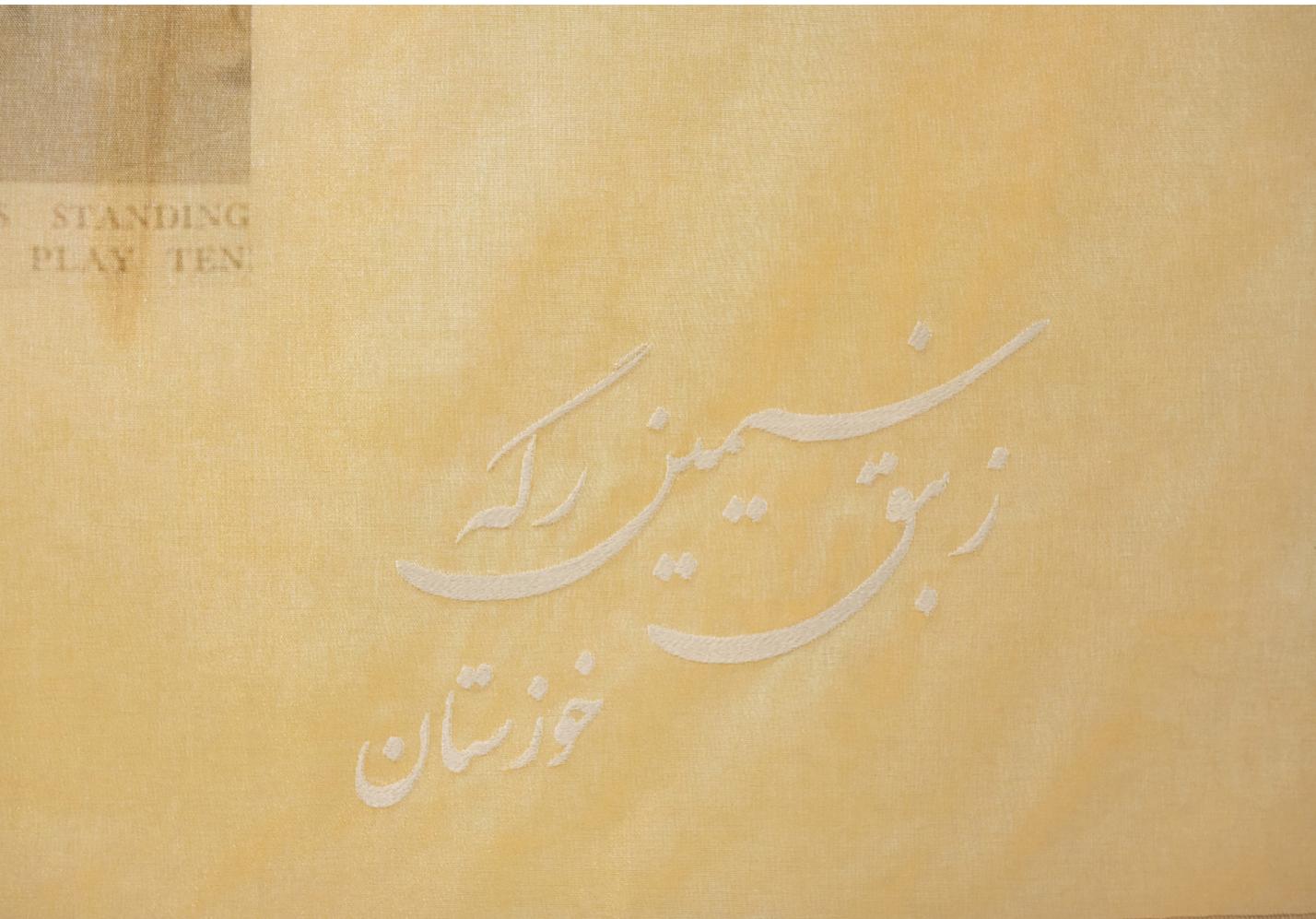


Systema Naturae

Anahita Norouzi



G44

Centre for
Contemporary
Photography

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Cover image

Anahita Norouzi, *Palimpsest of Unseen Pasts* (detail),
54 x 83 inch saffron anothotype prints on cotton, 2022

Poster image

Anahita Norouzi, *The Circuit of Dispossession*, mixed-media print,
sealer on translucent paper, 2022

Anahita Norouzi is a multidisciplinary artist originally from Tehran and based in Montreal and holds degrees in Fine Arts and Graphic Design from Concordia University. Articulated across sculpture, installation, photography and video Norouzi's practice is research-driven, instigated by marginalized histories and the legacies of botanical explorations and archeological excavations, particularly when scientific research became entangled in the colonial exploitation of non-Western geographies.

Norouzi has exhibited at BIENALESUR, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Royal Ontario Museum, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec and Musée d'Art Contemporain. She has received the Grantham Foundation Award, the Liz Crockford Artist Fund Award, the Vermont Studio Center Merit, the Contemporary Art Award of Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, the Impression residency at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Magic of Persia Contemporary Art Prize.

Valérie Litalien has worked in the cultural domain for almost twenty years, where she has prioritized collaboration above all. She has worked in research, writing and publishing in the literary and artistic fields, mostly as an editorial assistant. As an author, Litalien's texts reflect her penchant for places and landscapes by examining the inextricable links between humans and their environment and how these relationships materialize in the visual arts.

Laura Demers is an artist, writer and independent curator based in Toronto. She holds a BFA in Painting & Drawing from the University of Ottawa (2015) and an MA in History & Theory of Art from the University of Toronto (2017). She is interested in ecology, scientific and pseudoscientific discourses, local natural histories, and the materiality of our surroundings, both built and natural. She is co-founder of the plumb.

Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography is an artist-run centre committed to supporting diverse approaches to photographic and image-based practices through exhibitions, education programs and facilitating artistic production. Gallery 44 provides space and context for meaningful dialogue between artists and publics. Together, we offer an entry point to explore the artistic, cultural, historic, social and political implications of the image in our ever-expanding visual world.

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Ci-gisent les iris

Valérie Litalien

Des voiles descendent comme une lumière diffuse, safran,¹ tandis qu'une catastrophe, en filigrane, se laisse deviner. Elle tient à l'extraction, à l'exploitation, à l'épuisement, à l'étouffement et sans cesse se répète. Elle est accumulation, transfiguration, défiguration. Les grands pans de textile font penser à d'immenses feuilles, détachées mais rassemblées, couvertes d'enluminures, de calligraphies, de photographies, de textes, de spécimens végétaux.² Parchemins? Registre botanique? archéologique? Memento historique? Feuilletts extraits d'un album? Le tout semble apprêté pour la conservation, même si les soies – les suaires? – paraissent déteintes par le temps. En fait, il semble avoir presque agi, ici, jusqu'à la désertification. De subtiles touches de couleur le suggèrent, du reste, couche qui s'ajoute aux autres pour nous rappeler ce qu'il peut y avoir de vivant dans les sols non dégradés. Pendant obscur des tentures dorées, un grand tableau, ensuite, fait aussi songer à une page, mais cette fois engluée, comme imbibée d'« or noir »³. Tout près, des impressions florales se déploient telles des empreintes sur un passeport.⁴ Puis vient un jardin de formes – *mutants imaginaires*,⁵ pour reprendre les mots de l'artiste – qui, poussant à l'ombre de l'opulence et de l'ambition, joue des codes de la nomenclature, de la classification et soulève des interrogations sur l'*identification*, la *différenciation*.

Ci-gisent les iris de la soif sans fin. Ils poussent à même une déchirure – une tension,⁶ le choc du beau et de l'horreur – comme dans un puits marquant le roc. C'est un peuplement

L'histoire est faite de régimes, de dynasties, de puissances qui ont opéré, d'Empires qui se sont succédé, qui ont formé, au fil des siècles, un infini palimpseste.

de corps, de cultivars fossilisés, pétrifiés, asphyxiant, ployés mais imposants, aussi sombres que l'histoire. Ce sont des configurations dérangeantes, séduisantes, qui renvoient par leurs noms et l'homogénéité de leur teinte funèbre aux dommages environnementaux – et peut-être avant tout sociaux – de la prospection, de la production d'énergies. Car les œuvres, ici, évoquent le développement effréné autour des « richesses naturelles » – des hydrocarbures, plus particulièrement – de même que l'impérialisme et les *déterritorialisations*⁷ qui y sont liés, en « Orient » notamment. Or un parallèle peut être tracé entre l'exploitation horticole et pétrolière, entre la marchandisation du végétal et du sous-sol, « ressources » à ce point cultivables qu'on juge *fructueux* de spolier des gens pour tirer profit de leurs terres.⁸ Ci-gisent les iris de la convoitise prédatrice.

Ci-gisent les fleurs de la concupiscence. Ci-gisent des hampes terreuses, ocre, bistre, flottant, sur un fond couleur d'épice, par-delà un sol éventré, déroché. Ce sont des pétales noirs, funestes mais scintillants, offerts sur un fond calcaire. Des floraisons recensées, observées, croisées, transmuées. Des efflorescences entomologiques ou fauniques,⁹ puisqu'il n'y a qu'un pas entre l'animal et la plante; des fleurs qui nous rappellent à notre sort, notre périssabilité; des espèces anthropiques, aux noms comme des cris arrachés, assourdis; des fleurs migratrices mais figées, inertes comme l'artefact qu'on lègue et qu'il faudra faire parler.

1 Les étoffes de *Systema Naturae* ont été teintées avec des extraits de cette iridacée.

2 Les principes de superposition et de stratification agissent fortement dans *Systema Naturae*. Or ne renvoient-ils pas tant au fonctionnement de la mémoire qu'à la constitution des « territoires », sans cesse recomposés? De fait, Anahita Norouzi *rassemble* ici pour contrer l'oubli et toute tentative d'arasement.

3 Ce tableau est, plus précisément, recouvert d'un scellant dérivé du pétrole, qui vise normalement à étanchéifier les surfaces, à les rendre impénétrables.

4 Quoiqu'ils puissent rappeler divers types de documents tant il reste difficile d'en cerner aussitôt la nature, les fonds de ces empreintes correspondent aux versos d'archives rendues publiques par la British Petroleum Company (initialement nommée l'Anglo-Persian Oil Company).

5 Ces sculptures ont été créées pour susciter des questionnements sur les transformations que peuvent vivre des personnes expropriées ou exilées, voire réfugiées, une fois qu'elles ont changé de milieu.

6 D'ailleurs, les œuvres *What it is in a Name* (2022) et *Beneath the Petroliferous Moon, Foreign Drillers* sont mises en relation, voire en tension dans l'exposition, les deux reposant sur un support rectangulaire de mêmes dimensions et renvoyant, de manière complémentaire, aux effets de la dépossession.

7 Grandement polysémique, ce terme et les concepts qu'il implique ont été abordés par de nombreux philosophes, géographes, politologues et sociologues, mais on l'emploie ici dans un sens littéral, sans référence à une pensée particulière.

8 Et donc d'habitats, d'écosystèmes, de cultures.

9 Fauniques comme les carcasses, elles-mêmes souvent présentes dans les travaux de Norouzi, dans les séries *Other Landscapes* (2020) et *They Are Neither Dead nor Alive* (2018-2019), entre autres, ou dans les performances *Flesh Memory* (2018) et *Tehran, The Apocalypse* (2012).

Here lie the irises

Translated by Laura Demers

History is made of regimes and dynasties,
of powers that operated, of Empires that succeeded one
another, forming through centuries an infinite palimpsest.

Drapes hang like a diffuse saffron¹ glow, while between the overlaid images a catastrophe reveals itself. Devastation follows extraction, exploitation, exhaustion, suffocation and repeats itself in an endless cycle. It is accumulation, transfiguration and disfiguration. These vast swathes of fabric are reminiscent of large sheets of paper, unbound yet gathered, covered with manuscript illuminations, calligraphies, photographs, texts, plant specimens.² Scrolls? Botanical or archaeological registers? Historical mementos? Album folios? Though everything seems prepared for conservation, the screens (shrouds?) appear to have faded with time. In fact, time seems to have acted so thoroughly here that something might indeed have been extinguished, desertified. Subtle, enigmatic tinges of colour suggest as much, another layer reminding us of the liveliness of uncorrupted soils. A dark foil to these curtains of light, a large painting then brings to mind a page, this time coated and congealed with "black gold."³ Nearby, floral prints unfold like fingerprints on a passport.⁴ Then, a garden of forms—*imaginary mutants*,⁵ to borrow a phrase from the artist—grows in the shadow of opulence and ambition, using the codes of nomenclature and classification and raising, at the same time, questions about *identification* and *differentiation*.

Here lie the irises of endless thirst. Right out of the gash, like out of a borehole drilled into bedrock, they grow amidst a tension,⁶ a shock, the clash between beauty and horror. A population of fossilized bodies, of petrified cultivars,

asphyxiating, twisted but imposing, as somber as history itself. Tense and tortuous, disturbing and seductive, these strange configurations refer by their names and by the homogeneity of their funereal hue to the environmental—and perhaps above all social—damage of prospection and energy production. Here, the works evoke the unbridled exploitation of "natural wealth"—more specifically, fossil fuels—as well as the *deterritorializations*⁷ caused by imperialism, particularly in the "Orient." Conversely, a parallel can be drawn between horticultural exploitation and oil extraction, between the commodification of vegetation and of the subsoil. These "resources" are so arable that it is considered fruitful to despoil and uproot people in order to profit off their land.⁸ Here lie the irises of predatory greed.

Here lie the flowers of covetousness. Here lie earthy stems, ochre, bistre, on spice-coloured grounds, far beyond the torn soils of their stolen homeland. Black petals, baleful but scintillating, emerge as if out of limestone. Here are inventoried blooms, observed, hybridized, transmuted. Here are entomological or faunal⁹ flourishings, since there is little difference between animal and plant; flowers that remind us of our condition, our fate, our perishability; anthropogenic species with names like strained, muffled cries; migratory flowers made still, inert like artifacts that are left behind and must eventually be made to speak.

1 In *Systema Naturae*, fabrics have been dyed with extracts of this iridaceous plant.

2 Principles of juxtaposition and stratification are active in *Systema Naturae*. They refer, in addition to the functioning of memory, to the constitution of "territories" constantly recomposed. In fact, Anahita Norouzi *gathers* here to counter amnesia and further attempts at erosion.

3 This painting is, more precisely, covered with a sealant derived from petroleum, which normally aims to render surfaces impenetrable.

4 While at first they may recall various types of documents, revealing little about their nature, these prints correspond to the backings of archival documents made public by the British Petroleum Company (originally known as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company).

5 These sculptures were created to prompt reflections about the transformations lived by expropriated or exiled persons, or refugees, once they relocate to a new milieu.

6 Besides, the related works *What it is in a Name* (2022) and *Beneath the Petroliferous Moon, Foreign Drillers* (2022) create tension in the exhibition, both resting on a rectangular base of similar dimensions and referring, in complementary ways, to the effects of dispossession.

7 This polysemous term and the concepts to which it refers have been addressed by numerous philosophers and scientists, but it is used here in a literal sense, without reference to any particular school of thought.

8 And thus, off of entire habitats, ecosystems and cultures.

9 Fauna, mostly in the form of carcasses, is often present in Norouzi's works, for instance in the series *Other Landscapes* (2020) and *They Are Neither Dead nor Alive* (2018-2019), or in the filmed performances *Flesh Memory* (2018) and *Tehran, The Apocalypse* (2012).

