A PICTORIAL ESSAY ABOUT ART AND MIGRATION
MA FINE ART KONSTFACK

FERNANDO CACERES
‘Painting makes the absent present and the dead living, it aids memory and recognition; it can inspire awe; it rouses piety; and it transforms the value of unfigured material. Its powers, in short, are such that it can only be described as supernatural and divine’.  

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I am concerned with two words which have been used by artists, philosophers and art historians throughout time: Storia and Storie. Those two words are the building blocks for cultural studies, yet both words cannot be exactly translated into the English language. ‘History’ and ‘Story/Stories’ are somewhat poor equivalents. History is commonly defined as ‘the study of past events, particularly in human affairs’.  And story as ‘an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment’.  

Storia and storie seem to belong to two different and distinct spheres, although at times connected: Storia is concerned with chronology, with a perception of time, human experience and the temporal classification of events and thoughts along its line or circle, according to which concept of time unfolding, the narrator adopts and identifies with. Storie belongs to the realm of language, of words, of the rhetorical, narrative and poetical use of words to express thoughts and to explain events.

Storia and Storie are fundamental for my own creations of art since my raison d’être as an artist is the sincere commitment to preserve the complex richness of the oral tradition of

4 Saxer, Antoinette. Email 10 March 2018.
my ancestors and, more generally, to spread Andean culture. As a migrant artist I explore, transform and translate Andean – and other ancient – myths, legends and rituals into contemporary pieces of art.

Academia has formulated History of Art in the Socratian idea that art and artists do nothing but imitate the very imitation of world of forms and belong to the world of illusion and shadows. With that prelude, Art became a validator of History while still belonging to the sphere of Storie.

In his reflexion on the philosophy of history, Giovanni Battista Vico (1668–1744) postulated that to know something fully required understanding of how it came to be. In that sense while looking at a piece of art, a painting for example, understanding the multi-layered components will offer a more complete and complex reading of its existence.

In the ephemeral life of a painting, knowing can be seen as belonging to History, Story, Storie and Storia. Paintings in a museum and in academia are defined as having a ‘History’, a linear chain connecting people, movements, places and dates. Then again, when we talk of a religious or a mythological painting it may be a representation of a Story, but if we talk of the viewer experience of its chronological appreciation it can be associated with Storie. Furthermore, if we take the case of the “Miracle of the cross painting by Bellini, when we describe the sequence of events depicted in the painting, we are talking about Storia. A painting can symbolically recapture past people’s forms of thoughts and re-embody their emotions. As Walter Benjamin concludes; ‘To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was’. It means to take control of a memory’.  

In this essay I will present historical examples of artists who have used pictorial narrations to critically engage with and contextualize my own practice. In a second step I will explore the semantics of my art practice in relation to contemporary art practices and the museum display of historical paintings.

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5  https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/vico/ 20 March 2018
6  Benjamin Walter; On the Concept of History p 3.
LEARNING THROUGH CULTURE - SEEING IT IS BELIEVING IT

‘Good artists copy but great artists steal’.7

The majority of museums’ and galleries’ visitors are allowed, in fact, encouraged to draw from the artworks on display. Museums are not just spaces full of stuff. They are also full of histories-stories about culture, history, people, places and natural wonders. Sometimes these stories are obvious, at other times they are more obscure, but either way, museums offer a fertile ground for the imagination because they are full of the stuff - to put it colloquially - that stories are made off.

Museums offer the opportunity of interacting with the ‘real’ thing. Studying museum collections or works of art involves close observation of artefacts and specimens. This can mean seeing familiar things through fresh eyes. It can involve peering closely or scrutinising unfamiliar objects and using the details discovered to deduce facts and to construct meanings. So many perfect opportunities for creative exploration; museum objects have the power to inspire interest, capture the imagination and unleash curiosity. Drawing and writing about them can encourage visitors to investigate these histories, to think about them and to create stories of their own.

In 2012 a short note in the British newspaper, The Telegraph, drew my attention to one of the tragic tales of George Smith, the self-taught archaeologist and translator who rediscovered the Myth of Gilgamesh. This remarkable history took me to see the original pieces at the Mesopotamia collection in the British Museum in London. I was greatly motivated by the opportunity to work with the ‘real thing’. The power of the objects was really significant, the physical experience of seeing them was motivating and inspiring, then and there I knew it; I would use the objects to provide inspiration for a new art work. Following the steps of George Smith I visited the British Museum for two and half years, discovering one by one all the 12 tables of the Epic of Gilgamesh. This finally led to the illustration of 22 watercolours and the writing en of the book “Gilgamesh and Enkidu beyond death”, which was published in 2015 (English version) and in 2017 in South Korea (translated into Korean).

Being close up to the tablets of Gilgamesh, seeing the materials and techniques involved, it encouraged me to analyse what they were looking at, do an exhaustive research of the literature about it. I studied other artists working on the same subject. Handling the real

7 http://levine.sscnet.ucla.edu/papers/b._l_review.pdf
objects brought up many questions: How old is it? What was it used for? Who used it? What is it made from? Reflecting on these questions made the past come to life and it became real, tangible.

This was also a great opportunity to develop my creative writing skills; it increased my knowledge and meaningful understanding of the history of another culture. So I was able to rewrite the story of Gilgamesh in a more accessible way. This text was published together with the watercolours.

Front cover for Gilgamesh and Enkidu; beyond death.
WILLIAM TURNER AND THE INSPIRATION FOR THE ARCHITECTURAL INSTALLATION “YOU CAN TALK TO ME”. MEMORIES OF A FORCED STERILIZATION (2017)

I presented this piece in the collective exhibition CODE at the Platform Stockholm. The curator Elena Jarl wrote in the catalogue “Fernando dedicates the installation “You can talk to me”. Memories of a forced sterilization (2017), to women who were affected by forced mass sterilization in Peru in the 1990s, allegedly implemented by President Alberto Fujimori. Some of the testimonies have been collected on an online platform known as the Quipu-project and is referring to the ancient Quipu language – a complex system of codes on knotted cords. It was used by the Incas as a recording device and as a medium of communication that embodied far more qualities than other spoken or written languages. Fernando adapts the conventions with the help of the everlasting goddess and the mother of the seas, Yemaya. As a shape-shifter she has sustained throughout history and can now, appearing as scagliola seashells, speak on behalf of the women. Acknowledging these individual stories is of importance as they still lack recognition by the existing Peruvian government.”

The printed catalogue and the digital form belong to the History of the piece, but the Storie of the how the piece became requires art historical research on the painting “The

slave ship”. The need to create a piece in protest against the barbaric events, which I witnessed first hand, became a moral and artistic imperative when I came across a painting from 1840 at the Museum of Fine Art in Boston: ‘The Slave Ship’ by Joseph Mallord William Turner.
“When exhibited at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1872, bewildered art critics dismissed ‘The Slave Ship’ on aesthetic grounds. The critics argued that it was not strictly a landscape painting neither an historic one. The reason why this painting was – and still is - so revolutionary is because Turner used the complexity of a landscape, where political, social, economic and emotional feelings are connected in an intricate mesh. It is well documented that Turner took inspiration for the painting in the book of the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, "The History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade".

Turner was emotionally touched by a passage narrated by the abolitionist Clarkson about the real event during the Zong Massacre that occurred in 1781. The British ship Zong set sail from Africa overloaded with slaves. When the ship sailed off course and water allegedly grew scarce, the crew forced 54 female and child slaves through portholes into the sea, probably because they were less valuable than adult males. In the ensuing holocaust that lasted several days, 142 slaves were drowned in the sea, including 10 who jumped in protest. After the first wave of killings, remaining victims begged the crew to starve them rather than dump them into the ocean, but the crew did not comply because they could not collect any insurance money on slaves who died of natural causes.

Turner was preoccupied with translating his emotional state into an image that appealed imposingly to people’s emotions. Turner’s use of his careful observations of nature allowed him to transform the landscape of a stormy sea into a scene with roaring and tumultuous waves that seem to destroy everything in its path. Since first exhibited at the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1840, the painting has become a political, religious and moralising piece; the original title of the painting was ‘Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming’.

With very strong and agile brushstrokes, Turner conveyed the fierce waves of the coming storm, the ship became minuscule compared to the vigour of the sea, and in a poetical manner the force of nature is taking revenge for the grotesque and inhumane behaviour of the sailors. At the same time, the calm and serene background where the sun sets opens up a spiritual dimension. The painting was brought to Boston by the abolitionist Alice Sturgis Hooper (b. 1841 - d. 1879) and was used to rally for the anti-slavery movement.

This particular landscape also reveals Turner’s preoccupation with the degradation of the human soul as a result of the Industrial Revolution. The painting was exhibited

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accompanied by a poem written by Turner
"Aloft all hands, strike the top-masts and belay;
Yon angry setting sun and fierce-edged clouds
Declare the Typhon’s coming.
Before it sweeps your decks, throw overboard
The dead and dying - ne’er heed their chains
Hope, Hope, fallacious Hope!
Where is thy market now?"

There are many stories encapsulated in the painting that sparked my imagination. In the reports on the event it was said that ten slaves jumped in protest. In my Story, the 10 self-sacrificing slaves did it to implore Yemaya, the Yorùbá Orisha or Goddess of the living Ocean. The ship was in the middle of a sea storm and they knew that when she lost her temper, she could be destructive and violent, as a typhoon. They may have thought that their self-sacrifice will calm her and protect the rest of the slaves or at least comfort them and cleanse them of the sorrow, another attribute of the goddess.

In my piece, Yemaya inhabits the space as part of a ritual. The shells that represent her are displayed in a circle, like in a candomble ceremony. The shells vibrate with the voices of the force-sterilised women, which have been recorded via a telephone conversation. The voices are inside the shells, as if Yemaya herself was telling the deeply sad life-stories. The voices of these women are not in the History; they remain in the rim of Story, as the government does not acknowledge them. Likewise in all the official documents about the tragic Zong Massacre events, the voices of the pleading slaves on the waiting of their demise are not listened or recorded. It was my intention that when the viewers engaged with the shells in my piece, that Story would become a Storie, a real event.

It is believed that Yemaya was able to cure infertility in women, but perhaps this cannot be done this time. But this is one of the many ways that art uses Stories to challenge History with Story.
I hope that like in the case of Turner’s painting used to give voice to the slaves on the rallies in favour of abolitionism, my piece can make an injustice visible that took place not so long ago in my own memory.

The notion of that spoken language and formal writing are the only system that allows humans to convey any and all thought fails to consider the full range of human experience. There are social languages that succeed where ordinary languages do not, because of the human ability to grasp certain relationships visually at a glance but not to
describe them in words with anything like equal precision. One of these languages were the *quipus*; they were not only a way of recording information among the Incas but pieces of art that were able to transform colours and shapes into signifying agents.

The scagliola shells in my work are a metaphor of the myth of Yemaya, an African silvered goddess of the seas, mother of the fish and mother, who voluntarily emigrated on the slave ships towards the New World. Once there, she used her ability to modify herself to survive the strict *destripation* of idolatries (methodological clearance of local believes by European religion). Through the centuries she managed to reinvent herself into different shapes, today she still alive as strong has she was centuries ago. In my piece Yemaya reinvents herself again, speaking through the shells on behalf of the voiceless women.
You can talk to me”. A phone call about a forced sterilization.

The Gallery Sous-Terre in Oss, Holland commissioned the architectural installation SLUM-CHOLET: “MERRY POVERTY” for the 2017 summer exhibition. It is collaboration between Fernando Caceres and Philipp Dorstewitz and the third part of a series of architectural installations, which were presented in London, Stockholm and Holland.

Early in 2017 I had the chance to take a closer look at Vermeer's painting “The little street” in my role as a conservator. When searching for ideas for the proposal of the piece to be presented to the curators, Vermeer's painting appeared several times in the discussion, it spoke to us on several levels. In the words of G. Vico ‘understanding of how this painting become came to be’, was important to be able to understand the social-cultural, political, religious environment in which the painting was created, but also to make a comparison with the time-context in which we were creating our piece. In the same way as “The little street” became as a social commentator of its time, and an important observer of the ideological, political, economical conditions of the period, we sought to emulate the same with Slum–Cholet.
In the manner of “Little Street”, The “Slum-Cholet: Merry poverty” installation addresses the sense of separation between “inside” and “outside” both as categories of architectural space and in the dimension of social distance while also commenting on the inside-outside divide as a category of aesthetic and the social space. Seen from the outside “Slum-cholet” was an improvised shelter after the model of a Peruvian shack. From the inside it was designed as a refined space for aesthetic contemplation.

The exterior does the allusion of the Dutch Modernist “Stijl”, while the interior made reference to the ideal of perfect harmony and simplicity of the post-reformation style. The interior features coloured corals and two panda’s on gilded pebbles. This tacky reference to “wealth on the inside” ironically comments the investment of millions of Euros for building Panda housing in the Netherlands. The installation communicates with the adjacent wrapped human corpse in a simple wood coffin by Katinka Waelbers, which represents 10877 failed attempts by refugees to cross the Mediterranean Sea in the past three years that ended in demise.

I maintained that the artistic research of “The little street” is not merely a discussion on Art History but I asserted it part of the art project itself. How this piece of academic writing can claim to be part of an artwork?

The installation located at the entrance of the Sous-Terre gallery, sustained a steady stream of visitors. Some just poked their head in and moved on. Others stayed for a while examined inside and outside and engaged in discussions with the two authors. Many of the local and global connections became apparent or more precisely defined only through debates with visitors. Discussions held with visitors and passers-by were often academic in character and the reference to Vermeer’s “Little Street” became evident. Many discussed economic, political or architectural ideas or contributed personal experiences of life in developing countries, squats, or in the informality of undocumented immigration. The conversation did not end there, several newspapers, including Peruvian publishers, portrayed the initiative and conversations between Fernando Caceres and Philipp Dorstewitz continued in view of further research. The present contribution is but a continuation of a conversation on History, Story, Storia, and Storie, which began with the first conceptual ideas leading up to the 2017 installation.

In the late 1650s, the Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer painted a picture entitled “The Little Street”. Measuring just 54 x 44 cm, it was a quiet but momentous and revolutionary act. The small painting has created ripples that can still be felt today. The painting showed nothing more outwardly impressive than an ordinary street in Vermeer’s hometown of
Delft. Someone was doing a little sewing; some kids were playing on the stoop, a woman was busy in the yard.

The real reason why the painting was so revolutionary was because until then, the art productions relied on church and royal patronage for employment. Hence the cultural creation highlighted the merits and value of aristocratic, military and religious lives and was used mainly to corroborate history.

After the Orange Revolt (1568–1648) the Calvinist churches in the Dutch Republic no longer commissioned art and the House of Orange were modest patrons. Furthermore, most of the Dutch aristocrats had been Catholic and so moved south after the Reformation, meaning the traditional patronage system all but disappeared from the northern market.

Those unique conditions led to the creation of the ‘open art market’ as we know it today. After an initial stage where artists mostly produced non-commissioned works, which could be sold directly to a client at their studio, through a dealer or an art fair, or at the yearly Guild of St. Lucas (the patron saint of painters) exhibitions. The art consumer became more capricious, artists and styles came in and out of fashion quickly, and artists would adjust their styles to suit the market. The most successful artists used not only their technical skills but also implemented shrewd market positioning as well a careful consideration to the subject matter. It is in this context that “The Little Street” was created.

Vemeer’s painting of an everyday unassuming scene is appealing to a Calvinist culture that teaches one to reject graven images but also to be sceptical of visual images more generally. Vermeer’s painting relayed in the common notion of the virtues of domestic life, these simple scenes, which reflect the importance of the family in 17th century Calvinist society that reveres the virtues of the domestic life. In domestic scenes the intention was almost always exemplary; these were representations of virtuous behaviour, which remind us that homes were not just physical places but also the centre of society's moral instruction. The protagonists of most of these scenes are women of all ages who, by being located in the home, occupy the place which society considered appropriate for them, and behaved according to the models set out for each age and social situation. Women engaged in domestic tasks such as sewing and widows and old women who display the virtues of humility and piety, or like in “Slum-Cholet” the two Panda bears just playing.
GENTILE BELLINI THE GESTALT FOR THE SERIES MIGRATION.

In the art academy there is no category such as “document painting” but hanging in museums and galleries there are innumerable paintings that were indeed used as evidence - as valuable as written texts or witness accounts. That was the case of paintings NM 50 and NM 51 painted by Michelle Marieschi in the National Museum. The paintings were presented in court as evidence in a case of treason; it was not the subject matter neither the style, provenance or the painting itself; it was the Storie on the painting that yielded the guilty verdict. In my professional conservation life I have encountered many of them but one that defines the way I produce art, is the series of Gentile Bellini. The artist mastered the used of pictorial narrations to a level that was able to influence the current event of History of his time.

The nine canvases were commissioned to decorate the great hall of The Confraternity of the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista. The propaganda paintings were part of a visual campaign to persuade their members or citizens to devote themselves by praying to the relic of the True Cross.

The painting “The miracle of the cross” of documentary fidelity illustrated the crucial moment of the miracle happening.
It was a sunny afternoon, on the 3rd of May 1370, or it could have been any year until 1382. The record books of those years have disappeared. Those are the books where the confraternity of San Giovanni di Evangelista methodically records the miracles of the relic of the True Holy Cross. On that day the newly arrived fragment of the cross was taken on its yearly procession between the Scola and the church of St Lorenzo. As the procession advanced over the bridge in front of the church of St Lorenzo, the bridge became so overcrowded that the cross-bearer lost his balance and dropped the precious relic into the canal. That could have been the end of the ‘original’ fragment of the Holy Cross donated to the brotherhood in 1369 by Philip de Mezières, Chancellor of the Kingdom of Cyprus and Jerusalem, but something astonishing happened: the relic hovered over the murky waters of the canal. Given the urgency of the moment, several people jumped into the waters and tried to reach it, but in vain, since each time they approached it eluded their grasp. Finally, Andrea Vendramin, the guardian grande of San Giovanni di Evangelista leaped into the waters and by a divine intervention the relic came to his hands, and he was able to save it.

The evolution of narrative painting in Venice can be traced to the 12 Century mosaic of
San Marco\textsuperscript{10}. Painters of the period were preoccupied with the concept of \textit{storia}, as a coherent narrative sequence, but not until the circle of Bellini did a painting turn into historical evidence. The structural realism of the setting depicted with topographical accuracy combined with the portraying of social reality with a profusion of details proved, for the man of the period, the authenticity of the two hundred years old event.

For Venetians of that time an authoritative visual image functioned as proof that something actually happened and it was thus equivalent to an authoritative verbal text. Setting apart the image and imagery of the painting and analysing the details it could be argued that the painting is an essay on social, class relations, politics, economy, religion, cultural history and more.

The main feature of the painting is Vendramin, the guardian \textit{grande} of \textit{San Giovanni di Evangelista} -- depicted swimming with swan-like dignity, effortlessly holding aloft the relic. Vendramin was a wealthy oil merchant, soap industrialist and real state owner, but he was not a patrician, yet. It was not long after the Vendramin’s miracle was painted that he broke the political glass ceiling of the Venetian society. In 1381 he and his descendants were admitted into the Grand Council and became members of the ruling patrician elite of the city republic. As Kiril Petkov put it, “the rendition of the miracle at St Lorenzo duly conveyed the sense of individual social mobility enveloping Vendramin’s figure and career”\textsuperscript{11}. A miniature portrait of the Doge Andrea Vendramin (grandson) in the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam, painted by Gentile Bellini, shows the resemblance between the Doge and Andrea Vendramin, the grandfather who saved the cross from drowning. This bare the question; it was a coincidence or a request that Bellini painted the portrait of the grandson instead of the grandfather. The miracle of St Lorenzo was the foundation myth for the Vendramin family and to have the portrait of the grandson ensures the social political and economic position in Venetian society.

Bellini’s painting is an articulation of space, time and society. He creates a static dynamic act, were the characters are frozen in action. The \textit{gondolieri} take off their hats and turn their eyes towards heaven, well aware of the hopelessness of their action to save the relic. A house lady, instructs her servant to jump into the water. The confraternities of brothers are still, somehow frozen between praying and amazement; the ones who have jumped in the water are immobilised in a physical effort to maintain themselves afloat, their clothes in disarray, in sharp contrast with Vendramin’s effortlessness.

\textsuperscript{10} Fortini Brown, Patricia.
\textsuperscript{11} Kiril Petkov
Paintings in this period were also powerful emblems for politics and war. To the untrained eye there is no element of war in the painting, but it is there. By the time the painting was completed, the Turkish–Venetian War of 1499–1503 was still fresh in the Venetian collective memory. Recognisable in the first row on the left of the painting is Caterine Cornaro, married to James II of Cyprus in 1468. She became the ruler when her husband and later their infant son James III of Cyprus passed away. In order for Venice to secure the commercial rights and other privileges in Cyprus, Caterine was forced to abdicate and sell the administration of her country to the Republic of Venice. By the time ‘the Miracle of St Lorenzo’ was painted she was already living in arranged exile in the last crusader state of Asolo. For the political class, having the Venitian-born queen of Cyprus portrayed amongst the higher echelons of the Venitian social hierarchy, gave to the Doge the divine approval to keep military control over the island of Cyprus.

Bellini’s masterly use of pictorial narrative language depicted the character of ‘The dissolute brother’, who is painted in a blue dress watching the miracle from his window. He will be the focus of the next painting in the series, “The Miracle in the Campo of San Lio”. But he is not aware of it yet. His identity has not been acknowledged but it is known that he was a member of the confraternity at the Church of San Lio. He refused to participate in any of the processions or to go to anybody else’s funeral, including those of confraternity brothers; and he secretly lived as a sinner life, often visiting brothels and taverns, dying without repentance. Bellini places him alone amid the brothers of the Scuole Grandi, dressed in white cloaks, which is sign of a flagellant religious order, and they live a pious and decent life.
Detail: Andrea Vendramin retrieving the relic of the cross

Doge Andrea Vendramin (grandson) in the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam (by Gentile Bellini)
Portrait of Caterine Cornaro by Gentile Bellini, at the Museum of Fine Arts Budapest
Details of the painting.
THE MIGRATION SERIES - AN EXERCISE IN PICTORIAL NARRATIVE

At dusk, at the beginning of the autumn, invisible in the cloud-covered sky, the red-winds arrive to the United Kingdom on their yearly migration from Scandinavia. As they have been doing for centuries, the birds arrive, making a soft seep, seep call to keep the small flocks together during flight. One calls and the others respond, one at the time. From a distance it can sound like a conversation. For the superstitious medieval mind, it represented witches flying overhead, looking for victims to take. In those days, all the work of the byres should be finished and the cattle fed before sundown. Three crosses were chalked on every door, and little birch-trees fastened over the house door, because the witches must count every leaf on the tree before they can cross the threshold.¹²

There was something touching I read in the Royal Society of Protection of Birds website about the red-wings that prompted me to start painting the series, it was the comparable struggle of a journey within the human migration on the Mediterranean Sea and the red-wings: "Redwings migrate by night in loose flocks. In autumn, red-wings gather along the Scandinavian coast at dusk before launching off on their single 800 km (500 mile) flight across the North Sea to the UK. In rough weather, many may crash into the waves and drown."¹³

I started painting the series “Migrations” when I first moved to Bristol, on the west coast of England. Similar to the journey that the red-wings made, it was just a stop in my own migration journey. The first painting of “Migrations” was “The Flight of the Red-wings’ Migration I. It was exhibited at the 159 the Autumn Exhibition at the West Royal Academy in 2011. It was also the fastest sold painting in the show, 5 minutes after opening to collectors’ viewing.
In medieval times, people used church spikes and towers to navigate the landscape as they were the most recognisable landmarks. Once, I heard a WWII Spitfire pilot say that they tried at all cost never to bomb church towers, because they were the tallest buildings in the landscape. It helped them to find their way in and out of the country after a mission. Perhaps the red-wings can also see the spiked towers. I looked through the window of my studio and I could see the spiked tower of St Christ church. I painted it. Like in the Bellini-painting, this small and architectural realistic detail created a connection with the viewer, it was the start of the conversation.

I usually listen to the radio when I paint. There are always talk shows. Then I put the radio on BBC4. The invasion of Afghanistan had started; The radio host was holding a calling program; the caller in the program was worried about the mass migration of Afghans to the UK. We have enough - he said - we are a small island we cannot host everyone here, migration has to stop! He hung up the phone in fury.

In the Middle Ages, when people were afraid of the unknown and the strangers, the red-wings became witches, now migrants become a threat similar to witches. I was thinking of the many red-wings crashing into the waves and drowning during their long migration journey. Hence I painted the red-wings as fantasy entities half humans and half birds, they are the beginning of the line for the pictorial narrative. The red-wings and the Afghanistan migration in this case are ‘provable’ events which we can see as belonging to History. The way I experience it and in the prose of my painting it remains in the range of story but when I narrate it to the viewers, it becomes Storie.
Stockholm Hover (Migrations II) Natural pigments in wooden board. Maritje Kardaum Collection, Holland.
I arrived in Sweden whilst winter signalled its advent; that special day the sky appeared in this special blue. The landscape looked still and silent and my companion said that Stockholm is made up hundreds of islands... thousands, in fact. That day we went to the Stadshus, the red building in the painting, and I expressed my wish to become a citizen of this new land. In the same pictorial narrative style, the architecture plays the role of contextualisation, it draws the viewer into looking at recognisable places but they are my familiar places, part of my everyday storia.

Once I went to a lecture by an ornithologist, and he said that some migrant red-wings have to brave the winter in Scandinavia, because they may have a damaged wing or are too weak for the long flight. They usually die in the cold, but the ones who manage to survive don't leave again, they develop techniques to survive the next winters.

My art is a contemplation of my own personal history and from there I generalise that art could aspire to the inclusion of the practitioners in their new social environment on account of the new intellectual demands that are imposed upon migrant artists. The new market place and cultural specificities of the host country (such as Konstfack), force migrant artists to reject their own traditions and aesthetic practices. In the process of integrating themselves in the cultural fabric of the hosting land the artists are obliged to produce objects of art in the taste of the host country. In this respect it can be argued that the arts function as a battlefield in the conflict of integration and assimilation.
The Solitude of Migration. (Migration III) Natural pigments on wooden board. National Museum Ras Al Khaiman EUA.
When you arrive in a new city, and you don’t know the names of the streets, buildings become important, and the city becomes familiar through its landscape. The war in Syria has started, and thousands of refugees have arrived, they are a priority and rightly so. I spoke with the Spanish bartender, I am an architect she said, but I cannot find anything
in my area, meanwhile I am working as bartender, it has been like that for the last four years. We all have met a taxi driver with a master’s degree. The majority of migrants are ‘trapped’ in a suboptimal job market, we (including myself as a migrant) are waiting for the magical ‘stepping-stones’ that gradually will match our knowledge with an occupational position. Thinking about this, an ancient story came to my mind.

The European myth that arose around ‘El Dorado’ (The golden), as a lost city of gold waiting for discovery by an adventurous conqueror, encapsulates the Europeans’ endless thirst for gold and their unerring drive to exploit these new lands for their monetary value. In some ironic way the myth of El Dorado still unfolds, as westerners are looking to the south for natural wealth and mystical culture and the southerners are migrating to Europe in the search of their own ‘El Dorado’ dream that should take them out of poverty.

After frantically searching and applying for jobs, I got my first position as a conservator in Sweden: the task was to restore the medieval wall paintings at Rö Kyrka. As a conservator to learn from imagery, iconography, materials and techniques is a way to learn about the history of a land and its people. Depicted on that particular ceiling there is a churchyard with some skeletons in a frantic dance. They are happy, so happy to be dead. The title in Swedish is "De tacksamma döda" (Happy dead together). I guess it is not bad to be dead with all your friends around, having parties for all eternity. Ernest Hemingway inspired by John Donne’s poem started his book ‘For Whom the Bell Tolls’ with the verse:

No man is an island entire of itself
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main;

While I was painting “The Solitude of Migration”, I was thinking of an occurrence among migrants: invisibility, which is a way how sparse immigrant population, unmarked and marked migrants of ethnic minorities negotiate the issues of legality and exclusion. Invisibility is a product of categorizing people, it shows how social relations between social classes render an entire category of people invisible, people who suffer a form of ‘displacement in place’; they also distort our analysis of the experience as migrants themselves. In Saskia Sassen’s words this is the idea of the “flattened immigrant” as a way in which people become reduced to one category and function.

One well known case, which I experience here in Sweden and have previously experienced in the UK as well is the narrative of how the building industry workers, mainly migrants from East European countries, are defined by the socio-cultural functionality and
massification they are subject to. This occurs when society refers to “the Polish worker” as every worker in the building industry that speaks some eastern European language. The “flattening of the building worker” is co-produced and sustained by a lack of official attention and soft migrant pan-ethnic identifications. Also significant here is the fraught relationship between these migrants and the system of ethno-cultural recognition which operates in their host society.

PROTRUSIONS - ANNOTATING THE PAST

While meditating about migration and the science of conservation, I come across with the concept of protrusion. The Latin source of protrusion is protrudere, which means, “to push out.” In the semantic sense protrusion is the disruption of the status quo. In medicine, most protrusions are evidence of some disorder or illness, like a bulging protrusion in your belly. Most other protrusions, though, are perfectly normal: your nose is a protrusion in the middle of your face.

In the art conservation language, protrusions are a type of damage on the paint layer. These are blisters and crater-like holes, filled with metallic soap aggregates or a chemical reaction called saponification. There are many reasons why pigments and binders degrade in colour layers of paintings. Some of them are chemically unstable by their nature; others interact with each other in mixtures. Visually the slow development of protrusions will change the material existence and visual appearance of an image irremediably and forever.

This multidisciplinary word ‘protrusion’ can be also used to refer to a process in migration. Through this concept we can assert that migration is a slow irreversible process that will change the overall appearance of the social landscape. Could this term be applied to migration or ideas of representation? When politicians refer to the change of the overall picture of society by migration, could it be said that they are talking about protrusions?

Because art is a reflection of cultural heritage and traditions, art pieces can describe and define nations, individual and collective memory. However, if contemporary artwork is displayed according to conformist ideas of what we already think is valuable - according to preconceived notions of what is important or exotic about other cultures - then the true dialogue of art is lost. If artists and their art have to develop in the same way as protrusions, in isolated bubbles, it will take many bubbles to eventually become a visible phenomenon in the social landscape.
It could be argued that new social, economical and cultural specificities generate an increasing control over the creativity of artists. For example, the supremacy of the ‘white box’ in Konstfack. Despite this reality migrant artists show a remarkable sense of resistance and resilience, exemplified by the exhibitions of the separatist group ‘Brown Island’. In fact, migrant artists perceive the arts as a powerful tool to defend and redefine the new cultural borders and to engage in social critic. The art pieces created in this context are means of preserving memory and cultural meaning.

**A NEWSPAPER NOTE THE INSPIRATION FOR 17th CENTURY PORTRAIT OF A DEVOTEES**

Walter Benjamin in his famous reflexion “On the Concept of History” wrote: ‘to articulate what is past does not mean to recognize “how it really was’. It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger’. In this context it makes sense to define nostalgia. Nostalgia is a noun that describes a sentimental longing or wishful affection for the past.

In the practice of landscape painting idealization is a form of nostalgia that generates a dramatic emotion and connects the idealized image with the viewer in the form of a created memory.

Recent political events around the globe, starting in the United States and continuing in Europe have shown how nostalgia has come to play an important part in our lives. As Lucy Collins writing for the Observer Online put it ‘We are living in a present that seems to be obsessed with the past.’

“Even politicians have taken note of this trend — the very nature of the slogan “Make America Great Again” implies that there was a time, within memory, when America was outshining other nations; it was the pining for a reoccurrence of these “golden years” that contributed to the election of Donald Trump. Donald Trump’s campaign slogan idealized the past in a dangerous way that focused on conjuring unrealistic and occasionally blatantly false images of a shining past, free of fault. The notion that America was somehow “great” in some unspecified time in the past sets an unwelcome precedent that we have not moved in a positive direction over the years, and would do well to harken back to the “good ole days” with less tolerance, lacking civil rights and few opportunities

14 Benjamin Walter; on the concept of History pp 3
I was thinking about this article, when I found this painting at an auction house, a 17th century portrait of a man. Not much is known about the painting, the painter or the sitter. But there is something cunning and shadowy in the depiction of the sitter. Simulating Bellini’s ‘Miracle of the Cross” where the crafty use of portraiture validated veracity in history, I used a real portrait to which I added an inscription in the style of the painting which reads: “make America great again” painted on the headgear. It is a way to play with history and nostalgia and create a narrative story in a painting that is already part of history.

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END NOTE

As an artist I walk a very fine line between the praxis of art making and the art practice. My art production is the reflexion of my itinerant background; indeed the fuel of my imagination is the landscapes of my personal history; which is composed by the encounters of everyday or stories of everyday.

As a migrant artist I have adopted the stance of the middle gaze. I am standing not here, neither there, I stand as onlooker and actor. I criticise and react to the immediacy of the events.

As an art producer I hold the ground of the art of making, on account of my understanding of historic practices and techniques. In my work, I combine the mastery of historical artist techniques with contemporary psychological renderings of both ancient and contemporary mythologies. My work frequently embodies specific socio-political messages.

As artist my space is somewhere between the imaginary and the real, the concrete. I have deliberately chosen not to work with and in a single style. On the contrary, I encourage myself to explore, to learn and to use other historical artist techniques to create my contemporary works of art.

I wish my art pieces to look archaic, old and attached to a historic period, while relying on the intellectualization and reaction of today’s events. I would like to capture the viewer through the material quality and details of the art object, to introduce her or him to the complexity of the material process, the ways of production that underlie the final representation. I hope my work contributes to the dialogue between history, story, fantasy and memory.

My art needs History, story, storia and storie, my narrative could have been completely different if I did not encounter and touch the magnificent pieces of human creation, although the pneuma of my art is human experience.