

Memory is Frail (and Truth Brittle)

Tintin Wulia 2019

Installation of 115 charcoal and graphite drawings on cotton paper

Dimensions variable

IMAGES OF THE WORK









MEMORY IS FRAIL
(AND TRUTH BRITTLE)

It was a quiet Tuesday afternoon and the TV was on. A film showed a small white airplane crashing into the White House. Hollywood. I thought it a legend of dying different realities, and now, who could've come up with such an act of violence?

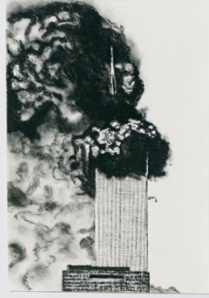
We are so fragile, I thought, and, as though agreeing with me that life is indeed so fragile, my mind replayed a familiar scene so recently, one of my recurrent suicidal dreams, where I was walking along a crowded street when suddenly someone stabbed me in the stomach with an insignificant knife.

Insignificant, but sufficient.
Death is really not that dramatic,
ladies and gentlemen,
boys and girls, plants and animals;
it happens to everyone.



That evening, I saw another thing on TV.
At first I thought it was still that same film.
The camerawork, however, was not as controlled.
That was when I realised it was really a news report.
It was real. Someone had actually crashed an airplane
into something, not the White House but something
similarly significant. I was astounded. Did they
watch the same film? I saw earlier that afternoon?
Were they inspired by that film, or did they inspire
that film? Which came first, the reality, or the film?
For a second, I thought of Orson Welles's radio
adaptation of The War of the Worlds.





From 16,327 kilometres away, I didn't recognise the tower on the screen; it was a mere tower, which for me only became identified with meaning when it was destroyed.

A teacher in Samira Makhsouf's class, Construction and Destruction, later tried to explain that very tower to a bunch of Afghan school children in Iran. Later still I could've been any one of those children.



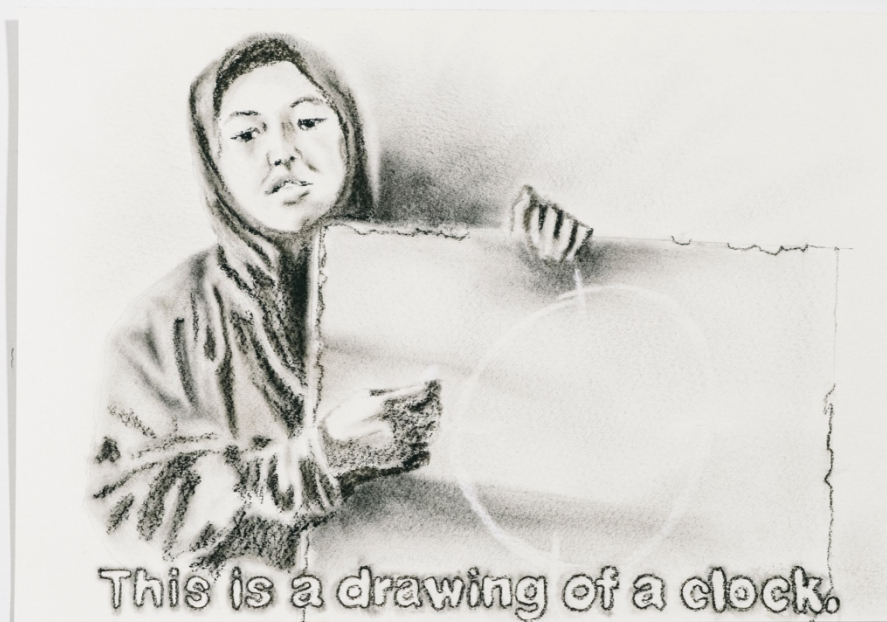


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MY FATHER
THE CONTORTIONIST









Perhaps the
gaze on when
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In it, he was
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Looking at
revealed as
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who lead to
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MY FATHER
THE CONTORTIONIST

That Sunday, when panic-stricken listeners tried to escape from the first Marban attacks on the US, my father was trying to climb a ladder, some fourteen-thousand kilometres (and an international date line) away.
He was only a few months over one year old, an agile young fiddler whose presence I can only imagine, as his body had, unlike mine, has left no traces on photographs. But knowing him, and looking at photographs of myself at his age when the Martians first invaded the US, I deduced that he must've been trying to climb a ladder that day.



My father's
"Just go up
a banana to
that evening
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eight sibling
He went on
asked for a
hunger but
crying seem

UNFAMILIAR WORLDS





UNFAMILIAR
WORLDS

*"What is essential is invisible to the eye,"
the little prince repeats, so that he would be sure
to remember.
"It is the time you have wasted for your rose that
makes your rose so important."
"It is the time I have wasted for my rose —"
said the little prince, so that he would be sure
to remember.
"Men have forgotten this truth," said the fox.
"But you must not forget it. You become responsible,
forever, for what you have tamed."*

*When everyone sleeps, does reality still take place?
This is a hard question to answer, because I ask things
that never occur to me: when everyone — and by
that I mean every single creature in our universe,
dead and alive, including their tiny atoms — sleep.
At the launch of universe v1.1, the biblical gods
must've sneezed out of their fat, so and made
the universe round, and made everything in it go
round and round, and thus created time.
Hence all the different time zones, as well —
not to mention all the different bubbles, or realities —
which makes a very smart design.*

*The smart design was a result of learning.
Once upon a time, during universe v1.0, at one
extraordinary point, everyone went to sleep at
exactly the same time. At that point, time mysteriously
stopped. Although what really happened was never
disclosed, the error 500 was carefully documented
to be avoided in the next version of the universe.
Thus, the problem was solved with the orb-shaped
design that underlies everything — a no-matter
what the outer shapes of our eyes are, our eyeballs
are all orb-shaped — which make way for the different
kinds of realities to co-exist.*





When everyone sleeps, does reality still take place?
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At the launch of universe v1.1, the biblical gods must've sneaked out of their rest-day and made the universe round, and made everything in it go round and round, and thus created time. Hence all the different time zones, as well — not to mention all the different hubs of reality — which makes a very smart design.



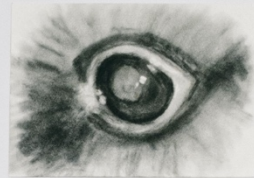
The biblical gods really made sure that at each single moment, someone would be awake to get at least one reality going wild enough to fuel time.



This smart design was a result of learning.
Once upon a time during universe v1.0, at one extraordinary point, everyone went to sleep at exactly the same time. At that point, time mysteriously stopped. Although what really happened was never disclosed, the error 500 was carefully documented to be avoided in the next version of the universe.

Thus, the problem was solved with the orb-shaped design that enables overruling — e.g. no matter what the outer shapes of our eyes are, our eyeballs are all orb-shaped — which made way for the different kinds of realities to co-exist.





When we ourselves then step into
one of these bubbles,
the familiar world is transformed.
Many of its colorful features disappear,
others no longer belong together
but appear in new relationships.



This is a drawing of a clock.



A new world comes into being.

Through the bubble
we see the world of the
burrowing worm, of the butterfly,
or of the field mouse;
the world as it appears to
the animal; themselves,
not as it appears to us.
This is what we call the
phenomenal world or
the self-world of the animal.

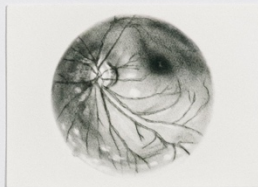
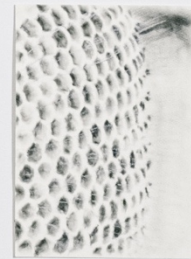
*The best time to set out
on such an adventure
is on a summer day.*

*The place,
a flower-strewn meadow,
humming with insects,
fluttering with butterflies.*

*Here we may glimpse
the world of
the lowly dwellers
of the meadow.*

*To do so, we must first blow,
in fancy,
a soap bubble
around each creature
to represent its own world
filled with the perceptions
which it alone knows.*

*When we ourselves then step into
one of these bubbles,
the familiar meadow is transformed.
Many of its colorful features disappear,
others no longer belong together
but appear in new relationships.*





ALL TREES ARE
GOOD LISTENERS

It might have been fear that prevented me from talking with Ilham about 1965, when he was my senior at the architecture school. Which kind of fear it was, I don't really know. Was it a fear of illicit involvement of some sort, resulting from discussing 1965, or was it more a fear of Ilham's father, whom the government had portrayed to the whole nation and especially to my generation, as a chain-smoking demon, the devil himself?

It was probably a bit of both, working their ways through my own family secret. One day at uni, I remember, someone whispered to my ears: "Ilham is Aidi's son" and that was enough to make me shiver, in silence.

Never did it cross my
lucky not to be devout
calibre. For that matter

As for my grandfather's
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We heard so many st
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From here to here is one minute.

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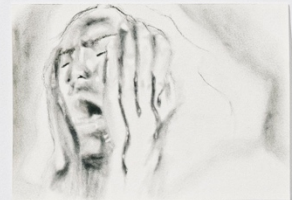
"I have done nothing wrong," he said when the family tried to convince him to leave the nation that used to be their home, burnt to the ground already.

That night, he was taken away.

Never did it cross my mind that my grandfather was lucky not to be elevated as a public enemy of such calibre. For that matter perhaps it was I who was lucky.

As for my grandfather, we never know where he ended up, or whether he was even still alive.

We heard so many stories, both kind and nasty, about the end of his life. I knew, though, that even if he was still alive somewhere, he might have not cared the least about being a public enemy.



My memory of Mom's father, Auit, was as crystal clear as the projection. In that film that we all had to watch every year on the last day of September, Auit was cold blooded, ambitious, and avicious.

He killed the army generals,
(and so everyone — my grandfather and millions of others — must be killed in return)

I can't remember whether he won in the end, though, he must've lost, because wasn't it Suharto who saved the country from the murders of the army generals that Auit orchestrated?

"I have done nothing wrong,"
he said when the family tried to convince him to leave the name
that used to be their home,
burnt to the ground already.
That night, he was taken away.

One of the generals had a sweet daughter,
Ade Irma Suryani, who was only a few years younger
than me in that film. She was shot and killed.

Another daughter, older than me when I saw the film,
found a god of her own blood.
She washed her face — crying — with his blood.
It was scary and sad.

I felt guilty, if my grandfather was a devil,
doesn't that make me evil too?



My memory of Mom's father, Auit, was as crystal clear as the projection. In that film that we all had to watch every year on the last day of September, Auit was cold blooded, ambitious, and avicious.



When asked for a photograph to accompany his story, however, I then slumped. I immediately realized that must have been a tough request. Even if Iliam's family house were not been burnt to the ground, his household was destroyed when his father was assassinated, and when as a little boy he was at gunpoint.

As with so many people in their position, at one point in their lives the only thing they had left was their souls — and even those might have not been entirely theirs.

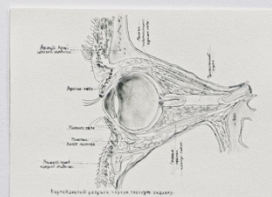
Later, we found that the lovely photograph was actually an artwork.

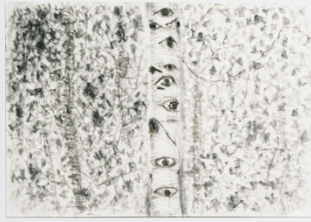
Everyone in that photograph was photoshopped in.



"Just look around online," he said, "There's a lovely photograph of my father showing President Soekarno a camera made in Russia.

They were both smiling in that picture. That's how close they were."





SOLITARY TRUTH AS
AN ACT OF VIOLENCE

If one falls in the middle of a forest
and no one is present to photograph it,
does one really fall?
But then how is it possible for anything to happen
with absolutely no one — and absolutely naming —
around, to bear or share witness?

SOLITARY TRUTH AS
AN ACT OF VIOLENCE

For the citizens of Earth, Tedjabayu, Hersri and many others may as well have died, especially because no one on Earth knew anything about the Martian labour camp. They may as well have gone to heaven, or hell, as in 2065 a distance of 54.6 million kilometres was still not too different from a distance of 401 million kilometres, or 225 million kilometres for that matter (and no one knew how much further or closer heaven or hell was).

Most probably hell, as weren't they the devil themselves?

$1 \neq 1'$



The first photograph of the planet Mars was taken in 1865 by the astronomer Schiaparelli. He called the dark spots on the surface 'canals', which were later found to be natural features. The first photograph of the planet Mars was taken in 1865 by the astronomer Schiaparelli. He called the dark spots on the surface 'canals', which were later found to be natural features.

What if Earth disappeared and left it all behind? What if Earth disappeared and left it all behind? What if Earth disappeared and left it all behind?

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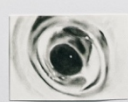


In 1965, the first photograph of the planet Mars was taken by the Mariner 4 spacecraft. It showed a rocky, cratered surface with no signs of life. This photograph did not answer the question: are there any life forms on Mars?

What if the world of your imagination was real? What if the world of your imagination was real? What if the world of your imagination was real?



The first photograph of the planet Mars was taken in 1865 by the astronomer Schiaparelli. He called the dark spots on the surface 'canals', which were later found to be natural features.



For the thirty-three years of the dictatorship, there was only one solid, solitary truth. This tower of solitary truth not only disregarded the manifold and varied realities, but also the many lives that hold those realities, that could have brought other meanings to the tower and therefore threaten its solidity. In order to assert itself as a solitary truth, the dictatorship had to kill as manifold and varied lives as possible.

Death happens to everyone anyway.

The latest, but not least part of the problem, as the biblical gods are currently figuring out, might be inherent to their v 1.1 design.

As everything is round, whichever direction you walk away to, you can't avoid getting back to the point in space where you began.

*The best time to set out
on such an adventure
is on a summer day.*



Day by day, these questions eroded Tedjabayu and Hersi within the endless years of their internment. Realizing how precarious reality was, Tedjabayu kept himself sane by reciting any single thing that he could remember, be it not to lose his memory. Hersi covertly wrote journal after journal of new and newer thoughts, burying them underneath a specimen banana tree, as it was made illegal for them to write or read.

"Hopefully one day, these thoughts could be free again, with or without us."

If one falls in the middle of a forest and no one is around to photograph it, does one really fall?

But then how is it possible for anything to happen with absolutely no one — and absolutely nothing — around, to bear or dare witness?

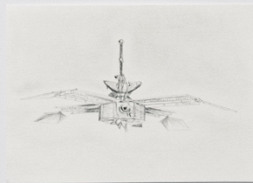
Everyone on earth that 2065 was a 9

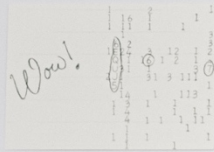
That was the year operation budget in 2079, when the completed, and he returned to Earth, political prisoners,

Instead, the people were mostly killed eagerly and their children in a bid o

For the citizens of Earth, Tedjabayu, Hersi and many others may as well have died, especially because no one on Earth knew anything about the Martian labour camp. They may as well have gone to heaven, or hell, as in 2065 a distance of 24.6 million kilometres was still not too different from a distance of 401 million kilometres, or 225 million kilometres for that matter (and no one knew how much further or closer heaven or hell was).

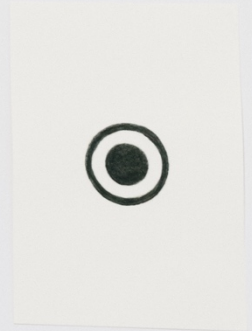
Most probably hell, as weren't they the devil themselves?





Even when their return was the closest thing to a Martian invasion of Earth — about a 1000 mile and bumble bee — people talked about the achievement of progress and moving forward, instead, and of the huge astronomical distance being miraculously overcome.

Perhaps it should be called a stroll into unfamiliar worlds.



In 2012, a documentary film about them hit the headlines. Suddenly, what had happened to them on Mars became real. My friends — knowing I've been working with my family's wedding camera — promptly urged me to watch that film.

So I asked them: "If one was killed in the middle of a forest and no one cares about it, does one continue living?"

These stories have always been part of my reality.

No one talked about them in 2006 either, when the disaster fell.

They did talk about the dictator's fall, though, because everyone had seen it, as if was broadcast all over the solar system.

One story my uncle told was that my grandfather was shot under a tree in a cemetery, "speaking like a pig" does it make a sound?

Was my grandfather inspired by that film, or did my grandfather inspire that film? Does the film document reality, or does reality document the film?

Which came first, reality or the film? If it was part of that reality, how should I watch the film? If it were part of that reality, how would the film observe me?

$1 \neq 1'$



In universe v1.1, there remains a problem not even the biblical gods have ever been able to sort out between themselves: out of so many different kinds of realities, which one is the truth?

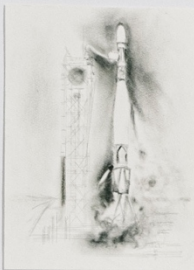
Part of the problem, as they later discovered, is in the question. The question assumes that the truth is amongst these realities, an aspect of them, perhaps, that perhaps shines so brightly, or perhaps sends such a strong narrow-band radio signal back to Earth then disappeared like a wow signal, never to be found again.

The question also assumes that there is only one truth.

And — the reality of our reality is that it is expanded. It includes voguing and live dances, the wars of the worlds and oshering, celebrities and people seeking asylum, Facebook betrayals, soccer matches, other people's affairs, my family's fear, your love, their hatred, it includes all their mess, all their facts, all their fictions, and all their myths and faiths, manichae and varied.

"Men have forgotten this truth," said the fox.

The War of the Worlds supposedly caused nationwide panic in 1938 because it was performed in a timeline, in a timeline, once a point in time is gone, it's gone. Had people listened to the start of the play, where it must've felt like a play, they would've understood that it was just a play. Once that starting point was gone, however, overtime the play became part of reality. Yet, even the start of the play was part of reality.



For the thirty-three years of the dictatorship, there was only one solid, solitary truth. This tower of solitary truth not only disregarded the manifold and varied realities, but also the many lies that held those realities, that could have brought other meanings to the tower and themselves threaten its solidity. In order to assure itself as a solitary truth, the dictatorship had to kill as manifold and varied lives as possible.

Death happens to everyone anyway.

What it did of your brain then benefit
What it is for life or to rememb
As thought, that they ex independent the potency any kind of concept face.

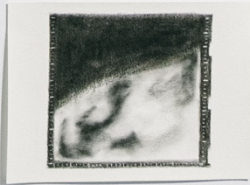
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And — the reality of our reality is that it is expanded. It includes roving and line dances, the wars of the world and elsewhere, call centers and people seeking asylum, facebook betrayals, soccer matches, other people's beliefs, my family's fears, your love, their hatred, it includes all their lies, all their facts, all their fictions, and all their myths and faiths, manifold and varied.

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Death happens to everyone anyway.

What it didn't understand was that if the chemistry of your brain can make you believe that you exist, then genetics are not merely physical.

"What is essential is invisible to the eyes" the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember.

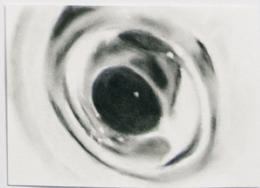
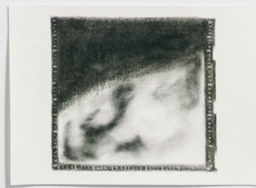
As thoughts are transferred through so many lives that they eventually become bodiless — or rather, independent of bodies — they proceed towards the potential of invincibility. This applies to any kind of thought, however, and sadly doesn't favour us or them.

In universe v1.1, there remains a problem not even the biblical gods have ever been able to sort out between themselves: out of so many different kinds of realities, which one is the truth?

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 ", said the fox.



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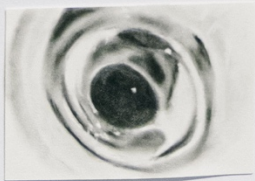
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The labels, but not least part of the problem, as the biblical gods are currently figuring out, might be inherent to their v. 1.1 design.
As everything is round, whichever direction you walk away, you can't avoid getting back to the point in space where you began.

The best time to set out on such an adventure is on a summer day.



You might argue that a point in time can never be recreated, and therefore no two points can be exactly the same (A ≠ A) as time will have elapsed in a trip between the two.
A new world comes into being.
However, memory is frail, and truth brittle.





The labels that we fasten onto the problems, are the labels that are currently ignored and, might be important to those who disagree.

As everything is round, whichever direction you walk away to, you can't avoid getting back to the point in space where you began.

The best time to get out
is on a summer day.

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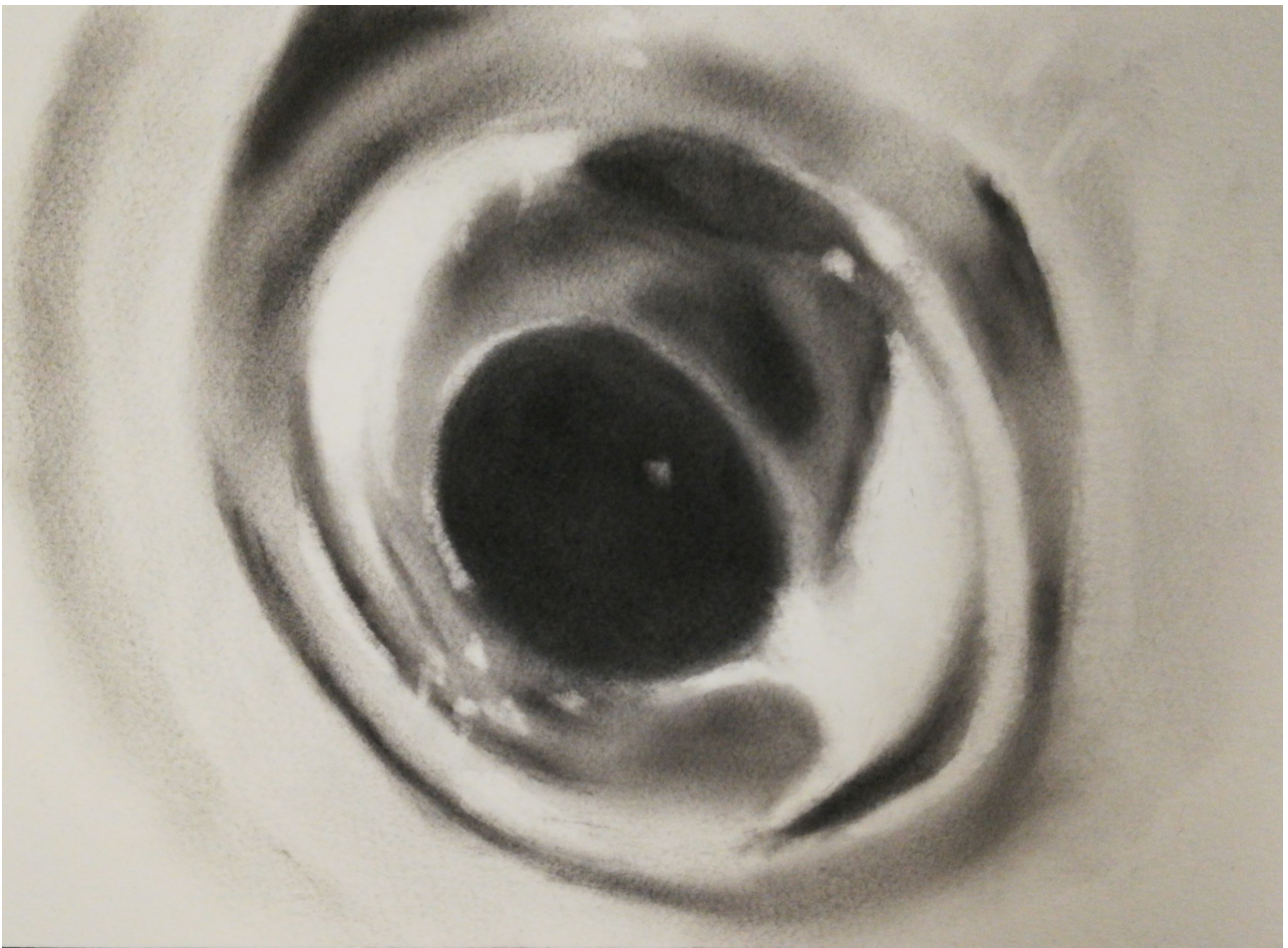
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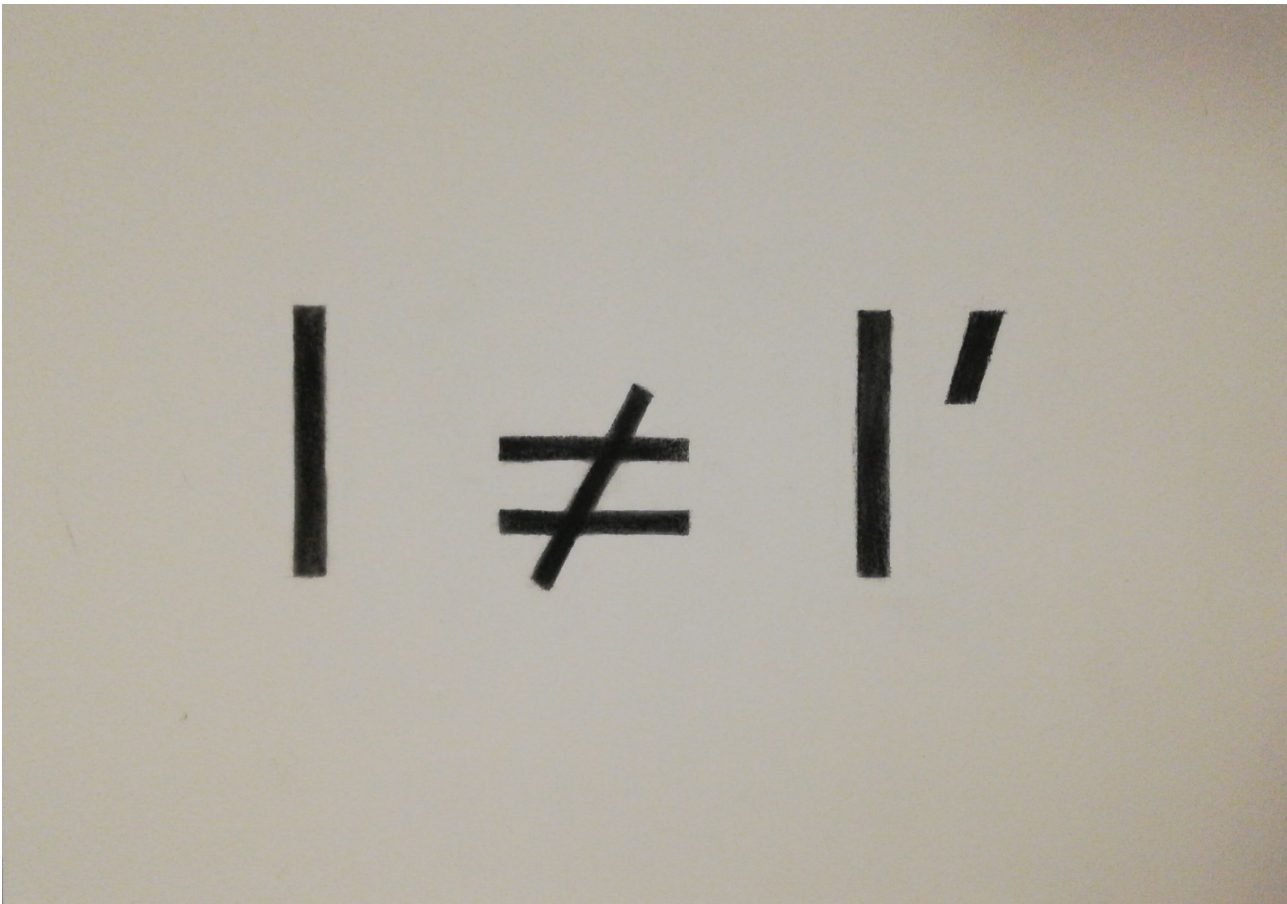
MEMORY IS FRAIL (AND TRUTH BRITTLE)

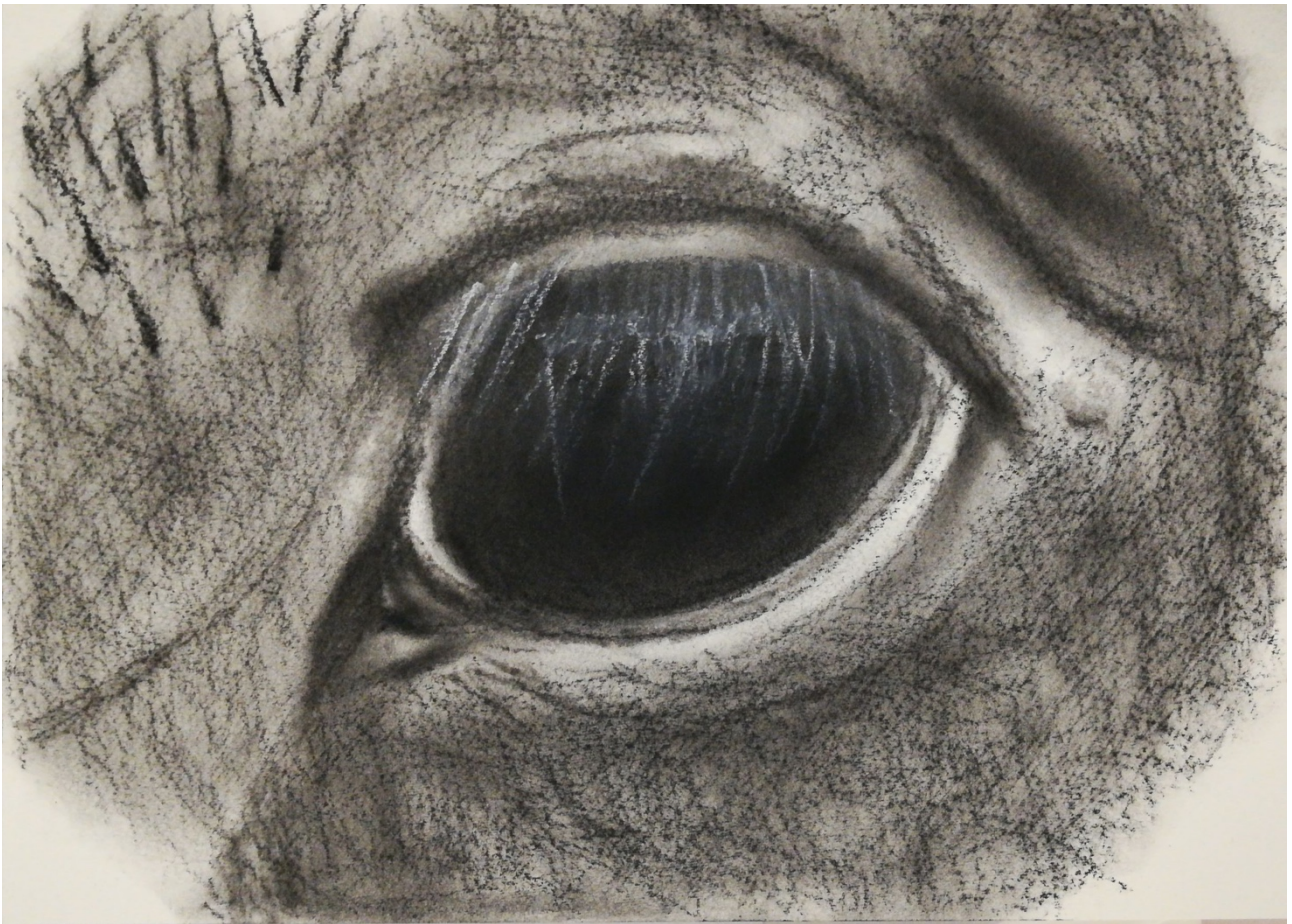
It was a quiet Tuesday afternoon and the TV was on. A man showed a small white airplane crashing into the side of a house. "That's not it," I thought, "it is a legend of striking different realities, and some, who would've come up with such an act of violence?"

We are so fragile, thought, and, as though agreeing with me that life is indeed so fragile, my mind recalled a similar scene to me recently, one of my former, useful dreams, where I was walking along a crowded street when suddenly someone stabbed me in the stomach with an insignificant knife.





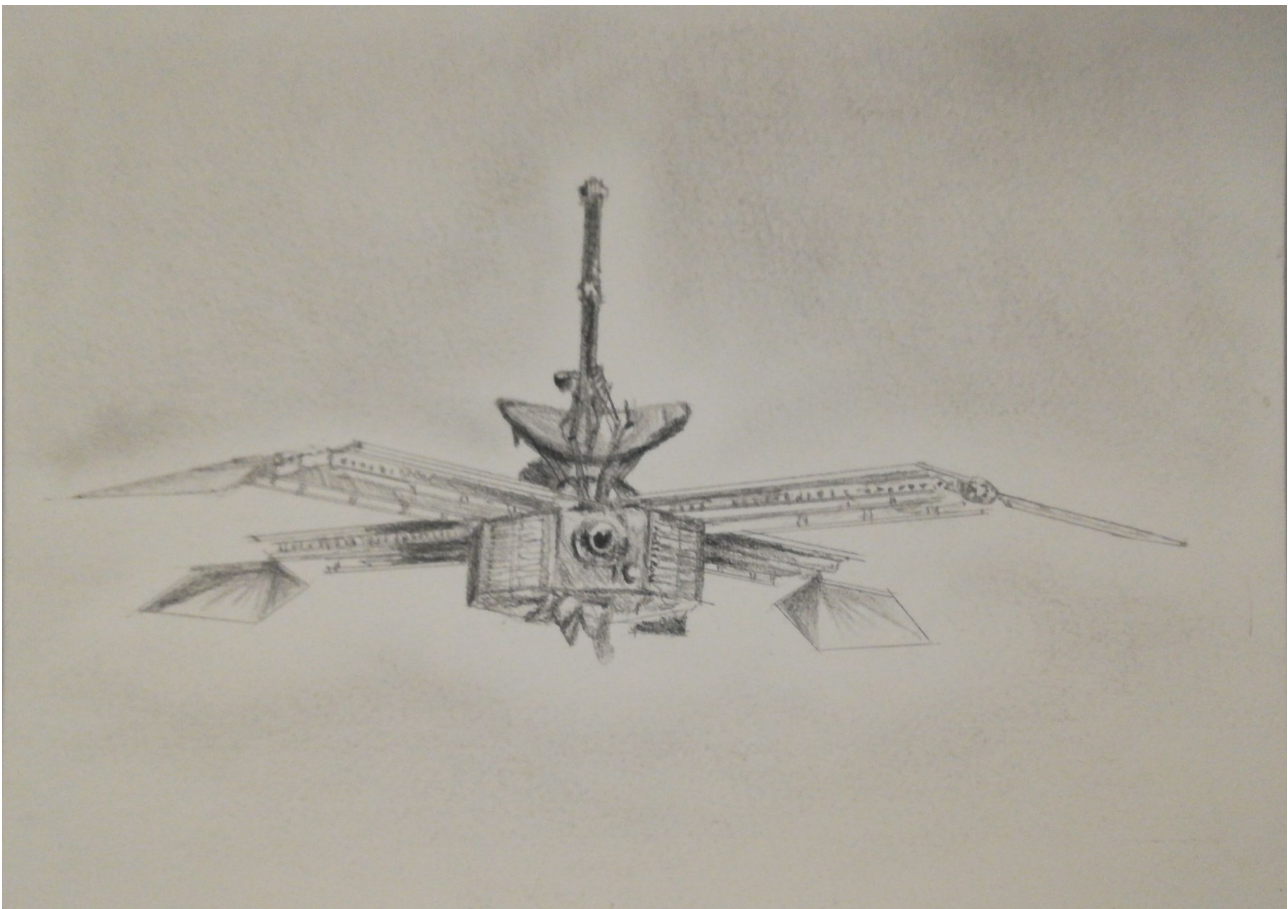
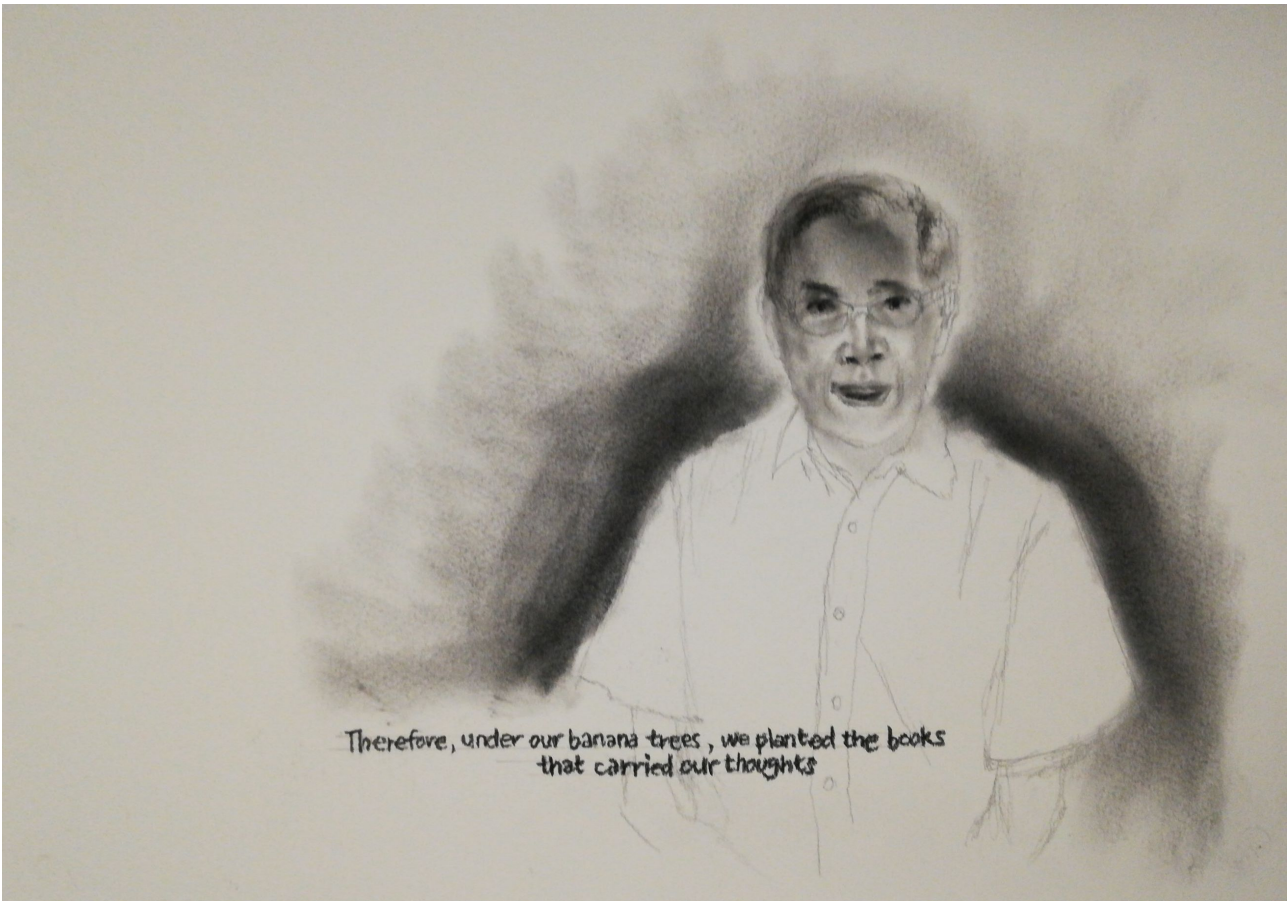


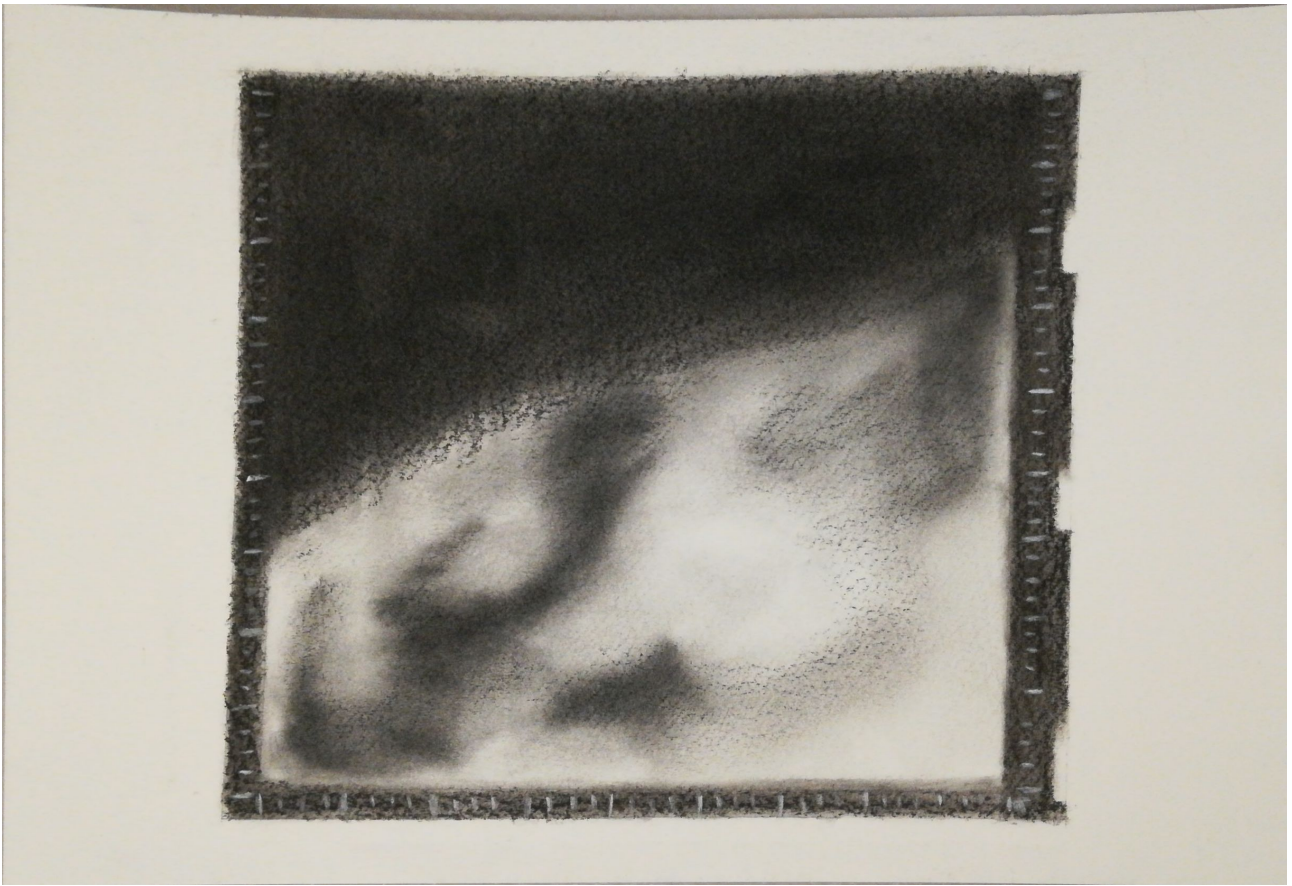


Wow!

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Memory is Frail (and Truth Brittle) is a development of an illustrated article I wrote with the same title, which was published in the journal *Protocollum* in 2018. The suite of 115 drawings in A5 and A4 sizes aims to assemble representations of space (as in geography) and time (as in history) into a looping narrative, similar to an ouroboros. The assembly is presented as a suite of monochromatic charcoal and graphite drawings (including hand-drawn texts) in allusion to the frailty of memory. It questions the nature of reality and the building block of human knowledge, which is perceived mainly through humankind's limited senses, the main part of which is the eye. At an allegorical level, it interrogates how our understanding of the world is largely constructed visually and recorded through memory. It examines how reality is formed through the perception of visuals/visual cues and our often fragmented memory of them, as well as how knowledge is built (and therefore truth established) through the making sense of a perceived reality, the nature of which is fragmented.

The broad context of the geographical and historical representations employed in the work aims to establish connections between different markers of time and space. One of these time and space markers is a phase of cold war after the Cuban missile crisis, specifically when Indonesia, the country I was born and bred in, was covertly implicated as some kind of a proxy war site (1965-66, and the dictatorship that followed). Another marker, still connected to the cold war, is when the First World nations' territorial competition (both in geographical and conceptual sense) manifests in what became known as the Space Race, with NASA having their highest budget in the fiscal year 1965 (Nimmen, Bruno, & Rosholt, 1976, p. 6). One other marker is the event popularly known as 9/11, which sees two hijacked commercial airplanes colliding into the twin tower in New York City. This marker is important because it is associated, firstly, with a major longitudinal research project on flashbulb memories (Brown & Kulik, 1977) known as the Manhattan Memory Project (Hirst et al, 2015). Secondly, this marker is a date in 2001 that is an anniversary of the 1973 Chilean coup of Allende, which is connected to the Indonesian coup of 1965 and the mass killings that followed, both backed by the US and other First World nations. I also "quoted" cultural and scientific artefacts as well as artworks in this work, e.g. Samira Makhmalbaf's film *God, Construction and Destruction*, part of the anthology of short films *11'09"01 - September 11* (2002), one of Indonesian artist Agan Harahap's photoshop works of historical figures, the first ever image of the surface of Mars taken by Mariner 4, scenes from the propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (Noer, 1982), and several others.

The work is composed of five interrelated parts under the subtitles *Memory is Frail (and Truth Brittle)*, *My Father the Contortionist*, *Unfamiliar Worlds*, *All Trees are Good Listeners*, and *Solitary Truth as an Act of Violence*. Excerpts from a scene in Makhmalbaf's short film, where the teacher made her student dedicate a minute of silence to the victims of 9/11 by drawing a clock on her old and chipped blackboard are depicted in five drawings that are spread around the sections, as a connecting element between the parts.

The last sentence of the *Solitary Truth as an Act of Violence* is "However, memory is frail, and truth brittle." This manifests in the title of the next part, *Memory is Frail (and Truth Brittle)*, which starts with a glimpse of a Hollywood film scene I saw on 11 September 2001, of an airplane crashing into the white house. This section refers to my experience of 9/11 (from quite a distance) as well as Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* (1938 – a bit more than a year after my father was born, also in quite a distance from the US) which supposedly caused nation-wide panic and established Welles as a dramatist. The reference to Samira Makhmalbaf's film in this section is developed visually through drawings of scenes from the film depicting school children looking at an example of a tower, which is actually a kiln they used in the Afghan refugee camps to make bricks intended to build new shelters to protect themselves from bombings by the US. I use the fragmentation of the scenes to organise these drawings on the wall and make it look as though the children were looking at a drawing of Welles reciting a part of *War of the Worlds* (drawn to resemble an Associated Press photograph of the scene) at a height, at a distance, like the tower.

My Father the Contortionist introduces my family's personal and political entanglements into of this work. The section starts through describing the geographical distance in a proximity of time between Welles's *War of the Worlds* and my father's parallel space and time. This introduction quickly segues to a photograph that I used to introduce the family through my father and his brothers, the second and fourth boys in the family. In the photograph, my father comfortably posed in a contortion act, with his two siblings posing behind him. This photograph was found after my father's sudden death (of an accident) in 2008, and I never knew that he had such an excellent mastery of contortionism. However, linking the photograph to the stories that I heard about his childhood (e.g. his first stage experience with his father's traveling theatre troupe) caused my suspicion that my grandfather was staging political plays around the villages of Bali in the late 40s/early 50s, within the first decade of the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. The section ends with a description of my fourth

uncle, the youngest of the boys in the photograph, who introduced me to a simplified version of existentialism through pinching my arm to discuss pain. Visually, one of the most prominent themes in the work, that is the depiction of the eye, starts towards the end of this section and segued this section to the next.

The next part, *Unfamiliar Worlds*, is a small section that serves as a kind of a pivot point, and is a part where I directly quoted two seminal works, fiction and non-fiction: Antoine de Saint-Exupery on seeing and taming (from *The Little Prince*, 1943) and Baltic-German pioneer of biosemiotics Johann Jacob von Uexküll's notion of the Umwelt, the peculiar and particular self-world of each living creature. In 1912, he noted that Umwelt as a term that is frequently misused, and proposed the term Merkwelt to clarify Umwelt – “merken” in German means to remember, to feel or to realise. This part extends the visuals of eyes, and the text brings in other living creatures into the work mostly through the direct quotes and Uexküll's description of a “stroll into unfamiliar worlds”.

All Trees are Good Listeners recounts the worlds once I thought unfamiliar that I came in contact with, through narratives of my interaction with Ilham Aidit, my senior at architecture school, the son of Dipa Nusantara Aidit, the central committee leader of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) who was assassinated when Ilham was just a boy. The realisation that Ilham and I might have shared a common world only came years after the fall of Suharto and the beginning of my research on 1965 Indonesia. This section intertwines several narratives with the story of my interaction with Ilham, who I came in contact again a while after I began my research on 1965 Indonesia. One narrative is about my grandfather, a BAPERKI activist and treasurer of the Bali chapter of the organisation, who was forcefully disappeared during the US-backed 1965-66 mass killings because of BAPERKI's proximity to PKI (and allegedly the People's Republic of China, on the other side of the US during the cold war). Another narrative is the film Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI which also provides the visuals within this section. The work of Indonesian artist Agan Harahap, who utilises photoshop to recreate photos of historical figures in his series *Membidik Sejarah* (2013), particularly a photograph showing Indonesia's first president Sukarno taking a picture of Ilham's father, D. N. Aidit, with a camera that – according to Ilham before he found out that the photo was an artwork – was made in Moscow and was just given to Sukarno by Aidit. This section clearly questions the nature of evidence as assertion of memories and establishment of truth.

All Trees are Good Listeners is followed by *Solitary Truth as an Act of Violence* in which I weave in narratives from my previous work *A Thousand and One Martian Nights* (2017) with parts from all the narratives in this suite of drawings, with an obscured reference to Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), as well as the direct quotation from previous sections.

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