

Text by Yasmine Ben Abdessalem

Title: I, too, wish everything was different (diary entry)

Ahmad titled his work; *I wish everything was different*.

I try to translate it quickly in my head. In French, too, the sentence expresses regret. A sort of finitude.

In Tunisian Arabic, in my translation (could be faulty, as I only invoke the hopefulness that emerges from this language) it would sound like: *net'manna eli kolchey yetghayer*. This sounds different. There is a potential for change, for flux, for movement. The 'everything' that he wishes was different, can be different. In my Arabic translation, things are not immutable.

So, perhaps, there is something of the fixed in the English language¹; it calls to mind fixations, congelations, the frozen-ness of Anglo-Saxon politics. We are still stuck. The broader exhibition is titled *Act like you still know me*. Isn't it what people have demanded from Palestinians these days; act like you still know *it*. Act like you still know a land that no longer is. Or in Ahmad's case, a land that never was (he has not been to Palestine yet).

To paint, Ahmad saves images of the genocide on his phone, prints them out, and hangs them on his wall. Everyday, he wants to confront himself with history. And refuses to stare at white walls (there are a lot of white walls in this country, especially in the -Gracht facing streets²).

Ample strokes of surrealist paint brushes. To be more precise, he uses airbrushes; hence the roundness in the triptych. Veiled women at the bottom (veiled women are always at the bottom anyways). Some have hands and some don't have them; or at least I don't see them. Maybe they are holding hands in the space outside of the painting. Olive branches, flowers, crowds in the background. Is there so much to show that all we can do is fit as many people and flowers and branches in the middle? A son embracing his mother. I don't know what it is about it but I can tell she is the mother of a martyr. All Palestinian mothers, at this point, are martyred mothers.

But all I keep remembering from the painting is the airbrushing and the pink all over. I thought airbrushes were for glamour and photoshoots. But perhaps airbrushing smoothes out the violence. The profusion of pink too, here, replaces the usual red. The red of the bloodshed that I have been witnessing from my bed.

¹I'm aware I'm drawing easy conclusions here; assigning flux to Arabic and fixedness to English is the kind of reductive move I should know better than to make. But the linguistic feeling persists anyway.

²In Amsterdam, the grachten (major canals like the Keizersgracht) are where galleries cluster. The work they show (and the way they show it) often looks sanitized against the white walls.

My narrative is not Ahmad's; it's merely another person's, one that keeps taking gravitas out of the word 'genocide'. Pink and war. Blurs and digitally-facilitated mourning.