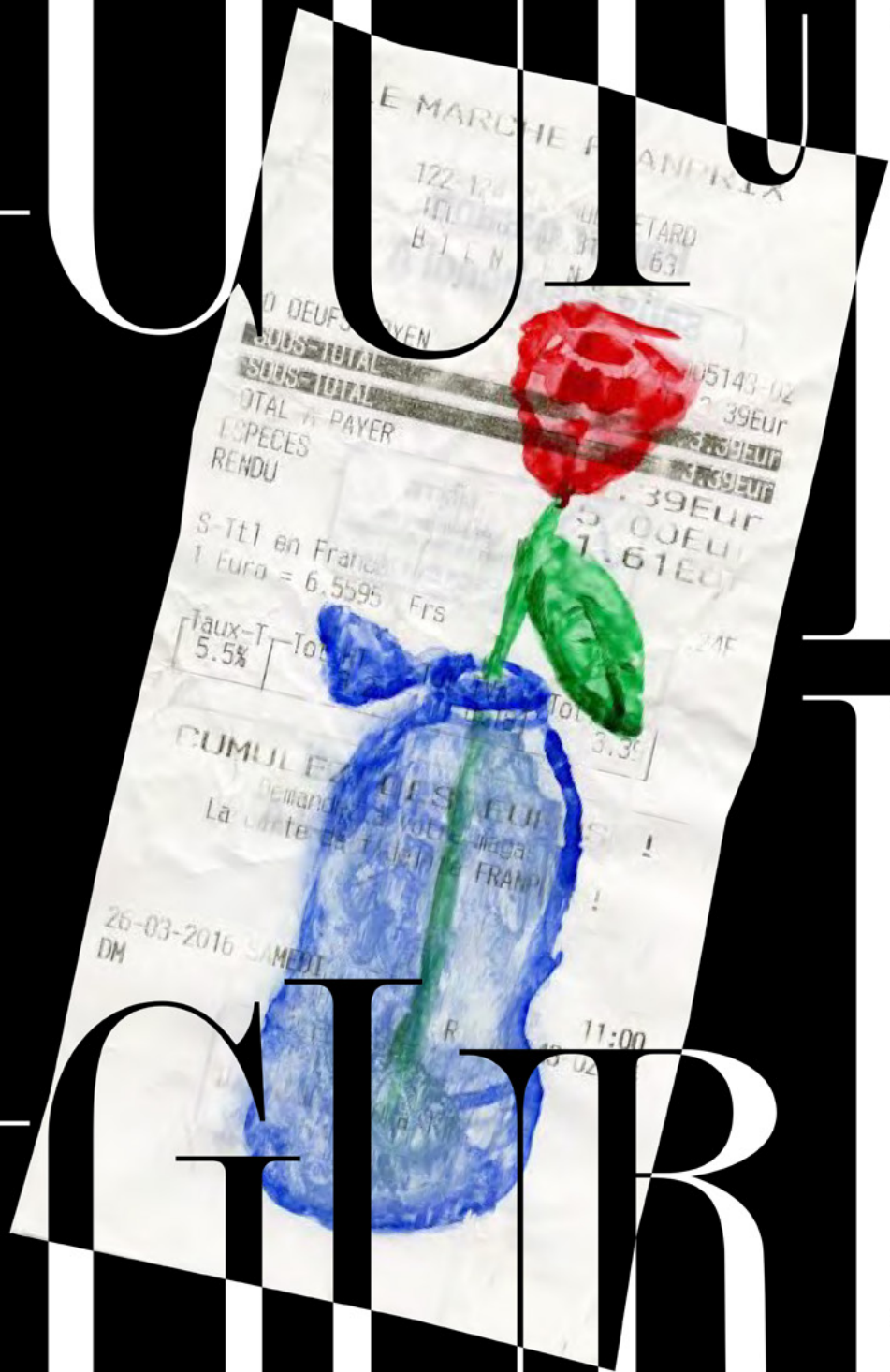


FIGURE





The Gospel According To Judas, Performance, London, United Kingdom, 2020.

MARCO GALVAN *in conversation with*
ORFEO TAGIURI

MG

OT

What's your background and how did you approach art? Initially, I was preparing to study medicine in the UK. Then I moved to the US and that gave me two more years to determine what I was going to do. I took a range of different classes and at the end of that period, I was tending towards the creative writing path. For my BA I graduated in English and now I hold an MFA from Slade School of Fine Arts.

When I was a kid, my older sister was really good at drawing. She was definitely the visual artist in the family. My dad's an architect, so there were always drawings and art around me, but I don't remember making art when I was younger. I did a lot of performance, as in theatre, and when I was thirteen, I went to an acting school for one year. I eventually quit but as a



Studio documentation, London, United Kingdom, 2019.



The Disappointment of Waking To Realize It Was Only A Dream,
Oil bar and graphite on canvas, 160 × 220 cm, 2020.

child, that was probably the closest I got to any consistent sort of art form.

I also moved a lot: from zero to five, I was in the States with one year in Zurich, which I have no memory of. Afterwards, we moved to Yorkshire, to London, back to Cambridge (MA) and then back to London. I went to ten different schools before moving to California for university.

MG

Did you adapt well or were you more reluctant?

OT

I think I adapted pretty well. That is an interesting question. It makes me think and reflect on what that kind of adaptation was. Imagine you arrive at a school, you are five, you make all your new friends, and then a year later you have to leave. And you do that several times. The adaptation is an ability to not become too attached, which is a loss of another thing, another type of way of relating to people.

I can just move now and arrive at a new place. But then again, having been in London this time around for three years in a more lucid state of mind, I feel more aware of the effort to forge relationships, in a way that I haven't done so much before, especially in this city.

MG

Takes a lot of effort to cultivate relationships, plant the seed, make it grow...

OT

I feel like you stole my own symbolism! It's the way I consider a relationship, whether it's a love relationship or friendship.

MG

In your practice, there are recurring elements such as the hammer, the nail, the star. You also work a lot with the image of the Home/House...

OT

Yes, it is as if I have replaced the plant metaphor with the house metaphor. In my work, the home often has to do with relationships. I was drawing houses and only after having done loads of them, I started wondering why I was drawn to the home as an image. Then, given where I was mentally



The Relief of Waking To Realize It Was Only A Dream,
Oil bar and graphite on canvas, 160 × 220 cm, 2020.



Walking Home, Performance, London, United Kingdom, 2018.

at the time, I placed my own feelings in that object as a symbol. I was considering the idea of building the home together as a shared space in which both people exist; someone could leave the house and someone else could still be occupying the mental space that the home embodies. What's exciting for me about working with such a definite symbol is that rather than me fixing them with one definition—and saying for example *Houses* always correspond to relationships—is that because of their simplicity as I change they can take on completely different meanings for me. For instance, in a project called *Walking Home*, I carried a painting of a house around London. On the one hand, it relates to the fact that I have moved a lot, so my sense of home is this portable concept. But an additional layer was that the project was photographed two separate times, the first time by my ex-girlfriend, the second time by my current girlfriend. Neither time did I consciously consider that dynamic, but now when I see the photos I can see my personality, and my sense of a home, reflected back to me by someone very close to me. It's a symbol that people can understand. I'm not delivering a fixed message but a subject heading for a conversation that is about to begin.

MG

And the burning house? How did it all evolve into that state?

OT

When I was at Slade School of Arts, I made so much stuff in my studio that I had to move down into the stairwell. I did this big painting of a house in the centre of the stairs. When I finished it, I wasn't entirely satisfied with the home and I let it sit there for a week. At a certain point, I started painting flames on it as people were passing by and it took on a performative aspect. In a sense, the result is quite tragic. If you picture a burning





The Brightness of Colors After It Rains, Etched wood and stainer,
122 × 244 cm, 2020.

home it's a disaster, but there's also a sense of crematory liberation. The possibility of re-building contained within the burning home is also fascinating.

MG

Talking about symbolism, the elements that I was citing have become distinctive of your poetics...

OT

There are some that come immediately to mind like the hammer, the dog, the tree, the house, the star and so on and so forth. Each one of these elements has infinite variations. Inflections. Cartoonist Saul Steinberg, who does really beautiful and simple drawings, said in an interview that he worked with a very limited visual alphabet or vocabulary, combining all its simple elements to express more elaborate concepts. I really relate to this, but the difference for me would be that I would often produce something and later start to wonder what it means, instead of the other way round.

MG

Do all of these symbols come from your personal experience?

OT

Usually, I just pick up a pad and start drawing. For example, I could start with an angel and if I like the purely aesthetic result of it, I'm inclined to draw more of that figure. It functions as a letter in my alphabet through which I can spell new words.

For me, the flower and the tree would be operating in the same world, like the star and moon. There is so much room for the interplay between these elements and it is really curious to see what new letter emerges over time, however it emerges.

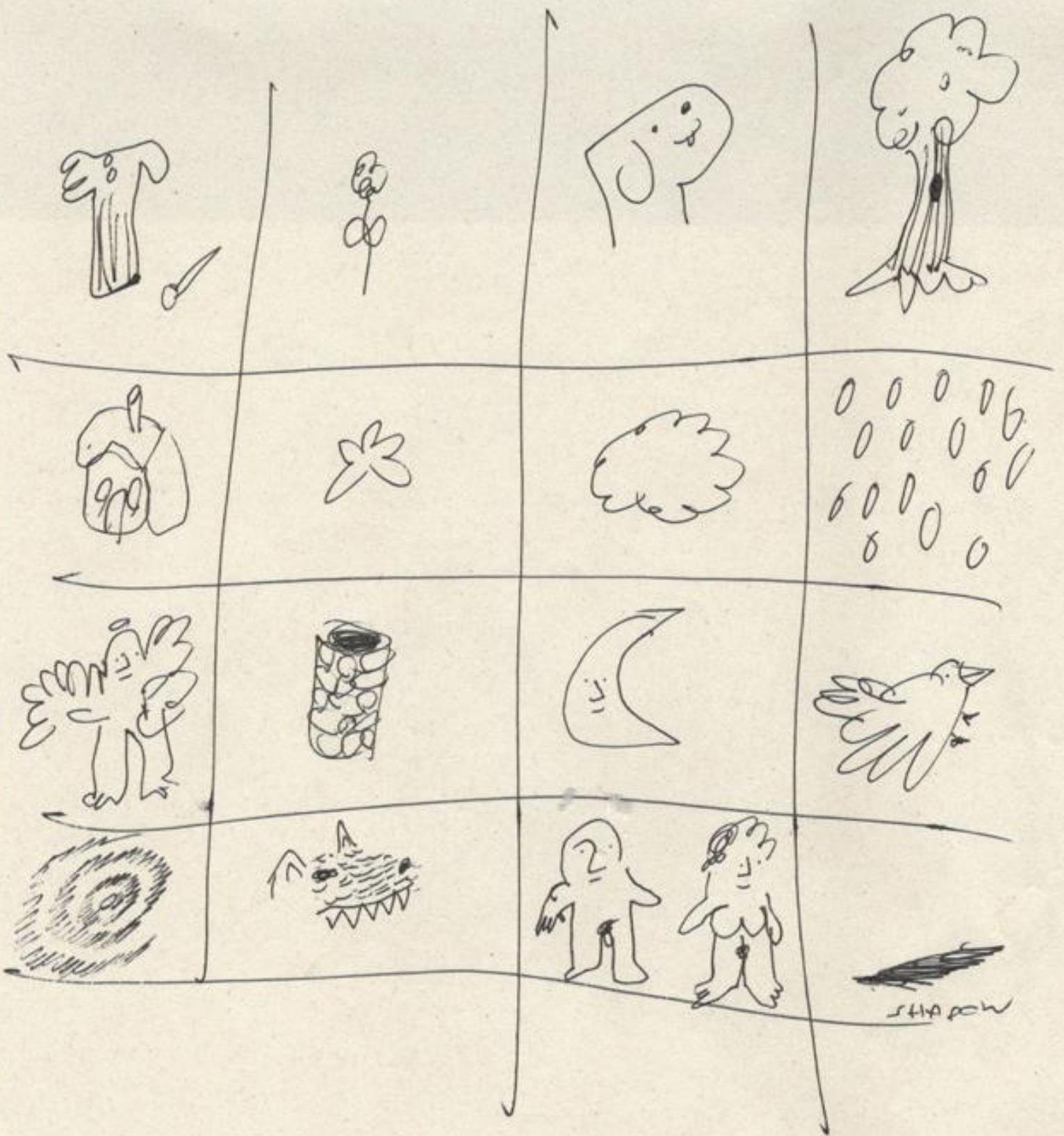
MG

You work a lot around the figure of the angel, especially the fallen angel. Is there a mythological influence in your work and how did you become so interested in exploring and representing this character?

OT

In college, I used to write stories, and when I was





Alphabet of symbols,

Ink on paper, 17 × 25 cm, 2020.



List of Lists, Studio documentation, Colored pencil on paper, London, United Kingdom, 2018.



Still An Angel, Oil bar and graphite on canvas, 110 × 240 cm,
London, United Kingdom, 2020.

doing visual art, I often started with stories that I was really excited about, picking very evocative moments, and depicting those scenes. For example, the Bible—and I have to say that my knowledge of the Bible and religion is very peripheral—has this universal and inescapable moral intrigue that makes it such rich material. The Bible is a good starting point as the questions it asks are universal: “What is a good person?”, “What is a betrayal?”, “What is a saint?” These epic questions have entered into my world view, and my frame of being, without me choosing them.

From a general perspective, an angel might represent a sort of supreme goodness and perfection. But on the other side, there is also the figure of the fallen angel, and I definitely felt I had moments in my life where I had fallen from “grace”. For example, when I was younger and bullied someone, misbehaved in a relationship or had been really cruel to someone. From the angel’s perspective, then I was no longer close to that “saintly” status and on some level, I was operating with a sense of guilt. I was drawn to the image of the fallen angel because of how inevitable it is in life to be involved in sinful moments. I have done two paintings of the angel falling. One is falling with frightful sadness and the other one is more light-hearted during its fall. It has accepted this condition.

MG

When looking at your work, it feels like entering your intimate dimension to which anyone could relate to. Your first solo show “A Song I Wrote For My Four-Year-Old Nephew” at Sans Titre Gallery in Paris showcased various works, including a corner with a basin, a chair and a series of drawings and notes on the wall, recreating a very intimate and homely feeling. Could you talk about the show?

OT

My show was in a space that used to be a kids’



The Leaver and The Left (detail), Etched wooden surface mounted on steel frame,
73 × 120 × 60 cm, 2020.



“The Distance A Seed Travels From Its Mother Plant”, Exhibition view,
London, United Kingdom, 2020.



Angel Daisy Chain (detail), Etched wooden surface mounted on steel frame,
73 × 120 × 60 cm, 2020.

clothing store, called Le Mouton à Cinq Pattes. When you entered the space, you passed through the storage room where works directly on clothing were hanging before accessing the primary exhibition space. I worked with curator Marie Madec to closely recreate the shelf in my bedroom, with a lot of the same artefacts. I was interested in the layers of personal experience that some objects become imbued with. An object becomes more evocative simply because you have experienced things around it, thus placing my bedroom wall in the exhibition space for me was already really suggestive. The larger works hanging were much more formal compositions and half of them were made for the show.

MG

How did you come up with the title for the show?

OT

Initially, I wanted to call it “Odysseus’s Lullaby”, which is the name of a song that I wrote for my four-year-old nephew; reading it from a French-language perspective, Marie and her collaborator, Lucie Sotty, were able to approach the language more abstractly and they were both excited by the phrase: “A Song I Wrote For My Four-Year-Old Nephew”. I liked the idea that the works reflected the type of world I would want my nephew to be raised, exposed and educated into.

Parallel to the show, I performed my music at the Palais de Tokyo, in the Ancienne Cinematheque where Godard used to show his films. The performance was called *A Mirror For The Stars*, and the house that I had been carrying around in the *Walking Home* project was sitting behind me on the stage.

MG

You also investigate and depict fight scenes sometimes, is there a particular reason for that?

OT

When confrontation happens it means that someone has touched upon something that another is



“A Song I Wrote For My Four-Year-Old Nephew”, Exhibition view,
Galerie Sans-Titre, Paris, France, 2018.



“A Song I Wrote For My Four-Year-Old Nephew”, Exhibition view,
Galerie Sans-Titre, Paris, France, 2018.



“A Song I Wrote For My Four-Year-Old Nephew”, Exhibition view,
Galerie Sans-Titre, Paris, France, 2018.

strongly clinging to with his/her identity. I think it is worth me investigating what it is about the other person's behaviour that produced in me such a reaction.

There is definitely a value within confrontation: it pours us into an awareness of discomfort which we tend to avoid.

MG

Can you talk about your receipt drawings? How did you get the idea to work on that type of format and to sell them at the price indicated on the receipt?

OT

I started doing them while I was at Slade, but I really started drawing on receipts and using them as a medium during my final year at college. I had this pen that would transfer the coloured ink through the receipt onto the other side where it would come out in a different shade.

In the show I did with Marie Madec, I included the receipt drawings; some of them were £2.50 and others, the same size, would be £200. I guess it is another confrontation of ideas.

MG

Part of your practice involves collecting lost and found objects that you then associate together. Is it a form of giving new life to them or a form of re-appropriation? Is there any meaning that you're trying to bloom out by recontextualising these objects?

OT

All of the items that I find have a human touch. On the floor, you can find anything, but I tend to pick up things that emanate a sense of personality. Once they are recontextualised in my practice, it is interesting to think about the community-building aspect that these objects can be connected to: I see the act of picking them up as an act of the celebration of whoever dropped them. Even if it is something as simple as a shopping list, it sparks in me a curiosity and gives me the opportunity to engage with people's lives. There is a great Allan Kaprow line that says: "now non-art is more art than Art art." Imagine



To Slow Down Time By Consciously Waiting, Snail and daisy chain crawling on the exterior wall of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, United Kingdom, 2019.



*The Walk Home From The Tube Measured In Discarded Cigarette Butts,
14th May 2018.*

you walk down a street seeing people doing things, carrying a mattress, for example. If you consider that as a piece of performance art, it becomes much more exciting than any actual performance piece.

For me, this collection of other people's scraps is more beautiful than a mark that I make consciously: the mark I make is already attempting to be something while these scraps are revealing something they're making no effort to reveal.

MG

You have a very eclectic and multifaceted practice as your work experiments with various media (drawing, animation, photography, sculpture, carving, painting, music, poetry). How important is it for you to be able to shift between all these disciplines?

OT

It is always really impressive for me when people can work within one fixed medium. There are so many different modes of thinking, moments when I am feeling more visual, moments when I am feeling more linguistic and I think I would not be able to express all of them through just one paintbrush. I reckon it also corresponds to a sense of having multiple lenses on a single subject. If I draw an angel, it is different from saying the word angel: if I say angel you could be picturing anything, but if I draw an angel then you relate to that specific figure I have drawn. There are multiple lenses that you can pull on to explore different perspectives both for me and for the viewer.

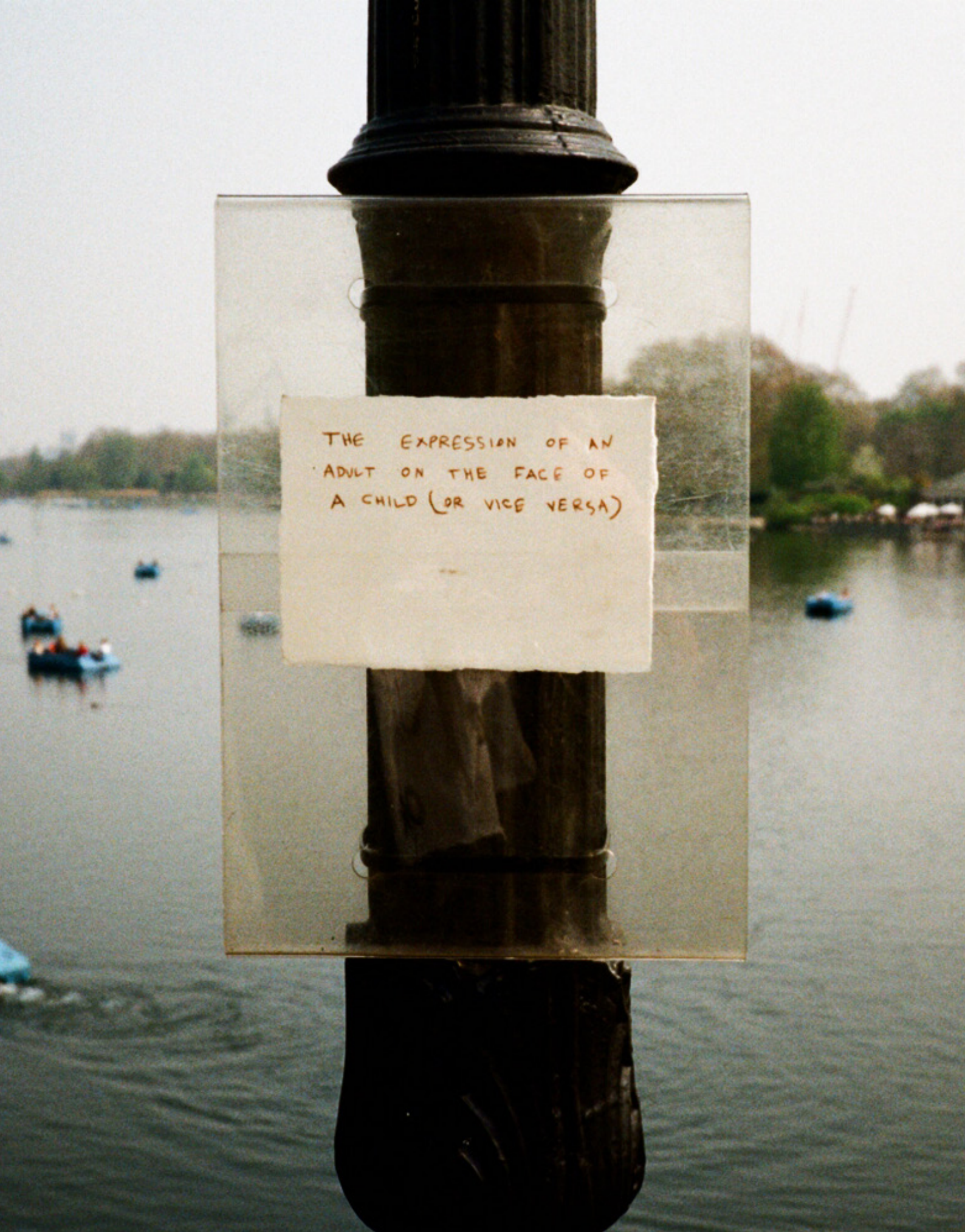
Being able to shift through media is pretty important, especially if you want to be consistently making. It is also a way of letting go. It permits me to not let the mind overcome over the heart, and I am still trying to find that balance.

MG

In your practice, you have been exploring ways of exhibiting art. I'm thinking about the temporary exhibition installed on Sainsbury's CCTV or the Pole Gallery. Can you talk about these projects? Would you



Earth Angel, Installation, Flower petals, Treverton Street,
London, United Kingdom, 2020.



“The Expression Of An Adult On The Face Of A Child (Or Vice Versa)”,
Exhibition view, The Pole Gallery,
London, United Kingdom, 2019.

consider them as art pieces or collateral projects parallel to your practice?

OT

I see art-making as a tool for gaining awareness, finding scraps on the floor wakes me up from a mindless walk, forcing me to be present. I see The Pole Gallery with that type of “alarm clock” function, as it can create excitement for someone passing by. At the same time, it is about community building. I get to meet and collaborate with so many interesting people.

The Sainsbury’s CCTV project is in a way in dialogue with the receipts project and with the subversive act of showing the lost and found scraps. With the lost and found things, I’m placing something seemingly unimportant in a prestigious space; whereas, in the case of the CCTV project, I am placing something that is important to me in the context of Sainsbury’s cameras, which is a relatively low-grade but universally accessible exposure.

I am also collaborating with Sainsbury’s as the documenter of this performance, showing paintings that will probably end up in their permanent CCTV collection, in the same way other artists might have artwork in Tate’s permanent collection.

MG

You’ve recently started experimenting with moving images, how did you start working with animation?

OT

I started doing animation right at the end of my time at Slade because my friend Frank Lebon invited me to produce five seconds of animation for a music video for James Blake’s *Can’t Believe The Way We Flow*.

MG

Then you naturally incorporated animation into your art practice...

OT

Yes, I used to see people at Slade doing incredible animation projects and at the time I had no idea of how it worked. I slowly picked it up and learned on the go. It’s a really fun format. After the project



O Beautiful Was The Werewolf, Colored Pencil on Envelopes,
14.8 × 10.5 cm, 2020.



O Beautiful Was The Werewolf, Colored Pencil on Envelopes,
14.8 × 10.5 cm, 2020.



O Beautiful Was The Werewolf, Colored Pencil on Envelopes,
14.8 × 10.5 cm, 2020.

with Frank, I was invited to make a video for James Blake—they gave me complete freedom and I produced a mostly animated video, which was a great leap as my first music video project.

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