

Talash

(Try)

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University of East London UK

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Editors: Majid Adin, Giorgia Dona`, Marie Godin, Crispin Hughes and Arash Niroomand

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Refugee Week | CMRB
Centre for Migration, Refugees and Belonging

PREFACE

The University of East London has a long-standing history and commitment to working in partnership with our communities. Through research, knowledge exchange and a wide range of innovative outreach and co-created projects we seek to engage, support and amplify the voices of our global and local communities. Arash and Majid's Tallash exhibition shares migrant experiences, journeys and reflections vividly and with compassion through words, images and the perspectives of those who have experienced these journeys and does so much to extend our understanding. Tallash is a wonderful example of engagement and partnership.

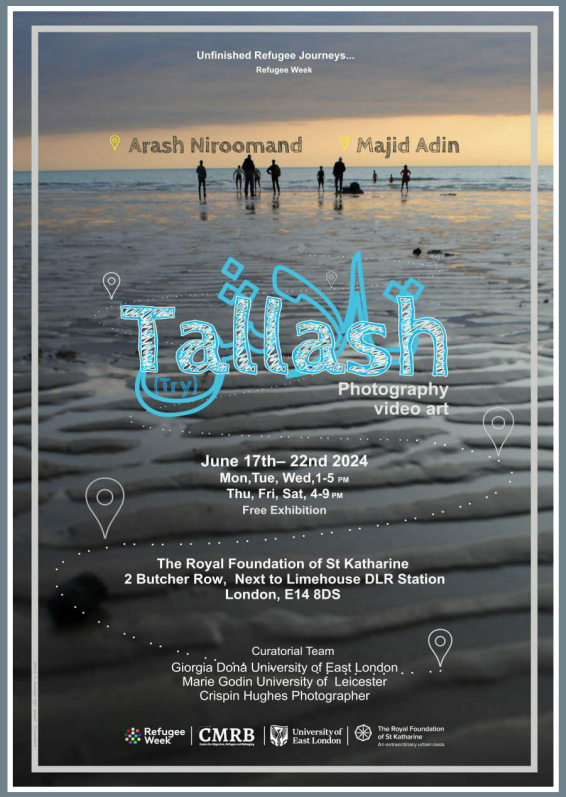
The project is a Public Engagement partnership between the Centre for Migration, Refugees and Belonging at the University of East London, and the Royal Foundation of St Katharine.

Gail May
Director of the Office for Postgraduates, Research and Engagement, University of East London

Last summer we were honoured to partner with the Centre for Research on Migration, Refugees and Belonging and the University of East London hosting the work of Arash and Majid.The work brought their stories of refugee journeys to new audiences. Arash and Majid were both there to share with those in the local community their lived experiences.It was a sheer pleasure to work with professional artists in putting on this informative exhibition in a most unusual of settings but it worked and was a great success.

Kevin McCullough
Community and Public Engagement, The Royal Foundation of St Katharine





The Farsi word Tallash, تلاش, meaning Try, has resonance for Majid and Arash - visual artists born in Iran, now living in the UK

Tallash was exhibited in a shipping container at The Royal Foundation of St Katharine in East London

17- 22 June 2024

From the moment we are born, life is an effort. For us two, at one moment in our lives, it was about trying to escape from conflict and war, to seek refuge in places of peace and safety. Trying to cross from land to land, from land to sea, from sea to land. A journey of losses, friendship, suffering, violence, and solidarity. Sometimes together, sometimes alone, we try to flee from the darkness that haunts our past. From the white fences of Calais to the white cliffs of Dover. Crushed on a boat, confined at the back of a lorry, trying to make no sound, trying to breathe just enough to make it to the other side, trying not to speak too loudly, whispering to one another. Once on the other side, in another land, another sea, another city, keep trying. New faces, new barriers, trying not to disappear, trying to recover from long-term anonymity, trying to get our names back, trying to stay alive.

Majid Adin & Arash Niroomand





Reversing the gaze

In 2015, a group from the University of East London - staff, students and friends - went to the so-called Calais Jungle to deliver arts workshops with migrants in transit at the border.

From that initiative, friendships and collaborations developed. Tallash is one of the long-standing collaborations.

Majid and Arash, two multi-media artists from refugee backgrounds, worked with UK-based photographer Crispin and migrant researchers Giorgia and Marie. All share an interest in reflecting on the borders, journeys and the politics of Fortress Europe, using photography, media and installation.

Unlike much journalism and academic research, or most media representations of the 'refugee/ migrant', Tallash shifts the gaze to show how migrants themselves view and represent the border, other migrants' journeys, and life in the UK.

Giorgia Dona` and Marie Godin



Why here?

We wanted to share a ‘sense of presence’ in our experience. Exhibiting in a container was one of these choices, as we could show the experience of living in a tent for several months as refugees. And the use of the same blue plastic that had been our roof and shelter throughout the refugee challenge, we could say that it had a life-saving role. Another choice in the construction and preparation of the exhibition was the use of tools, boards, nails, stones, bricks and disposable chairs for the stands and projector holders. Exactly the same way as in the camp, we had to make or use anything we found in order to succeed. From stones, bricks, tools and equipment in the garbage. Similarly, the irregular arrangement on the blue plastic was also like pieces of experience and bitter memories of the shelter and asylum. What is certain is that one of our goals was to compress and collect all the works in one collection.

Arash Niroomand

Arash Niroomand



Arash Niroomand is an Iranian refugee who has lived in the UK since 2016.
Before reaching England, he lived for some time in the so-called ‘Jungle refugee camp’ in Calais.
Back in Iran, Arash was a graphic designer and photographer for several reputable newspapers.
Passionate about photography, in 2019-2020 Arash exhibited at the Musée National d’ Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou de Paris, in the exhibition *Calais Témoigner de la Jungle* (Witnessing the Jungle).
Arash is also a member of the art project *Ostranenie* (Russian: остранение), that gathers together refugee photographers who defamiliarize the UK.

Majid Adin

Majid Adin is an artist and animator from Iran, now living in London. He was forced to leave his home country, having been briefly imprisoned and politically exiled from Tehran after his blog upset the regime.
Majid journeyed through Europe, spent several months in the Calais Jungle, and after many attempts to make the crossing he finally arrived in the UK in a refrigerated van on 20th April 2016.
This coincided with celebrations for Shakespeare's 400th anniversary.
In 2017 Majid won a competition to produce an animation for a music video illustrating Elton John's song *Rocket Man*, with a tale about a lonely astronaut travelling across continents to a new home in England.



Inside and outside the tent

While we were planning the Tallash exhibition, artist Arash Niroomand resisted my desire for precision. He told me:
'In the Calais camp nothing had any value. Everything was temporary, here today and taken away tomorrow. I don't want this show to be perfect, lasting, and full of high-quality materials.'
Later I watched his co-exhibitor Majid physically crumple up prints, pictures he'd taken in the camp, before simply nailing them to the wall of the shipping container housing the show. Artists have long used 'found objects' in their work: raising rubbish up, isolating it and transforming it into something of artistic, cultural and monetary value. But in the Calais Camp everything was a found object. Even the residents were treated as found objects, in one way or another. Arash tells this story:

"Early on a cold winter morning, I went outside the tent, I saw one of the residents of a nearby tent digging the ground. I asked 'what are you digging the ground for?'



He said 'I want to bury them.'
I said 'what?' He said 'the dolls they brought yesterday.' I said 'I will take them all.' He said 'they're yours.'
And until the last days my silent friends were in my tent during the cold and lonely nights." The action, the story and the photo create meaning – who or what ends up in a hole in the ground? – and emotional value, out of nothing. A more venal artist might have cashed in on that new meaning. Once he was in the UK, Arash photographed London streets at night. Strange, cold and spooky, with the flare of the windows emphasising the difference between inside and outside. More recently he has used an architectural camera to look at borders.Visible and intangible borders, at the edges of the UK and within the UK. A thin, vertical line of focus, like a force field, runs through his images of the Seven Sisters white cliffs. In an accompanying video, Arash pushes against an invisible barrier on the beach. A mime artist pressing against the political wall that is intangible, but all too real.

Crispin Hughes





All my pictures are original and unaltered. To alter the photographs would be a betrayal of the past.
My photos are the product of the feeling, the performance, the place and the situation, as I experienced it.

Arash Niromand

Good Morning

Kitchen



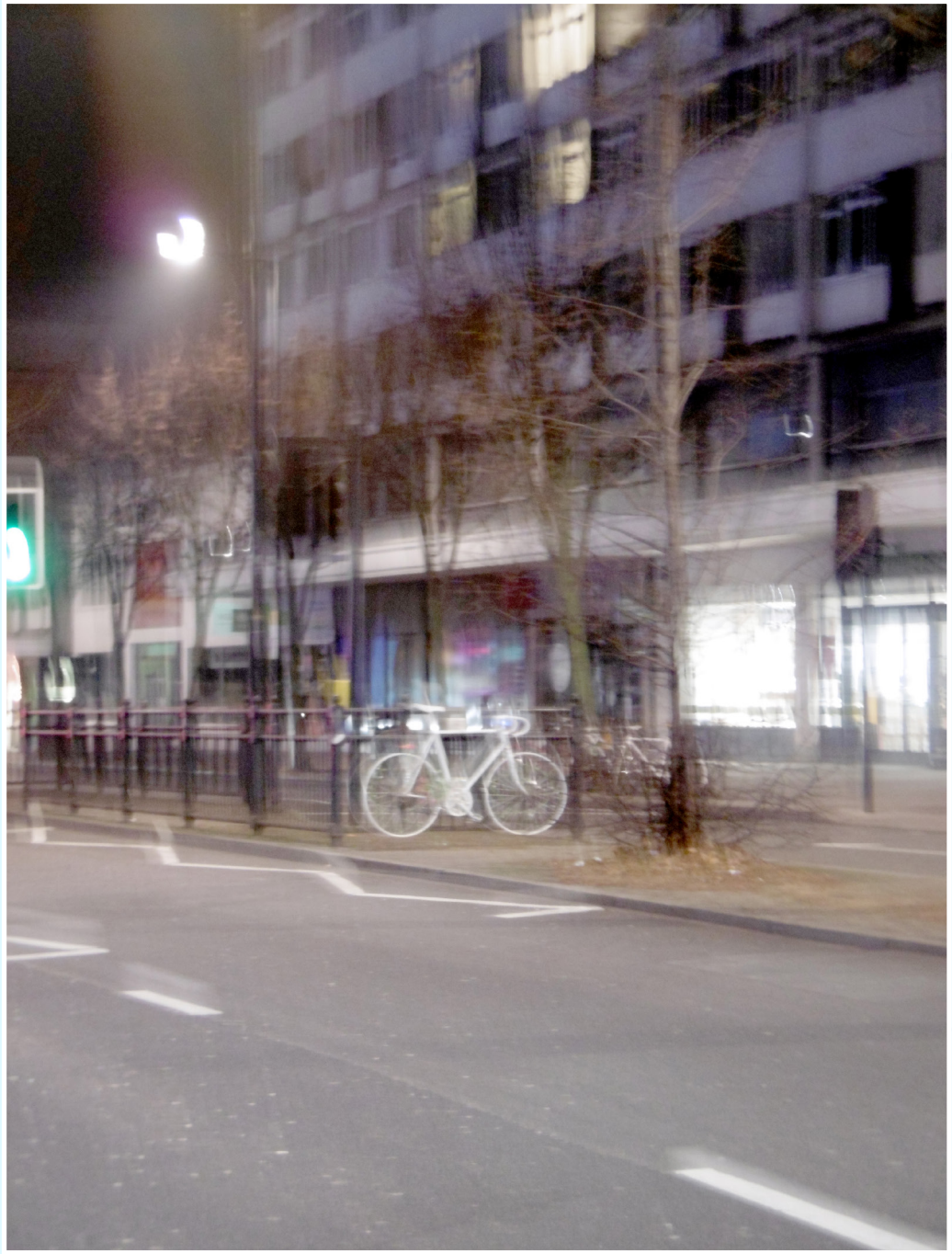

TUMMY

Friends

It was morning when I came out of the tent. A few steps away, someone was digging a hole. I asked what the hole was for. He said it was for burying dolls. With our current situation, no one needs them. Glassy eyes, soft skin, and a permanent smile. I am happy with that. I said I will take everyone with me. Don't dig any more holes. Now I think every day, did I save them from being buried, or did they save me? They were with me on dark nights for months, my friends. I cherish their memory.

Hope

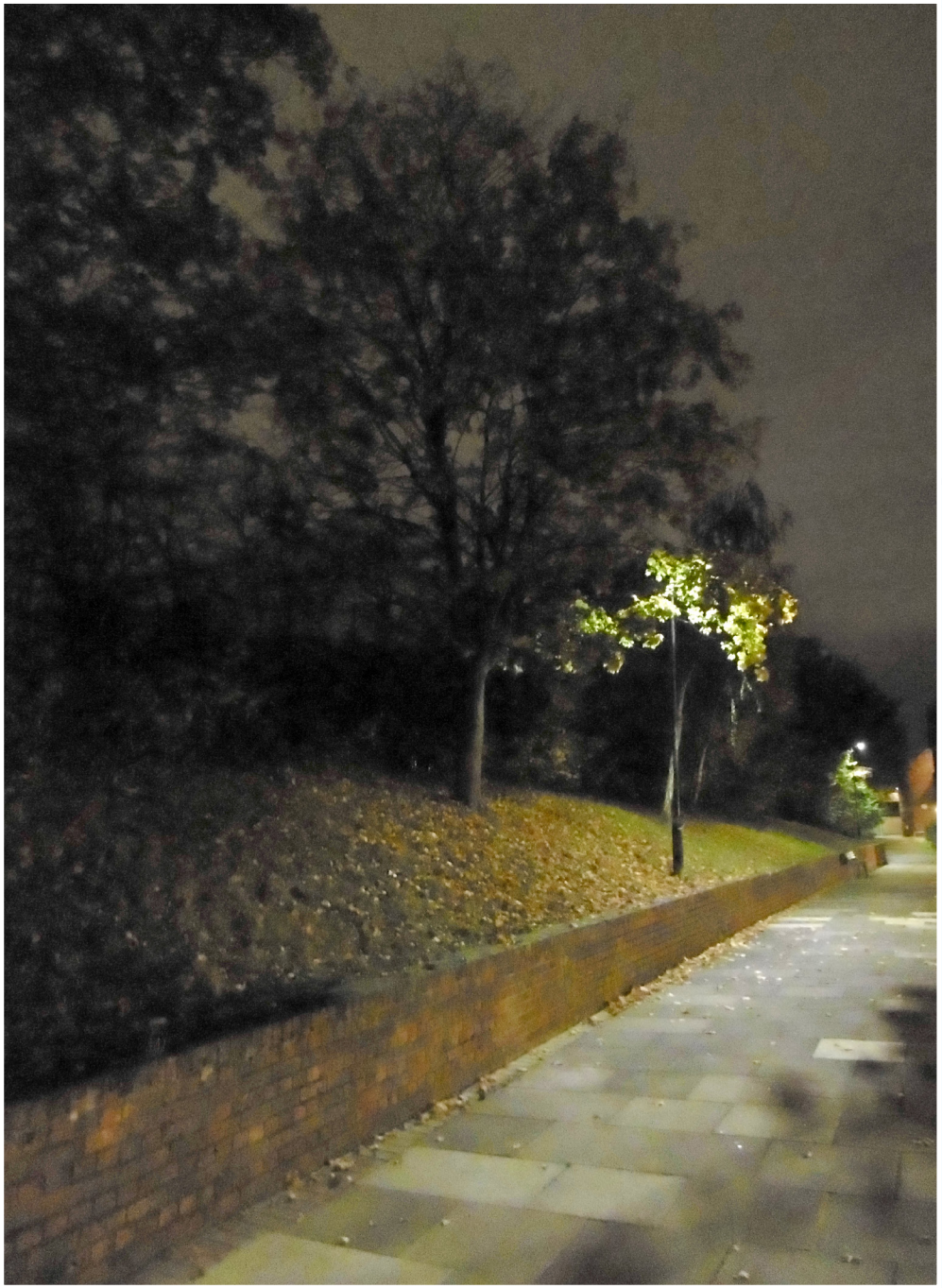


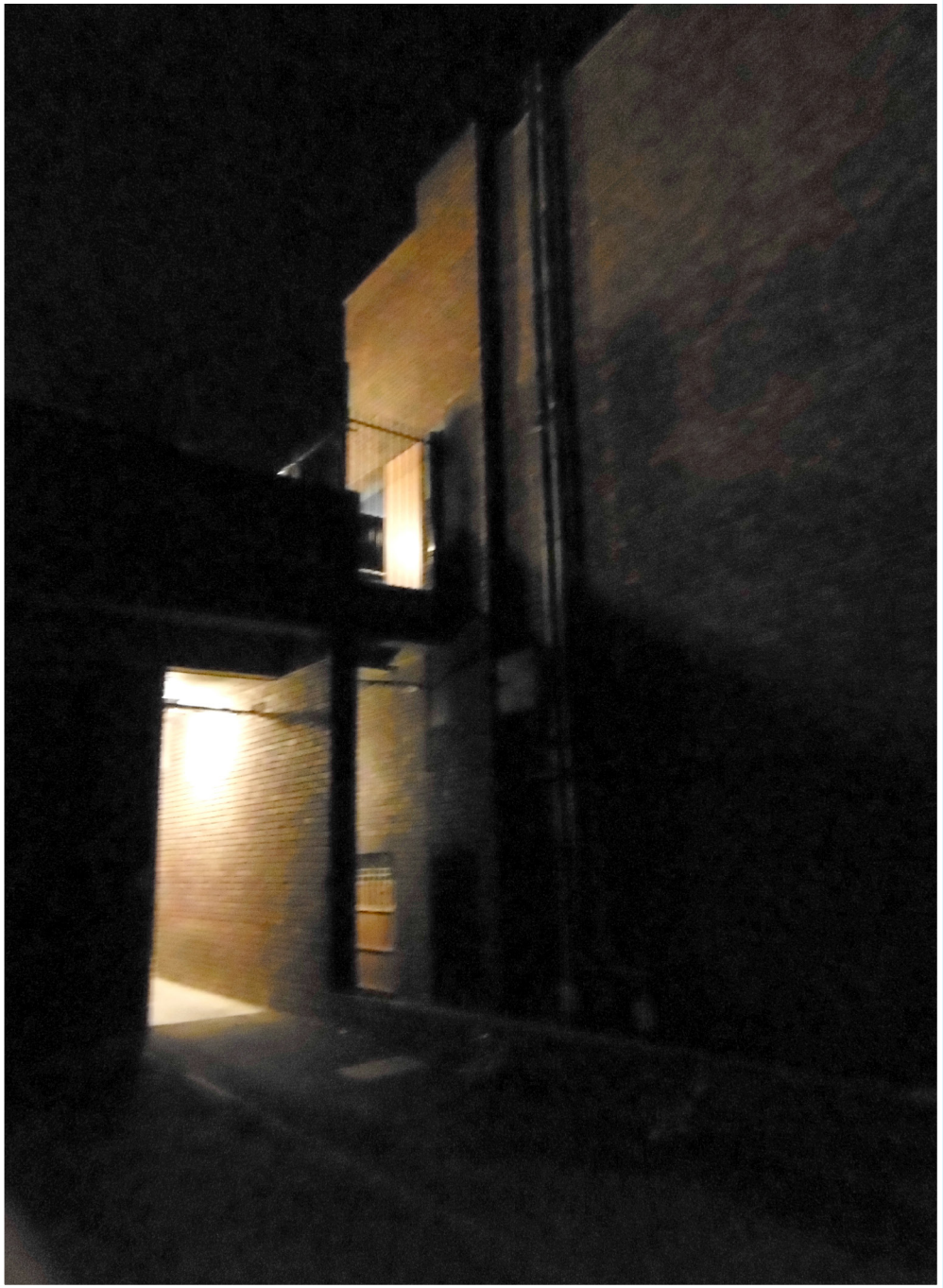


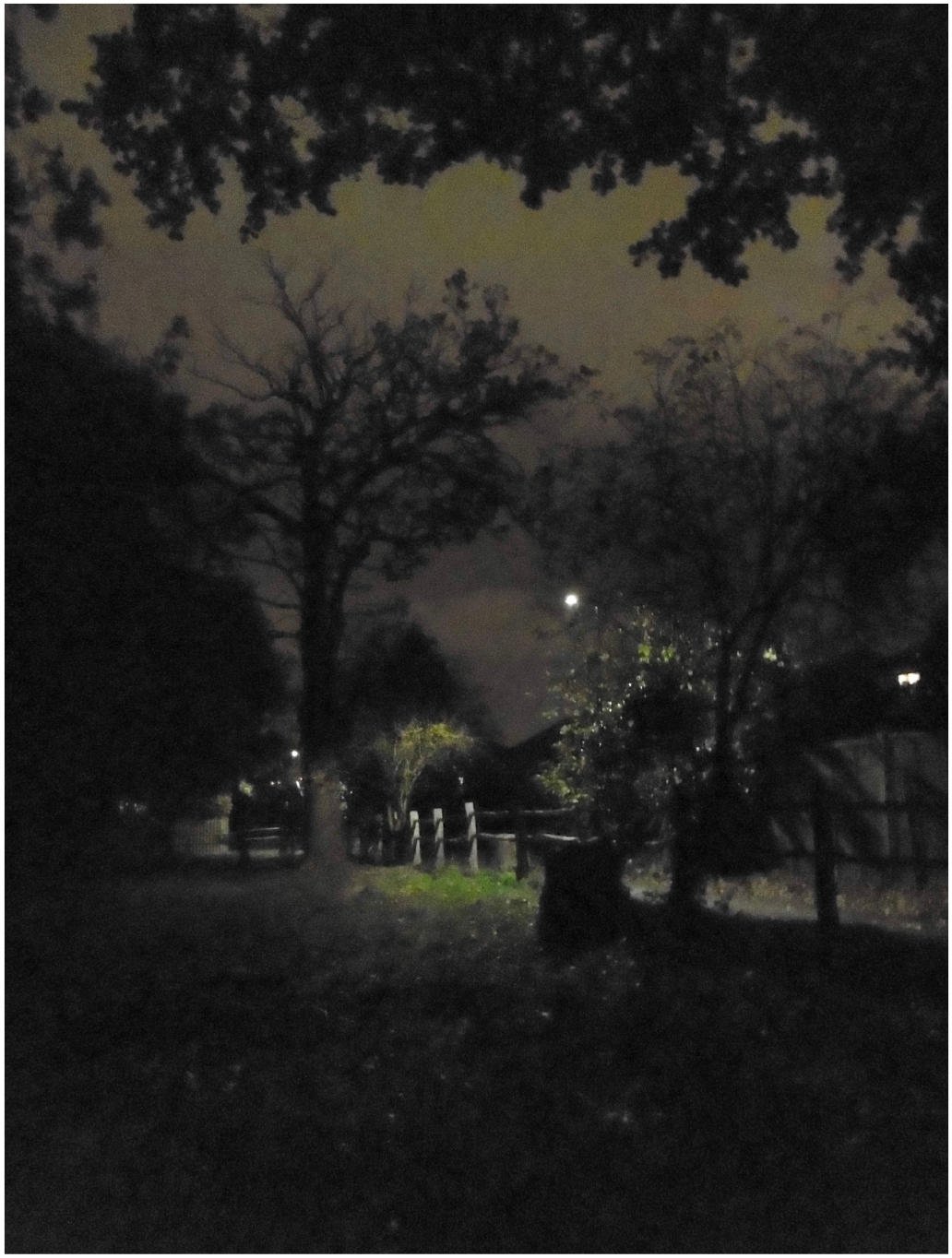
Illusion series

You will see nothing but a vague image of your surroundings that you will not want to see. This is a hallucinatory nightmare in the continuation of the darkness.









Darkness series

The darkness called
to me every night,
and I would dive
into it, hoping to find
something to bring me
out of the darkness,
every night,
every night.



Under series

Today I dared and looked at the world I am in, how small I am, and everything has grandeur. People, structures, will I dare to reach the surface?


SHAKES





In Sky, Lonely series

You open your eyes,
dry, lonely, helpless,
like a tree in winter,
looking at the sky in
a deep grey wave.
I wish I were a bird.



Fallen

Sweet Houses series



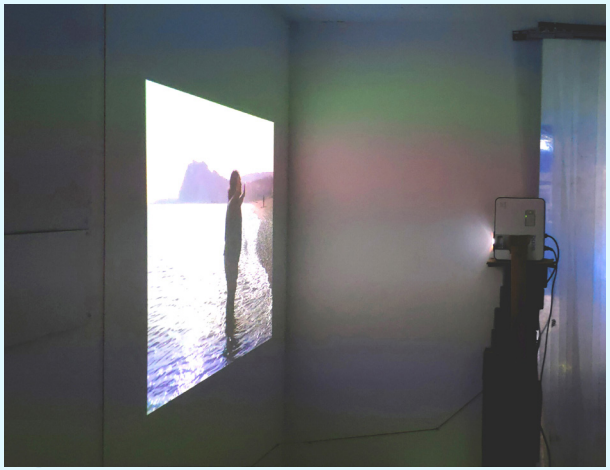




White Cliffs series

Imaginary Borders

Imaginary borders
no entry
no exit
only try
only try ...





Video Art: Arash Niroomand



Conversation Inside the Truck...

Where do you think we are?
I don't know how many hours we have been here.
I think it will be seven hours.
Wow, pregnant woman, how is she with a two-year old child in her arms?
I don't know. The child doesn't make a sound.
Maybe something happened, she gave the child sleeping pills. The poor child is asleep.
What is that a sound?
Who is talking?
I don't know how to find us.
Oh, we are stuck again. It is probably Belgium or the Netherlands.
We have to walk back to France, to the Jungle?
Again?
Wow, the truck is moving; what happened?
Look at your phone. No, no, the smuggler will find out my phone, they will beat me again, say it's my phone, check it to see where we are.Oh.
This is England, don't worry. Yes it's, yes, keep to the truck.
No, No, we will be away from the port in an hour.
It will be bad for us if they find us in the port, they will take us back...



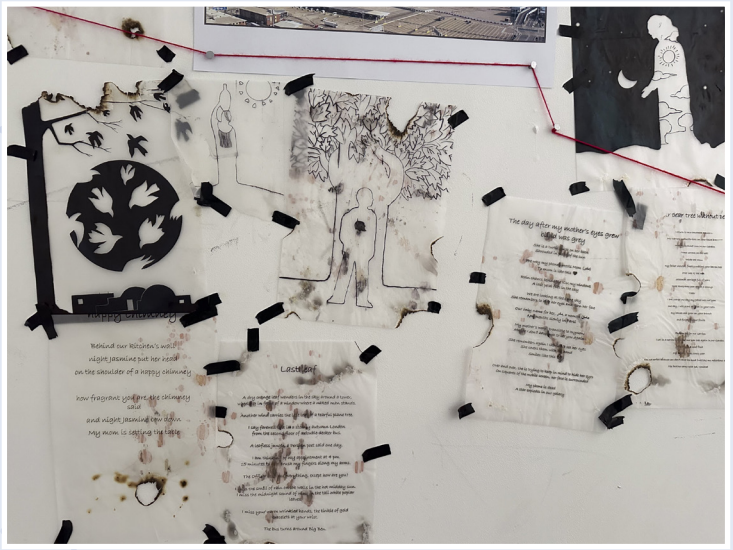


Video Art: Majid Adin & Arash Niroomand



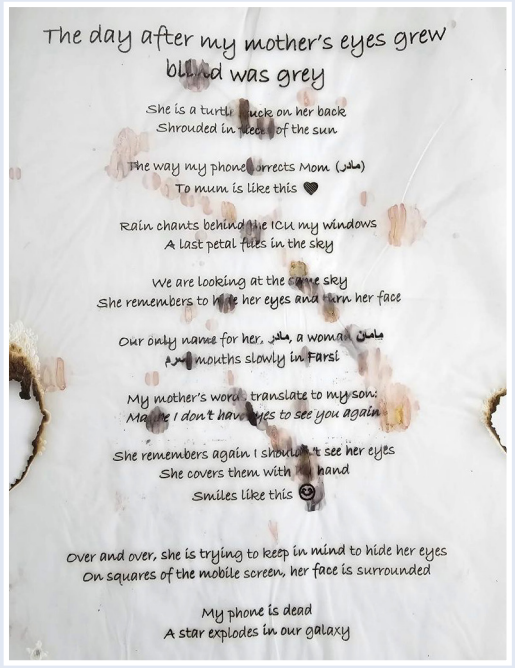


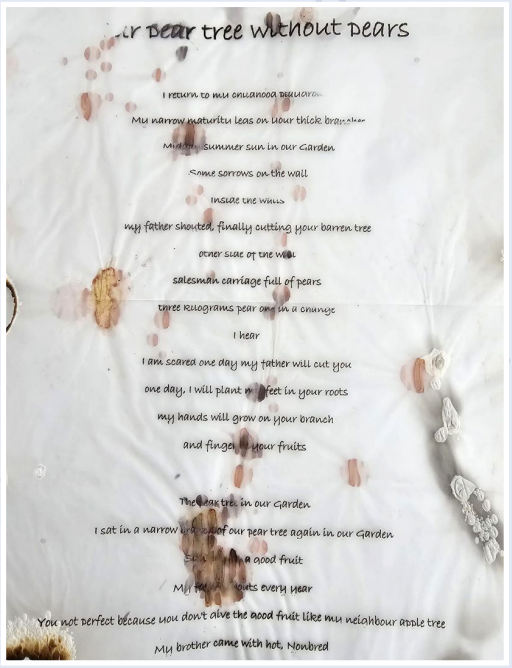


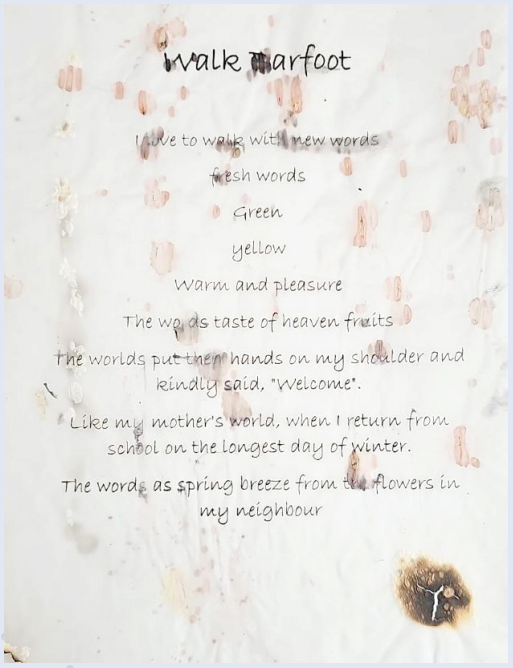


Mom




The day after my mother's eyes grew blind was grey
She is a turtle on her back
Shrouded in rays of the sun
The way my phone corrects Mom (مادر)
To mum is like this
Rain chants behind the ICU my windows
A last petal falls in the sky
We are looking at the same sky
She remembers to close her eyes and turn her face
Our only name for her, مادر, a woman مادران
Mothers mouths slowly in Farsi
My mother's world translate to my son:
Maybe I don't have eyes to see you again
She remembers again I should not see her eyes
She covers them with her hand
Smiles like this
Over and over, she is trying to keep in mind to hide her eyes
On squares of the mobile screen, her face is surrounded
My phone is dead
A star explodes in our galaxy


ır pear tree without pears
I return to my ancanoa peiucara
My narrow maturity leas on your thick branches
Many summer sun in our garden
Some sorrows on the wall
Inside the walls
my father shouted, finally cutting your barren tree
other side of the wall
salesman carriage full of pears
three kilograms pear one in a orange
I hear
I am scared one day my father will cut you
one day, I will plant my feet in your roots
my hands will grow on your branch
and fingers in your fruits
The pear tree in our garden
I sat in a narrow bench of our pear tree again in our garden
a good fruit
My fa outs every year
You not perfect because you don't give the good fruit like my neighbour apple tree
My brother came with hot, Nonbred


walk barfoot
I love to walk with new words
fresh words
Green
yellow
Warm and pleasure
The words taste of heaven fruits
The worlds put their hands on my shoulder and kindly said, "Welcome".
Like my mother's world, when I return from school on the longest day of winter.
The words as spring breeze from the flowers in my neighbour



Majid Adin



We are Home of Each Other

Night.
Tents.
Cold and fire,
amidst the sprawling grey.
Mojahed, laughing, points to the camera,
And in that shared laughter, we find a fleeting grace.

However, the truth remains,
A bitter echo in the chilling air:
Nobody knows where our home truly is.
Mojahed said to me, 'Can you hear?
The sound of tear gas canisters, whistling,
From the other side of the Calais Jungle Bridge,
Thrown by police,
A cruel symphony,
As children scream, their voices are lost in the wind.
The acrid sting of tear gas fills the air,
Choking our breaths,
A constant reminder of our precarious plight.

We are all strangers, adrift in this strange land,
Each one a story, a life left behind,
A language was lost, and a home was denied.
Yet, here, in this shared despair,
We find solace in each other's eyes,
A fragile bond in this forgotten place.
And though we are without a home, a land to claim,
We are home to each other.
Each one from a country,
Each one speaking a language,
We may not understand,
But in this shared struggle,
We find a common tongue,
A shared humanity.
Dry wood snaps and crackles in the tin brazier,
As fiery embers dance and leap towards the heavens,
Casting a warm glow on our weary faces.
Even in this darkness, we find warmth in each other's embrace,
A fragile hope.

Majid Adin



A Friend

The rain falls, a relentless beat,
Mirroring the rhythm of a broken heart,
Mud clings to his clothes,
A heavy defeat,
As he walks alone, torn and apart.
The wind howls, a mournful refrain,
Carrying echoes of screams and despair.
The sound of Eritrean music, a faint,
Distant melody fills the air.
Muddy streets, a desolate scene,
Tents torn and tattered, a pitiful sight.
But in his eyes, a flicker remains,
A spark of hope, burning ever so bright.

Majid Adin


51
TESFA








LONDON...
Because
CALLING


AKAKHAIL


NO BORDE
NO NATION
NOBODY
ESERVES
TO LIVE
THIS WAY!
DAME
DIBABA
11/9/15


XVALA
MAGA
MAKE
ART
GREAT
AGAIN
DONT TREAD ON MEMES
XVALA
VUITTON
NO BORDE
NO NATION
NOBODY
ESERVES
TO LIVE
THIS WAY!
DAME
DIBABA
11/9/15



Where does this Road Take Me?

Oh, good road, you promise a better day, across the seas.
Show your self in the moon light on your body
Show your self in the moon light, bathed in silver sheen
Show herself from behind of starting stars
Emergence from the darkness, serene.
A road without any fences, not to a dead-end alley.
Shadows lengthen, stretching across the desolate valley.

Passenger pleaded, ‘show me the way.’
But the road, a stoic guardian, remained silent
A stony gaze that held no pity, no grace.
The wind whispers secrets of distant shores.
The moon, a silver coin, peeks through the clouds.
Illuminating the path, a fleeting guide.
But the darkness lingers, heavy and deep.
I lay down and hide from polices behind the bushes at night.
The sound of distant barking, the flash of red lights.
The smell of their tear gases.
A chilling of the dangers of the night.
I crouch low, heart pounding, breath held tight.
The road groaned, gasped and writhed.
Its surface is cracked and torn.
It stretched into an endless horizon,
Labored, and stretched endlessly on a never-ending journey.

Majid Adin






Le site du Fort Vert à Calais et Marck-en-Calaisis
Un espace remarquable façonné par l'Homme
TRAVAUX DE RENATURATION DES TERRAINS DE L'EX-LANDE DE CALAIS




Goodbye
You are now
crossing the border


wal of
Permission to
station
BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE

The Face is the Index of Mind

گر بگویم که مرا حال پریشانی نیست
رنگ رخسار خبر می‌دهد از سر ضمیر [1]

If I say I'm not in distress
My face reveals the secret of my mind

Poet: Saadi Shirazi



What is one memory from your journey that makes you feel good?



What was the most challenging part of your journey?





1. "**Saadi Shirazi**" lyric poems Number 309.
"**Saadi Shirazi**" the nickname "The Master of Speech" (سعدی شیرازی) born (1210; died 1291 or 1292), was a Persian poet and prose writer of the medieval period. He is recognized for the quality of his writings and for the depth of his social and moral thoughts.

Video Art: Majid Adin



Creating Tallash





















I must thank all those who helped organize the exhibition, or rather, if it weren't for them, there would be no exhibition.

Dear **Giorgia**, whose patience, planning, and efforts to find the exhibition location and her follow-up made this project a reality.

Dear **Marie**, who contributed greatly to the exhibition project with her enthusiasm and follow-up, even though she came from afar and was very busy.

Mr **Crispin**, my dear friend, who gave me inspiration, and helped us organize the exhibition with his guidance and experience. It is perhaps fair to say that I owe most of the photos in the exhibition to him, who gave me a camera again during the crisis of refugee life so that I would not forget my identity.

And finally, to my dear friend **Kevin** from The Royal Foundation of St Katharine, who generously helped us throughout the days we were at the centre.

Arash Niroomand



