

THE TURN
ANAS ALBRAEHE



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Earth: A Dwelling Place

One needs to understand my work in a way that, if I were to remove the rotated bodies from my paintings, I would be left with an image of a picturesque landscape. If I were to do the inverse however, if I were to remove the landscape from my paintings, I would be only left with an impression of a black spot on my canvas.

– Anas Albraeche, 2023

“The Turn” a solo exhibition by Anas Albraeche on view for the first time at the Saleh Barakat Gallery in Beirut, Lebanon, marks a new phase in the artist’s body of work. Although having foreshadowed such a next phase in his three previous solo exhibitions, all of which were titled “The Dreamer,” Albraeche’s interests then were clearly directed towards the localized and spatial aspects of dwelling. Now, as his project progresses, he moves on from the spatial aspects of dwelling towards more philosophical issues, ones concerning how one dwells and what it means to properly dwell as a human being in relation to the other aspects of Being. To elaborate, he is now focused on the perceptive relationship between human beings and the other entities that surround them in their dwelling space.

As you begin to walk across the exhibition hall, you will see that he still approaches his new phase of work by using his motif of subjects lying asleep,¹ but while remaining devoted to his sleeping subjects, his focus regarding them and their subjectivity gradually changes – they are no longer the focal point of his paintings. Instead, Albraeche now uses them as a mere vessel to convey the total process of disclosure between human beings and nature in all of its modes. He does this by continuously using his subjects in a deliberate manner throughout a sequential set of repeated, yet distinct, paintings that methodically portray and chronicle the different stages of this gradual, aforementioned disclosure. The purpose behind their changing function is so that they convey a manifold sense of harmony and unity between his subjects, the earth, the sky and the divinities.² The more harmony there is between those entities, the less of a distinction there will be between the positive and negative space of his paintings. On the other hand, the less harmony there is between the subjects and their surroundings, the more of a contrast there will be between the subjects, the rivers and the mountainous ranges being depicted to a point where they would recede back into themselves and back into the background.

¹ However, I would be cautious to call them sleeping subjects now that Albraeche’s current work is taking the materiality of the earth into account.

² Heidegger, Martin. “Building Dwelling Thinking.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 148. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Albraeche describes such an understanding of space as symptomatic to a notion not so dissimilar to the Heideggerian understanding of how modern technology discloses things to us in what he calls, the Anthropocentric era.³ Such a technological understanding of Being, in very short, challenges forth or enframes (*Gestell*) everything as a standing-reserve (*Bestand*) that can either be used or stored as energy at the minimum cost. It is the perceiving of the world in a way in which the Rhine River “appears as something at our command [...] what the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station.”⁴ In such a perception, the Rhine no longer appears to humans as a large body of water that possesses any of its natural tendencies. It now only appears in relation to how much power it can give, produce and store for them. For Heidegger, once one enframes a thing, they would only unconceal them as standing reserves and lose sight of the things that do not fit in the standing reserve category back into concealment. So, when human beings enframe nature, they will always view how nature should fit with them instead of viewing how they should fit along with nature. They no longer see a thing for what it actually is in its totality. Instead, they see a thing only in terms of how it could fulfill their needs. What this results in is a shallow, dominative and self-centered understanding towards the nature of Being.

In order to figuratively reconcile such an ontological gap, Albraeche introduces the turn, a visual device that he uses to harmoniously and correspondingly mirror his subjects and their synchronous rotation in relation to the parallel setting in which they lie. Gradually turning or rotating his subjects directly reveals the interplay that is being undertaken between all of the facets of the painting. In order to reveal the magnitude of the gradual movement that is unfolding in tandem to the turn of his subjects, Albraeche additionally desubjectifies or depersonalizes his subjects and their faces – not only does he depersonalize them in parallel to the turn, he also removes any, if not all, of their defining visual and physical features. Therefore, along with his synchronous turn, the depersonalization of his subjects marks their departure as the focal point of his paintings.

Now, inserted and blended in between his paintings’ scenery, the newly rotated and depersonalized subjects now function as mere cogs that contribute to the total makeup of his paintings. However, in blending or merging them in, Albraeche is also simultaneously rooting them back into the earth, and back into nature. Such an act transfigures a “primal, existential oneness,”⁵ and unity between his subjects, the earth, the sky and the divinities.⁶ This existential unity is revealed once Albraeche opens up the space between earth and the sky and makes it a dwelling space for his subjects. In providing his subjects with a clear dwelling place between the earth and the sky, Albraeche foreshadows a constant and synchronized threefold interaction them, so that once his subjects rotate and blend in, the entities surrounding them will reciprocally respond and organically unconceal themselves. The more blended, depersonalized and rooted his subjects become, the clearer and more disclosed the setting becomes.⁷

³ The Anthropocene is an epoch of time where we have seen a massive geological interference from the collective activity of human beings over the last 250 years.

⁴ Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology*. Translated by William Lovitt, 16. New York: Garland Publishing, 1977.

⁵ Wrathall, Mark. “Our Mortal Dwelling With Things.” In *How to Read Heidegger*, 106. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005.

⁶ Heidegger, Martin. “Building Dwelling Thinking.” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 148. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

As aforementioned, like the entirety of being, Albraeche’s space is made up of other entities that complete its entirety. In blending them in, his rotated and blended subjects now approach said unconcealed entities, but they do so in a free and poetic manner – they approach them with the preconceived knowledge that they are now among things that are beyond the confines of their own constitution. In blending them in, Albraeche is rooting his subjects back into the earth, among entities that have preceded them and that will exist beyond them. Similarly, if such an understanding were to be applied to reality, human beings, like his subjects, would dwell and be a part of such a space, but as mortal beings. They would dwell in this space but they would do so in a particular manner – as mere visitors in a place that has preceded them and that will exist beyond them.



Oil on canvas, 120x100 cm, 2021

That is precisely what Albraeche’s mirroring between his subjects and the other entities of Being suggests; it suggests an understanding that the other entities being portrayed are perceived as they are in their totality. It is also understanding where we, as finite human beings, fit into such a framework in accordance to them, and not how they would fit in, in accordance to us. In rooting his own subjects back into the earth, Albraeche doubles down on this notion by faintly suggesting to the viewer that they themselves come to terms with the totality of their own surroundings in a similarly poetic manner. Only then can one attain a sense of the harmonious unity being espoused by Albraeche in his current artworks.

To conclude, this excerpt will serve as a preview towards a more detailed essay concerning the same topic.

— William Kaprielian, 2023

⁷ Here, Albraeche shows the interplay involved in a thing showing up. For him, this interplay resides between his subjects, the earth and the sky, but it totally depends on his subjects and the degree of their rotation. He intentionally places his subjects between the two other entities in order to disclose the process of unconcealment taking place.



صار البيت جبلاً وَالْحلمُ نهر والموجة الهائجة سكونٌ رقيق
صار الوجه صخرة، والجسد سهل
صار اللّونُ وطنًا، والوطنُ لحاف
صار اللّحاف صحراء، وَالخريطةُ غَيمة
اِختلطتْ علي الصور، الذكريات، الأفراح والأحزان
فصوّرت جسدي غارقا بذاتي
أردت للإنسان أن ينعم بالعدل،
أردتُ له أن يشعر بروحه، أردته حَقِيقًا،
فوجدته حين نأّم
نَمّ لتصبحَ أصدق، نَمّ لأرى فيكَ نِوَاهُ اللّهِ
وَلُبّ الأرض، و كينونة الحقّ
نَمّ لتصبحَ أرضاً بروح السماء
نَمّ لتصيرَ لوحةً تروي قصةَ مَنْ أراد الحقيقة فلم ينلُ منها الا النعاس،

أنس البريحي ٢٠٢٢



Oil on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2022



Oil on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2023



April - 2023

Photo ©Grayse

Oil on canvas | 140x140 cm | 2023

A Return to Sleep

Faces turn and blankets
pulled and piled that careful way;
only a nose, another nose, a chin.

There is breath, warmth, air.

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What is a dream but a place not to be hidden.
What is a place but a dream.

What place is dreaming.
What dream is placing your
cannot hide
your face
you cannot hide.
The face you cannot hide.

If you ask me what I want
give me the simple things.
You have the song I can remember
the face I love. Or give me the dream, the impossible known.

--

Do you know the feeling of dreaming, the feeling that this is your living room, but the colour is wrong; impossible this chair in this room, impossible this garden, this face on this soul. We dream the impossible and it can be this simple.

How do I talk about dreams without softness creeping. There is the hard edge of a hillside, even in its gentle containing I hear stones grinding underfoot. The scrape of rock under grass. There is air, maybe it is hard.

The sky is pink, soft, softness again, the pink sky is blue gone soft, baby pink, nothing but long evenings twitching grasses, waves.

The places here are unpeopled – they are desolate places - the blankets alone in the room – the hills alone. No people but the dreamer. The paintings trick the eye. Is the darkness object or form, once seen, cannot be unseen.

Over and again the paintings repeat
the dreaming forgive under their blankets
when do they wake, what do they do.

There is exile, there is dream.
We are under the covers, hiding
more than sleep.
Landscape.

How many blankets inhabit the life of Anas, how much warm weight, contoured, folded fabric. Taking more painterly space than his human subjects, these drapes are a place of safety from whose warm tunnels only small parts emerge. Always, blankets cover almost the whole person, in sleeping peace, warmth, light. The dream of space, of unpeopled place.

The paintings emerge
from colourfield abstraction into fugitive landscapes.

Forms made from shapes
that remain shapes that remain
shapes even as they reassemble
before our eyes becoming known

thing and from there
to object.

The room is not a room but a cell
stripped back
only blanket and person.

What is the world but you and the dream and the blanket,
a warm anchor in all of this space.

We are not observers to these sleepers, the composition is too light. Fragmented, we are made ordered, cold. Bodies. For this is a cold place where people are tucked up tight. In the inside warmth the edges of the cloth are rough or smooth, brushing fingers, a toe, a shoulder. It need not be night for this sleep.

Moving from wake to sleep, an empty space
the most awkward
awkward compositions.

How much space the sleeper inhabits
how much dream, how much person.

The paintings give volume to dreams, a commonality of blanket and mountain, a question of where to arrange a head, a face, how to go between.

A line, a moment of imperception
of knowing unravelled, unravelling.

The head between mountain and blanket
the moment of unknowing.

In place of dreams

contour
form
foreground.

These are not gardens but they are tender, tended,
the landscape just outside of us.

--

And later

A dream intrudes on a blanket that grows legs
multiplies into arms, into guns.

How can a landscape be without softness.

A second dreamer, dreaming inside a dream.
A landscape doubled.

What is between dreamers, between folds.
The gun, pointing finger
covered face.

Is this dream the dreamers'
what rich colours he can see
among soldiers, made from colour,
heads levelling the blanket edge,
creating edge.

The line is broken
The line between waking and sleep
becomes stronger.

Sleeping wins this composition
the landscape outside is in,
warmth, breath, air.
A return to sleep.

Amy Todman 2023



Oil on canvas | 150x180 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 100x100 cm | 2022



Oil on canvas | 100x100 cm | 2022



Oil on canvas
120x180 cm
2023



Oil on canvas | 100x100 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 100x100 cm | 2023

(Overleaf) Oil on canvas | 120x207 cm | 2023





Oil on canvas | 100x120 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 100x120 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 150x180 cm | 2022



Oil on canvas | 100x120 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 100x120 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 150x180 cm | 2022



Oil on canvas
120x180 cm
2022



Oil on canvas | 140x160 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 120x140 cm | 2023



Oil on canvas | 180x200 cm | 2022 | Photo ©Graysc



Photo ©Graysc

Oil on canvas | 150x130 cm | 2023



Photo ©Graysc

Oil on canvas | 130x160 cm | 2022



Oil on canvas | 82x130 cm | 2023



Pencil on carton | 20x30 cm each | 2023



Oil on canvas | 45x50 cm each | 2023

Oil on canvas | 45x50 cm each | 2023



Photo ©Graysc



Oil on canvas | 45x50 cm each | 2023

Oil on canvas | 30x30 cm each | 2023

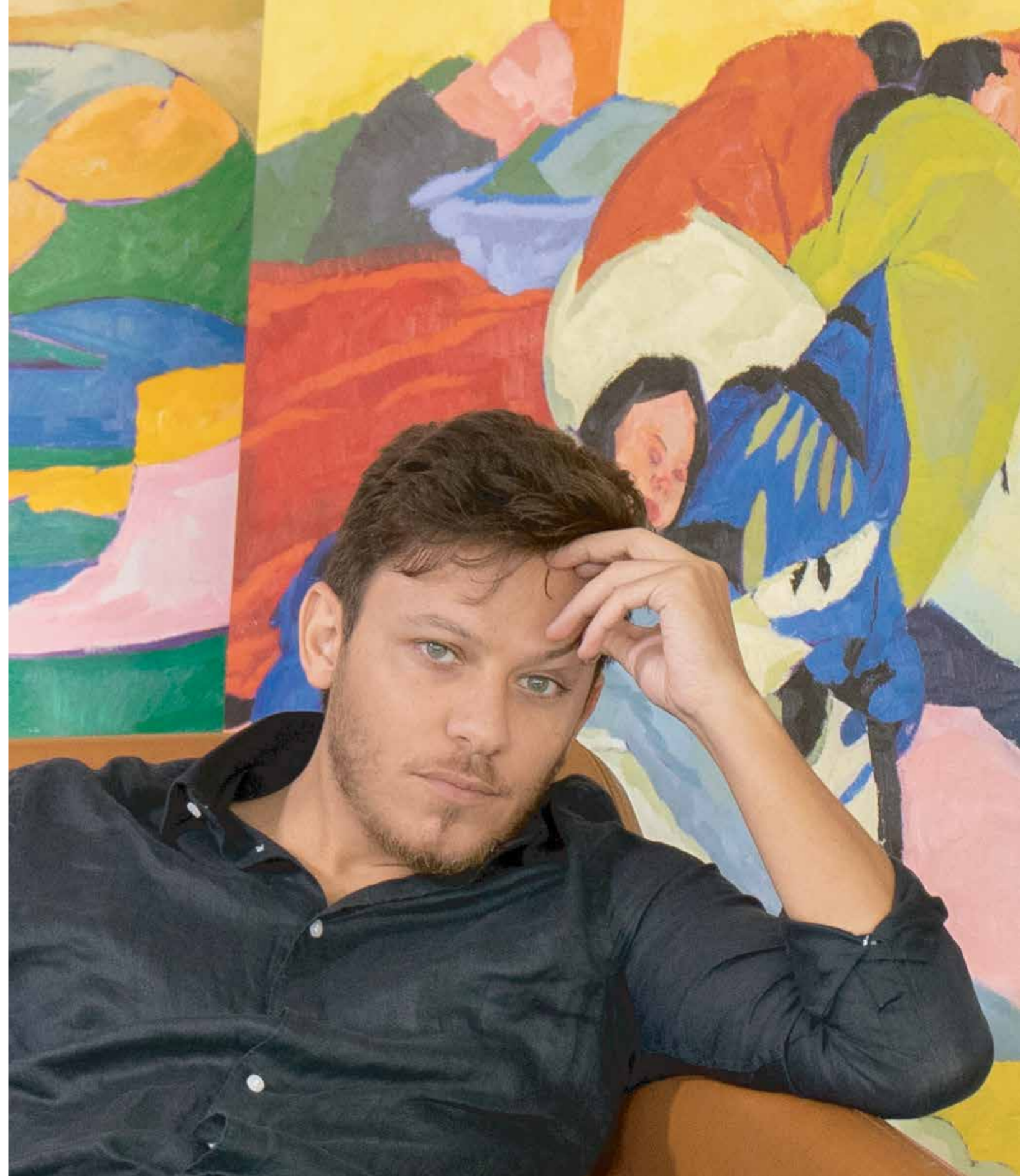


Oil on carton | 70x100 cm each | 2023

Oil on carton | 70x100 cm each | 2023

About the Artist

Born in Syria in 1991, Anas Albraeche is a Beirut-based artist who primarily works in painting and theatre performance. He received a bachelor's degree in painting and drawing in 2014 from the Fine Arts University of Damascus, Syria. After the onset of war in Syria, he relocated to Lebanon and obtained an MA in Psychology and Art Therapy from the Lebanese University in 2015. Albraeche's solo exhibitions include *Mother Earth* (2020) and *The Dream Catcher* (2018) at Agial Art Gallery in Lebanon, and *Manal*, which was held respectively in Artspace Hamra in Lebanon and in Wadi Finan in Jordan, in 2017. He has also participated in several group exhibitions, including the Middle East Institute Gallery in Washington DC, USA (2019); Capkuwait Gallery, organized by Selections Magazine in Kuwait (2018); Artspace Hamra in Lebanon (2016); and Albraeche Gallery in Bahrain (2015). In 2016-2017, Albraeche participated in SAFIR TA'AROF 2017, an artist workshop as part of the Sharjah Art Biennial. Artist Residency at La Cité International Des Arts, Paris, 2020.



SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY

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