 in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Dom Sylvester Houédard

°1924, Guernsey †1992, UK

Dom Sylvester Houédard was a monk, theologian and artist, born in 1924 in Guernsey and educated in Rome and Oxford. Houédard served in the military intelligence of the British Army before becoming ordained as a Benedictine priest in 1959 at the Prinknash Abbey in Gloucestershire.

Houédard wrote widely on new approaches to spirituality, philosophy and art and soon became a cult figure in London's counter-culture of the 1960s and a leading authority on the Beat movement. His abstract visual poems were created on an Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter which he started to experiment with while still working for the army. Houédard, also known by his

initials dsh, was a pioneer in the emerging concrete poetry scene and his interests reached far wider than those normally associated with a monastic priest. He was known for his abstract, precise and graphic work and was an active participant in the radical creative expression of the 1960s, where he worked alongside culture figures such as Yoko Ono, John Cage and Allen Ginsberg. He referred to his abstract visual poems as *Typestracts* – a combination of the words ‘typewriter’ and ‘abstract’.

As a literary figure, he appeared with his first visual poems in Ian Hamilton Finlay’s poetry magazine *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse* in 1963. The visual work of Houédard came into view from 1962, and from 1963 onwards he was increasingly prolific and visible in the international concrete poetry movement. In 1964 he co-founded the concrete poetry collective *Gloup*, together with John Furnival and Ken Cox, a founder and vice president of the Association of Little Presses. He refocused on religion for the last ten years of his life, as an infirmarian, and died in 1992, aged 67.

Houédard exhibited throughout his lifetime at venues including the Arnolfini, Bristol (1966); Lisson Gallery, London (1967 and 1968); the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1972); and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (1971). Exhibitions featuring dsh’s work have been organised posthumously at the Print Center, Philadelphia (2019); South London Gallery (2012); the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2009); and Whitechapel Gallery and Hayward Gallery, London (2000)

Derek Jarman

°1942, Northwood †1994, London (England)

Derek Jarman, full name Michael Derek Elworthy Jarman (1942-1994), was a multidisciplinary British artist, best known for his avant-garde, underground art cinema. His versatile and extensive oeuvre of films, writings and paintings combines a critical view on oppressive British politics and his outspoken homosexuality with an original aesthetic and images of popular culture. The artist gained fame for making his HIV diagnosis public, and for engaging in gay rights activism until his premature death from an AIDS-related illness in 1994.

Educated at the University of London and the Slade School of Art, he first worked in the cinema as a set designer. Experimental Super-8 films such as *Jubilee* (1977) launched his directorial career. In the mid-1980s, Jarman developed his status as a major European auteur with the film *Caravaggio* (1986). *Blue*, first shown at the 1993 Venice Biennial, documents the partial blindness he suffered as a consequence of a late-life illness. His paintings, ranging from oil on canvas to mixed media, captured the division between personal narratives and the stories of the times; his desire to paint remained intact even as the artist became very weakened and slowly lost his eyesight.

Towards the end of his life, Jarman acquired a small fisherman’s cottage near Dungeness nuclear power station in Kent. Despite the inhospitable conditions of the land, he created an iconic garden considered a work of art in itself, and recorded its evolution in the last book he wrote titled *Derek Jarman’s Garden*, published posthumously. Jarman found in Dungeness a place of healing and creative inspiration; here he painted, made sculptures from materials collected on the beach and wrote autobiographical diaries. In 2020, Prospect Cottage was saved from a private buyer following the largest ever arts crowdfunding campaign by the Art Fund which received international donations from the public as well as from charities, foundations, trusts and philanthropists. The cottage is set to become an artist residency program for artists, academics, writers, gardeners, filmmakers, and others interested in Jarman and his work.

Nalini Malani

°1946, Karachi, Undivided India,
lives and works in Mumbai, India.

Nalini Malani was born in Karachi, Pre-Partition India. Following India's declaration of independence in 1947, Malani fled her home as a child along with her family, and they settled in Mumbai as refugees. This experience of displacement and detachment has had an enduring influence on her artistic practice and her visual language, which give a voice to vulnerable and marginalised people, mostly women, through visual stories that link themes such as violence, race, religion and power.

During the first lockdown following the global health crisis caused by Coronavirus in 2020, Malani was staying in the Netherlands. For her, the impossibility of returning to her home in Mumbai was akin to reopening an old wound, namely the forced flight and subsequent confrontation with a different culture during her childhood. In relative social isolation she made a series of 89 drawings, entitled *Exile – Dreams – Longing*. The unrest, social injustice and violence in her homeland, the red brick architecture of her new environment, and familiar figures such as Alice in Wonderland are united in this eventful pictorial narrative.

Nalini Malani obtained a Diploma in Fine Arts from the Sir J. J. School of Art in Bombay in 1969 and was awarded an art scholarship by the French government to study in Paris from 1970 to 1972. Her work evolved from painting in the late 1960s to video and installation works in the 1990s. Since then, she has expanded her work into genres such as multimedia and experimental theatre. Her work was part of the World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam in 1998 and made history as India's first multi-channel video installation.

Malani staged her first solo exhibition in Europe in 2007 at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Malani's work has been acquired by more than thirty international institutions right across the world, including the MoMa New York; The Metropolitan Museum, New York; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, London; the Musée National d'Art Moderne – Centre Pompidou, Paris; M+ Hong Kong; Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Malani received an honorary doctorate from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2010.

Luciano Perna

°1958, Naples, Italy †2021, Los Angeles, USA

Luciano Perna was born in Naples and spent part of his youth in Caracas, Venezuela. Following in the footsteps of his father who was a keen amateur photographer, he began to take photographs at the age of 14 and learned to develop them in a home darkroom. In 1979, he moved to Los Angeles and enrolled in the photography department at CalArts. His presence in the Los Angeles art scene of the late 1970s shaped Perna as an artist and made him take part in activities and performances of artists such as John Baldessari, Michael Asher and many others. He was also strongly influenced by the 1960s Italian Arte Povera movement. Alongside his photography, he engaged in constructing conceptual, playful sculptures from everyday objects. Luciano Perna passed away abruptly in December 2021 in Los Angeles at the age of 63.

During the early lockdown of 2020, Perna started to photograph plants and simple objects from around his house against a black background and posted these elegant still-lives on social media. In a restrained but striking way, they reflected the feelings of fear, vulnerability and seclusion that the corona crisis aroused in most of us. According to the critic and art historian Benjamin Buchloh, Perna, in these photographs "seems to have grasped the paradox that the still life's ancient mnemonic power of a sudden arrest of time might nowadays find its optimal place and distribution form in the perpetually restless cycles of asocial digitality"¹. Perna himself said about his work in general that he wanted movement between immediate recognizability and something

more elusive; that to him it was a matter of not discriminating or discriminating very finely. A series in the format of inkjet prints were displayed in 2021 in Paris at the Marian Goodman Librairie. Luciano Perna exhibited at galleries and museums around the world including the Institute of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, CA; the List Visual Art Center at MIT, Cambridge, MA; the Dia Art Foundation, New York, NY and the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

1 BUCHLOH, Benjamin, *Pandemic Flowers*, in Artforum, October- November 2020.

Salam Atta Sabri

°1953, Baghdad, Iraq

Salam Atta Sabri is one of the most important Iraqi artists of his generation. He is trained as a ceramist, but also makes sculptures, paintings and drawings. He lived in the United States for sixteen years. During his stay, he studied at the California State University in Los Angeles, before moving to Jordan. When he returned to his native city of Baghdad in 2005, the situation there was particularly precarious: conflicts between militias, extreme violence, political instability, corruption and chaos. Lacking the basic material for ceramics, Atta Sabri started drawing. His visual idiom comprises both modernist elements and motifs from the ancient civilisations situated between the Tigris and Euphrates.

Atta Sabri's return to Baghdad is a connecting theme of the many drawings he has made since 2005; works in which he endeavours to grasp, interpret and critically engage with the immense and conflicting changes that have occurred, as well as the corruption, the constant violence and the political instability into which his country has fallen. Due to a shortage of art supplies in Iraq, he initially created these works using pencils borrowed from his daughters. From that point onwards, Atta Sabri created literally hundreds of drawings, which function as both a personal visual archive and a diary of the evolutions in Baghdad and Iraq. The drawings entitled *Letters to my father* (2010-2019) are published in their entirety in the eponymous book and can be seen as visual letters with textual insertions to a beloved father. They form an intimate snapshot of a one-way conversation between the artist and his father, both biographical and historical, a combination of diary elements and correspondence. The work of Salam Atta Sabri was included in *Invisible Beauty*, the exhibition for the Iraq Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale.

Judith Scott

°1943, Ohio, USA †2005, California, USA

Judith Scott was born in Columbus, Ohio and lived most of her life institutionalized at the Columbus State School due to her Down syndrome and deafness. Scott was born with a twin sister Joyce, who began her school at the age of five, at the same time when Judith was sent away because of her disabilities. The isolated life in a state institution ended for Scott in 1985 when her twin sister became her guardian. In 1987, Scott was introduced to Creative Growth, a visionary arts center where she found her creativity and started to create art at the age forty-three.

Scott became interested in fibre art and her enigmatic sculptures quickly became a source of communication, after having been verbally isolated for most of her life. Scott created nearly 100 sculptures during her time at Creative Growth. She wrapped abstract shaped sculptures using found fibre materials: yarn, twine and strips of fabric. Her abstract works have been compared to nests and cocoons, the wrapping suggesting both protection and concealment. The titles of her works *Poupée*, *Papillon*, *Animal* or *Maison* indicate a close connection to the environment, both domestic and natural, of the artist.

Scott became the first ever artist with Down Syndrome to be featured in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Scott's work has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in a retrospective exhibition and is part of the permanent collection at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Smithsonian in Washington DC, among many others.

Asim Abu Shakra

°1961, Umm el-Fahem, Palestine †1990, Israel

Asim Abu Shakra was one of the few Palestinian artists who was accepted into the canon of the Israeli art world. In 1981, Shakra moved to Tel Aviv where he studied painting at the Kalisher Art Academy. At the time, it was not easy for a Palestinian artist to live and study in an Israeli city and Shakra ended up living almost two years in a sleeping bag in the turpentine-smelling paint studio of the school.

In his life and work, Shakra experienced the conflict between his Arab and Israeli identities. The figure of the cactus is central to his visual language and reflects one of the personal stories of his life in Tel Aviv when one day he saw a potted cactus on a windowsill. The plant had been separated and removed from the wilderness and placed in a pot on the windowsill just like him, a Palestinian living in the Israeli capital. The feelings of alienation and non-belonging expressed in Shakra's work are familiar to many exiled or internally displaced Palestinians. The thorny plant became a popular symbol of Palestinian identity as it is known for its tenacity and deep roots.

The resilience of the cactus plant was especially crucial to Abu Shakra during the last years of his life. Diagnosed with cancer in 1987, he portrayed his determination to survive in the form of the spiky, steadfast plant. Asim Abu Shakra passed away at the young age of 29, yet he still had a prolific career as an artist.

After graduating in 1986, he had his first solo exhibition at the Rap Gallery in Tel Aviv. Shakra had three more solo exhibitions and participated in four group exhibitions before he passed away. Four years after his death, a comprehensive retrospective exhibition of his work was presented at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion of the Tel Aviv Museum.

Adrien Vescovi

°1981, Thonon-les-Bains.

Lives and works in Marseille, France.

Adrien Vescovi graduated from the École supérieure d'art de l'agglomération d'Annecy. Following a long stay in Paris and prior to settling in Marseille, the artist installed his studio in that of his grandfather in Getz, in the remote and mountainous Haute-Savoie region. Vescovi went on to ground his artistic practice in the place's unspoilt nature, specific altitude and intense ultraviolet light. *Villa* is one of the first works to be created in this isolated environment.

In his practice, the artist works with fabrics that have been infused with natural pigments by the elements, or with his own concoctions incorporating herbs, bark, spices and leaves. Analogous to alchemic processes, he sometimes immerses the textiles in baths with different maceration and infusion periods. Even after these long and labour-intensive treatments, the works continue to be at the mercy of their environment, leading to the development of multiple temporal layers. The resulting traces are comparable to a memory that collects and associates different impressions of reality.

Vescovi's work has been exhibited in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Mexico, amongst other places. In 2021, he was nominated for the Fondation Pernod Ricard's 22nd prize. His work is held in various public collections such as those of the CNAP – Musée d'Arts de Nantes (F), the FRAC PACA (F) – Conseil Général des Côtes d'Armor (F), and the city of Montrouge (F).

Frank Walter

°1926 †2009, Antigua

Frank Walter, born Francis Archibald Wentworth Walter, was a prolific visual artist and writer from the Caribbean Island of Antigua. His mixed-race descent, from both slave owners and enslaved people, led to a lifelong struggle with identity. A quiet and private person, he spent most of his life surrounded by the wilderness of nature, away from others. This is reflected in his deep connection to the geography of his home as well as in his artistic vision.

In 1948, at the age of 22, he became Antigua's first sugar plantation manager of colour. In 1953, fuelled by a desire to modernise agriculture, he embarked on an industrial Grand Tour of Great Britain and the Continent in order to study mechanical and technological innovations. Here he was confronted with the discrimination and prejudice of postcolonial society and survived through menial jobs under conditions of hunger and cold, suffering from hallucinations as a result. This racial exclusion informed an obsessive interest in his white European, aristocratic lineage, which he built into complex family trees and heraldic paintings.

Walter returned to the Caribbean in 1961 only to have the innovations he had acquired in Europe rejected as the sugar industry declined. Exposed to institutional corruption, the land he retreated to in Dominica was confiscated so he returned to Antigua where he worked as a photographer, frame maker and artist. In 1993, unable to conform to urban life, he settled upon the invitation of a cousin on family land where he built a home and studio, pursuing the most intense period of creativity until his death in 2009.

In 2013, Walter's work was exhibited for the first time in a gallery context at Ingleby in Edinburgh, Scotland. In 2017, he represented Antigua and Barbados in their inaugural national pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Italy. His first retrospective took place in 2020 at the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany.

Hervé Yamguen

°1971, Douala (Cameroon), lives and works in Douala

Hervé Yamguen is a Cameroonian poet, photographer and visual artist, living and working in Douala, Cameroon. His interest in art developed at a young age, yet he was not encouraged by his family to pursue a career in the field as it clashed with their traditional values. He gained their support, however, when he started painting at the age of 17, and his self-taught practice evolved into a singular artistic vision by the late 1980s. Since then, he has trained in Cameroon and abroad, including a year at the École des Arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg in 2000.

While focussing mainly on painting and sculptural work, Yamguen has also explored other mediums, namely photography, performance, installation and stage design. His passion for writing developed as a means to question and reflect upon his identity; his poems have been published in several collections. In his hometown of Douala, the artist lives in the district of New Bell whose particular urban atmosphere has allowed him to participate in various activities. Through the Kapsiki circle, a local design collective, he facilitated and supported the opening of K Factory, a contemporary art gallery and artist residency programme.

Recently, he was inducted as a notable in the village of his father (Bandja-Balassie in the upper Nkam). As such, he was able to reconnect with traditional customs and rituals while maintaining his contemporary art practice. "I have been working for years on the subject of 'human-plant-animal'. In the crafting of shapes, things shift and blend with one another; it is a metamorphosis, a transfiguration. A human face becomes a bird figure. In animism man, nature and animals are in communion. My work flows from a stream of consciousness, like in a dream. My art is rooted in the need to transcend everyday life, to move beyond the realm of reality. The colours become a universe of spontaneity of gesture, with feelings pouring out of my heart. I use series of images, like a storyteller."

