



## Artists as Witness

A selection of aquarelles by Katah  
Exhibited at La Muse en Gouette, August 2019

Review by Bernardo Olmedo

I entered the red brick building with a pang of apprehension. I have seen Katah's work before, her bright watercolors depicting the ongoing catastrophe of migrants on the Mediterranean sea, but I suspected this time it was going to be different. It was. A posteriori I will even read it in her calm demeanor, in the way she smiles in the hall, a smile with a certain opaque quality to it, and at the same time infused with determination.

The first watercolors are along the wall next to the black metal staircase. It is like climbing up, marching with the grey, static figures of people. A long line that could continue for years, if there was enough paper, it seems. What catches immediately my attention are the necks in the drawings. They're long. They're short. They're straight. They're contorted. It'd be easy to say the faces are moving. It'd be easy to say the children grab one's heart on press it in their little hands.

Bright colors are mainly absent from Katah's series. Faded blues, greys, greens. Marches, graves, boats, the sea, the beautiful, all giving, all consuming sea. A sea of clawed waves, ready to snatch people's lives in the dead of night.

My apprehension has turned to pain. The pain of looking at a neck that protrudes in despair. The simple expressivity of the eyes on white paper, wide open, or barely slits. The drama of the immobile, open hands, as if they had been stopped by force, and they refused to stay still. The difficulty of finding hope when confronted with the work of an artist who has been deeply touched by the endless tragedy in the sea of the Levant. An artist capable of conveying the bottomless sadness of loss in front of a grave, and the resilience of migrating people who struggle for life, stretching out their arms, carrying their children on their backs, carrying their stories and their cruelty, their wars, their dead, their future, moving on, moving on, moving on, towards a continent that erects walls with their skeletons and their blood, with the natural resources of their countries of origin. Walls of uncomfortable, semi-conscious indifference. One-way mirrors to not see the winding road of hundreds of years of past and present colonialism.

I see Katah's smile again. The series is in the end also a crack in the mask of our violent, poorly dissimulated guilt. Katah opened the crack by travelling to meet migrants in Greece, France and Italy, and brought us this back, across the one-way mirror. So that we can't take our eyes away. So that their suffering is mirrored on the oppressive wealth on this side, on the injustice of our laws, on our shameful response, across thousands of miles of land and salty water.