

Inge Meijer & Stéphanie Saadé

One Meter Under

10 January - 15 February, 2024

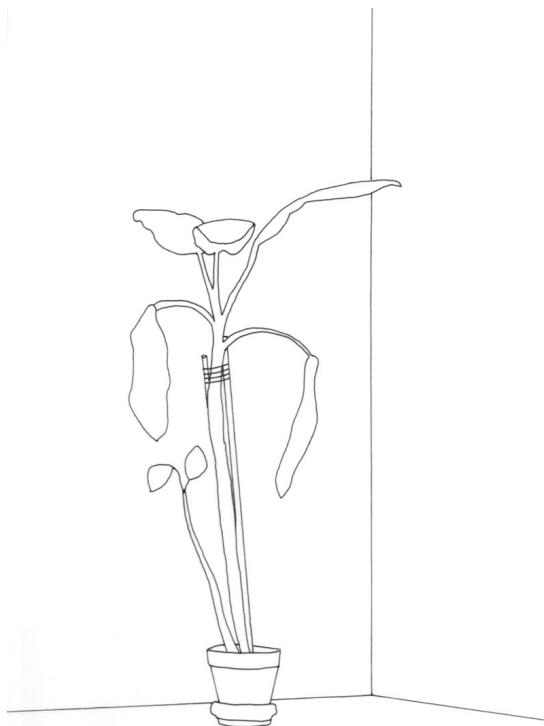


Stéphanie Saadé, *Construction Blocks*, used children wooden blocks, mother of pearl, 2022.

AKINCI is proud to present the duo exhibition *One Meter Under* by Inge Meijer (1986, Netherlands) and Stéphanie Saadé (1983, Lebanon). The artists find common grounds in their work through installation, video, photography and drawing. In a poetic way, the exhibition covers themes of childhood, reflections on home, memory and cultivated nature. The text accompanying the exhibition is written by Stéphanie Saadé.

When Inge Meijer invited me to share a show at AKINCI, she introduced herself notably as the owner of one of my works and the mother of Zevrah. Her introduction immediately brought us to an intimacy that already existed between us, even though we had never met. I mention these two points because they guided the way we built our show, as well as the title we chose for it: *One Meter Under*. I suggested this title to Inge based on the fact that we both have small children. Spending time with my daughter Noa makes me realize that she sees some things more beautifully than I do. I like to believe it's because of that meter—the slowly or quickly shrinking 100 centimeters—that separates us, and I try to imagine *seeing* from that perspective, in an attempt to share her amazement. I can still remember how beautiful I once found certain things when I was her age, or should I say, her height. Remembering how we *looked* at the world then could help us appreciate it as a vivid feeling in the present, rather than as a beautiful but distant memory.

My work *The Day in Order*, which hangs in Inge's home, more specifically in Zevrah's room, consists of a 30 cm ruler that is hand-painted on the back with a cloudy blue sky. In the context of a child's room, it condenses the usual blue wall painted with white clouds into one small object. When I made it in 2014, it evoked the possibility of a daydream during work. I had started exploring the theme of childhood before having a child, drawn to its bittersweetness as it unfolded in parallel with the Lebanese Civil War. In this work, I imagined a classroom, one in which a ruler would be used, but in which a drift would occur: looking out of the window at the sky instead of focusing on the page or the task. The plastic ruler ends up measuring much more than the 30 cm it physically holds: it measures a much greater expanse of sky, that the painting hints at.



Inge Meijer, 'The Sculpture of John B. Flannagan (1942), drawing from The MoMA Plant Collection', 2024, line drawing, acid-free paper, maple frame, museum glass, 35 x 26 cm

In *One Meter Under*, the drift points vertically and downward, one meter below, as a lesson or an invitation to humility. The negative 'under' takes on a positive connotation with the virtual kneeling it implies. It also brings us closer to the ground, yet another common subject between Inge and me. During one of our first exchanges about the show, she mentioned, while addressing the notion of value, "coming from a family who lived for centuries from the ground they grew upon." The ground is where you could build a protective shelter, such as her installation *Blow Softly* (Meijer, 2024) consisting of a hut made of willow branches. When stepping inside, we hear a choir singing for a small group of cows with their calves. Softly humming, the herd meets the choir, *Les Moucherons* led by conductor Antje de Wit. This performance sprouted from a collaboration earlier this year in Buro Stedelijk where the same choir sang for a Mycelium sculpture. The usual hierarchy between humans, animals and plants is shuffled. Humans perform for animals

or fungi, and as spectators we become mere witnesses, 'humans' simply 'being'. The ground is also where plants have been cultivated only to later be placed in alien environments, such as the museum: the starting point for Inge's project *The MoMA Plant Collection* (2024). The documentation of these plants through archival photographs of exhibition displays taken in the Museum of Modern Art in New York shifts the focus from the artworks to these seemingly decorative elements. Inge then reverses this process by turning them back into artworks and subjects through her drawings. In another series of photographs *Falling, Flying, Fragment* (Meijer, 2024), we see an uprooted tree flying above the ground, caught in a ghostly moment between being a tree and becoming wood scraps.

Pyramid (Saadé, 2022) —an inverted stalagmite as its smallest layer is its oldest one, a 'sedimentation' of clothing of all sizes — is placed close to the ground, materializing the process of growth. The superimposed layers of clothing of *Pyramid* echo the counted hours, minutes and seconds of *It is...* (Saadé, 2024). Time is written down in the way that we have learned to measure it, producing a comparative anatomy of time. An anatomy of language also emerges, since the details of the shapes produced also vary according to the language used (Arabic, French or English); even though the alphabet is the same (Latin), the order of the letters generates different forms. To make this anatomy clearer, an even and regular handwriting is developed, reminiscent of the handwriting taught at school, to my child, Inge's

child, and many others who are learning to write. Another lesson learned at school is writing out numbers in letters, as is the case in the work *It is...* . This skill, seldom used in daily life, is given a chance through the *temporal calligrams*. A gap separates the time written and the time needed to write the time: a day, an hour or a minute to write a minute, an hour or a day.

In other works, such as *Stage of Life* (Saadé, 2022), the notion of shelter is also present. A flat and soft fabric shelter, constituted by the limits of my current Parisian apartment. The apartment floor plan is cut off and sewn from a bedsheet set from my family house in Lebanon – Paris being an umpteenth landing spot after leaving the country following the Beirut Blast in 2020. In these times of extreme unease, turmoil, violence and destruction, shelter proves to be most essential. Our exhibition has been conceived and is taking place during these devastating times which infuse our hearts, our minds, our collective consciousness and our works.

- Stéphanie Saadé, December 2024

Biographies

Inge Meijer studied Fine Art at ArtEZ University of the Arts in Arnhem. In 2017 she completed her two-year residency at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, where her films and installations were highly acclaimed during the Open Studios. She participated in the ACC-Rijksakademie Dialogue and Exchange program in Gwangju, South Korea (2019) and was awarded a fellowship by the Society of Arts for an residency at the NIAS (Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies). Her work has been exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, UNSEEN, Museum Arnhem, Asia Culture Centre in Gwangju, South Korea, and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne, Australia. Her publication, "The Plant Collection", was selected for The Best Dutch Book Designs 2019. She has had solo exhibitions at Viervaat, NL (2024); Concordia, NL (2022); HHH dimension cultural, CO (2018). Recent group exhibitions have been at Ruigoord, NL (2023); Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, NL (2022); Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, AU (2021); La Marchéalerie, FR (2021); KF Global Center, KR (2021). Next year (2025/2026) she is selected for the ISCP (International Studio & Curatorial Program) residency in New York, USA.

Stéphanie Saadé graduated in Fine Arts from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France and attended a post-graduate program at the China Academy of Arts, Hangzhou, China. She was an artist in residence at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht (2014/2015), and the Cité Internationale des arts, Paris (2015). Saadé is the 2018-19 recipient of the AFK (Amsterdam Fund for the Arts) 3Package Deal program, a one year Interhistoricity scholarship linked to four renown museums and institutions of the city of Amsterdam. In 2023 she was selected for a residency at Centre Pompidou, Paris followed by a presentation in the permanent collection. She has had institutional solo exhibitions in Kunsthaus Pasquart, CH (2022); Museum Van Loon, NL (2019); Parc Saint Léger, FR (2018); Maison Salvan, FR (2018). Recent group exhibitions have been at Centraal Museum Utrecht, NL (2024); Het Noordbrabants Museum, NL (2024); Centre Pompidou, FR (2023); Villa Empain, BE (2023); Marres, NL (2021).