

completely obscures his face in the other. It's a clear statement to viewers that this moment is not for them. These quiet, personal images in the exhibition seem less about revealing the subject's interiority than protecting it.

One of the delights of the exhibition is the subtle repetition of gestures and formal elements across the photographs. The right hand of Johnson's *The Reader* mirrors the position of a hand in *Afro Goddess with Hand Between Legs* (2006), an adjacent photograph by Mickalene Thomas. The subject of the latter image faces the viewer with a direct, penetrating gaze, while the former completely obscures the subject's face. Lush vegetation surrounds *The Reader*, while a single towering houseplant creeps into the right side of *Afro Goddess's* frame. Ramsey's curation cultivates a sense of connection and continuity throughout the exhibition, and takes us from photographs that reclaim Black narratives to expressions of Black joy. Along the way, we move through interior domestic spaces, explorations of family and community, documentary photography, and necessary, direct political engagement.

Voyeuristic spectacles of violence, suffering, inequity, and abjection are (thankfully) left outside the frame. But still, they press in. Vanley Burke's *Boy with Flag, Winford, in Handsworth Park* (1970) features the iconic image of a young Winford Fagan standing confidently with his bicycle. His hand rests on his hip, while the Union Jack is mounted on the handlebar. In a 2015 *Guardian* interview, Fagan reveals how he built

the photographed bike as a child, and identifies Burke as a family friend. Fagan also speaks of the racist white nationalism of '70s England, and his run-ins with skinheads. The Union Jack on the handlebars stands for both this lurking threat and Fagan's claim to belonging. For Fagan, the carefree image of a youth on his bicycle is actually a moment of respite from the threat of violence. In the safe company of an older family friend, and with the means for a quick getaway, he can finally relax and smile.

"As We Rise: Photography from the Black Atlantic" is about that moment of the boy with his bike. The exhibition offers a space of familiarity and rest. A space where we write our own narratives, and where our interior lives as Black people are not under threat. The final section of the exhibition illustrates what's possible in such a space. It's the early days of New York hip-hop and rude boys in the photographs of Jamel Shabazz, the exuberant scenes of Toronto's Black queer parties shot by Tayo Yannick Anton, the teasing and shifting sexuality of Elliott Jerome Brown Jr.'s *Devin in Red Socks* (2016), and the arresting gaze of James Barnor's *Drum Cover Girl Erlin Ibreck, Kilburn, London* (1966).

How do we hold that space?

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**"from—about" — Christian Vistan**  
**Unit 17, Vancouver, 17 December 2022 to 19 February 2023**  
 by Leo Cocar

Christian Vistan's "from—about" is both a (poetic) inquiry into cultural transmission and an ode to painting itself, with neither taking precedence over the other. In the accompanying exhibition text, Kiel Torres writes of paint as a medium fundamentally tied to the presence of water, or lack thereof: "In our correspondence, Christian and I talked about laundry—how cycles of washing and drying accentuate the temporality of wetness. They explained how painting water extends this ephemeral wet time, offering a way to visualize liminality and articulate intangible distances." Across the exhibition, Vistan accentuates this temporal quality of wetness through abstract representation of the aquatic, and formal techniques that call attention to paint's liquid foundation.

In "from—about," ideas about cultural transmission are not communicated through figuration or representation, but through subtle deployments of painterly technique. Vistan's is a material poetics, where signification does not exclusively take place on the level of language, or of the painted figure, but through the painting's structural supports. Wetness is further mobilized by Vistan through an engagement with the painting's surface. The liquid contents of paint are highlighted by thin applications of tempera, watercolour, and ink over gesso that soak and wrinkle the painting's support. In the resulting images, large swaths of colour that appear to be in a permanent state of dampness particularly echo Helen Frankenthaler's *Canal* (1963) and *Basin* (1969), where wetness is deployed as a thematic and material concern. In *Clouds* (2022), muddled grey, beige, black, and eggplant-purple forms are rendered in ink,

tempera, and graphite on unmounted manila paper. A sense of material fluctuation is connoted throughout the work—the manila paper appears to be soaked through with liquid, and gently sways as the gallery's internal airflow moves beneath the image. The titular reference to clouds suggests not only geographic movement, but also water suspended in between liquid and solid forms: this is an in-between state, a gap.

We can also turn to *Volcano* (2022). This painting consists of a cluster of six grey circles over a muddled sky-blue background, divided up into an interlocking series of rough rectangles. Although not taking up the fiery aesthetics of what we could consider typical of a volcano, the volcano's role as a geological creator is present in the image's name and in its formal elements. In Vistan's painting, we witness the stony formation of land-mass before its occupation by terrestrial life, as well as that volcanic distancing between earth and sea.

In *Unfold* (2022), a swath of manila paper is folded into a six-by-eight grid and emblazoned with curvilinear yellow and black forms that cut across a background of beige and off-white squares. Outlined yellow forms appear as if they are waiting to be filled in against a wash of white and off-white tempera that evokes the default colour of a canvas. Throughout the works on display, the presence of painting's support (the canvas, the paper, etc.) is often made visible through an aesthetics of soaking, with wrinkling effects that call attention to the canvas not as a physically untethered neutral ground, but as a material that determines the image laid over it.



Christian Vistan, *Unfold*, 2022, tempera on manila paper, 91 cm x 100 cm  
PHOTO: NK PHOTO, © CHRISTIAN VISTAN; COURTESY OF UNIT 7, VANCOUVER

The use of manila paper throughout the show also gestures toward Vistan's tongue-in-cheek interest in their familial history of migration from the Philippines. Like many other formal elements present through the show, a patchwork made by Vistan's maternal grandmother contains abstract evocations of water, with aquatic muted colours, and a sense of movement produced from the piece being hung on the gallery door without supports. Other pieces, like *Patch (Paruparo)* (2022) and *Patch (Baby Blue)* (2022), suggest further dialogue between this entryway patchwork and its distillation into painting. We can view the patchwork by Vistan's grandmother as the "from" in the titular "from—about" dyad. Other concerns suggested by the patch, such as cultural translation, the influence of material on form, and the deployment of water on multiple registers, reverberate around the room in

a poetically elusive manner that is impossible to pin down. This makes the notion of wet time an effective metaphoric framework with which to approach the exhibition. Even between dry and solid states, paint is still inherently determined by its liquid origin. It is neither here nor there. In Vistan's paintings, the point of departure will never be the same as the point of arrival. Instead of defining the site of "here" or "there," "from—about" sits with the gap of transits, distance, and the state of flux.

**Leo Cocar** is a cultural worker from "Vancouver," the unceded traditional territory of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish Nations. His writing has appeared in *e-flux*, *C Magazine*, and *Numéro Homme Berlin*, among others. Recently, he has been interested in UFC in dialogue with performance art, histories of imperial violence, and the excess accumulation of the death drive within the national psyche.

**"In The Dark, We Lose Our Edges" — Kambui Olujimi**  
Sharjah Biennial 15, 7 February to 11 June 2023  
by Anna Khimasia

The Flying Saucer, one of Sharjah Biennial's unique exhibition spaces, has a storied history. Resembling a UFO and constructed in the mid-'70s, it was previously a chicken restaurant, a newsstand, a gift shop, and a patisserie. It is an architectural landmark, known for its floating dome, panoramic windows, and V-shaped pillars.

For his ambitious installation "In The Dark, We Lose Our Edges," New York-based artist Kambui Olujimi constructed a 16-sided room under the famous dome. While the diptychs are visible from the exterior of the building, the interior of the newly constructed space remains invisible when looking through the Flying Saucer's panoramic windows. This spatial shift is mirrored by representational slippage in Olujimi's work, which prompts us to rethink the conditions of seeing and knowing.

On the outside walls of Olujimi's constructed room are eight diptychs blending cyanotype with blue, black,

and gold watercolour. In this series, *A Temporary Understanding of...* (2022), the first of each pair depicts a historical figure who confuses expectations and blurs genres; each of these is partnered with an image of an object surrounded by a geometric pattern. In *A Temporary Understanding of Ellen Craft* (2022), Olujimi depicts two people in elaborate suit jackets seated at a table of what we assume to be a train, as we see mountains in the background of a curtain-framed window. Olujimi's painting style blends and blurs scenes together so that there is no clearly defined space into which we peer. The work deliberately offers an anti-Western art-historical understanding of represented space: there is no vanishing point, there is no ideal spectator, and there is no clearly defined perspective. The figures in the foreground disappear into the window and the landscape blends into their bodies. Depicted at the bottom of the frame are teeth