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My Whole Being Is a Dark Verse

curated by Chus Martínez

with works by Alexa Karolinski/Ingo Niermann, Sofia Karim, Maryam Tafakory

opening weekend: September 11 - 13, 2026

Friday: 12 noon – 9pm // Saturday/Sunday: 11am – 6pm

Duration: September 15 – October 17, 2026

I have noticed that lately I keep returning to the time I spent in Iran in my mid-twenties. I have never spoken about it publicly, because I never saw a reason to. And yet, those months were crucial both to my life and to my personal development. Nowhere else have I experienced such a brutal discrepancy between the image of a place conveyed by the media and the place itself. Nowhere else have I felt such a strong desire to share with others what I experienced and what I learned from the people and the culture.

It was there that I first experienced poetry as a language of resistance. Poetry is of fundamental importance in every culture, but the knowledge people there possessed of their poets was so powerful and unique that it moved me deeply. The poet who captured my heart in particular was Forugh Farrokhzad. “My whole being is a dark verse” or, depending on the translation, “All my being is a dark verse” is the opening line of her poem *Another Birth* (*Tavalloḏī Dīgar*, دیگر تولدی).

Another Birth was published in the spring of 1964 and comprises thirty-five poems written during the six years preceding its publication. The book emerged at a moment of profound cultural change in Iran. In the early 1960s, the country under the Shah was undergoing a process of rapid modernization while at the same time being marked by deep political, social, and religious tensions.

Another Birth fundamentally changed the perception of Farrokhzad as a poet. Until then, she had often been regarded primarily as a “woman poet”; afterwards, she was increasingly recognized as a writer. For Farrokhzad, darkness means neither despair nor mere negation. Darkness is a state that points toward unrealized potential—a space from which another form of perception, language, and life can emerge. She deeply believed in the possibility of a rebirth of consciousness through the poetic imagination.

For this reason, in the context of an edition of *curated by* devoted to love, I decided to reflect on darkness. Darkness as the feeling that we should continue to love, but also continue to think, reflect, and interpret those times that demand an awareness of the historical dimensions within which our cultural and artistic practices take place and therefore I have chosen to place two films at the center of the exhibition: *Oceano de amor* (2019) by Alexa Karolinski & Ingo Niermann and *Nazarbazi* (2021) by Maryam Tafakory. In the same space as these two films, the audience encounters a series of works initiated by Sofia Karim: *Tippex Letter* (*Diptych*) by Timothy James Young and Sofia Karim, and *Letters of light to Stacey Dyer, in prison in California* by Sofia Karim.

Films

***Oceano de Amor* (2019) by Alexa Karolinski & Ingo Niermann** is set in Havana and follows a diverse group of people who speak about love, loneliness, work, desire, ageing, disability, and care. Together, they imagine a society in which the distribution of sensual and emotional care becomes a collective responsibility rather than remaining a private privilege. The film asks whether love itself could be understood as a form of social infrastructure. The participants envision a future in which the only indispensable form of human labour is to give and receive love.

The Cuban context is fundamental to this perspective. Ingo Niermann explained that he and Alexa Karolinski chose Cuba because it is one of the few countries that still formally adheres to socialist ideals. This makes it an important context for imagining forms of redistribution that extend beyond the economic sphere.

Nazarbazi (2021) by Maryam Tafakory — *Nazarbazi* means “the game of glances” — is an essay film about love, desire, and the politics of looking in Iranian cinema, where depictions of physical intimacy between women and men have long been prohibited.

Drawing on films made in the period following the Revolution, Tafakory assembles a montage of images in which female bodies are simultaneously present and erased. In doing so, she exposes the mechanisms through which censorship regulates visibility, touch, and affect. Rather than depicting intimacy directly, the film directs its attention towards the subtle gestures, glances, pauses, and absences through which desire is expressed both within and against the boundaries imposed by censorship.

Poetry and silence become the film’s central languages. They allow it to inhabit spaces that can neither be touched nor spoken: the inner landscapes of desire, the experience of untouchability beyond the body, and the unwritten prohibitions that shape emotional and social life. In this way, *Nazarbazi* transforms censorship itself into artistic material, showing how restriction can generate new forms of visual and emotional communication.

Letters

Hail Mary, (Dptych) (2025) by Timothy James Young and Sofia Karim

Timothy James Young is a writer and artist who is currently incarcerated on death row in a Californian prison, where he has developed an extensive artistic and literary practice. Sofia Karim is an artist, architect, and human rights activist. She has long been engaged in an ongoing creative collaboration with Young, thereby enabling the production, realization, and public presentation of the works beyond the confines of the prison.

Letters of Light (2026) by Sofia Karim

The three letters are dedicated to and created for Stacey Daniella Dyer. Dyer is an incarcerated survivor of severe sexual violence during childhood. She has been held in a Californian prison for more than two decades, serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole.

Chuz Martínez

Sofia Karim is an architect, artist and activist based in London. Her activism focuses on human rights across Bangladesh and India. She campaigns for the release of political prisoners. She was a finalist for the Jameel Prize in 2021. She has exhibited at venues including Tate Modern (London), V&A (London), The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) London, Rubin Museum (NY), Arthshila Ahmedabad (India) and Documenta 15 (Steidl/ Kunsthaus Göttingen). In November 2023 she set up Architects for Palestine / Tragic Turn, an initiative which raises funds for Gaza by offering architectural design advice on everyday projects.

Alexa Karolinski is a writer and director based in Berlin who has worked across documentary, narrative, and experimental genres. Her work moves between intimate portraiture and historical excavation, tracing the ways trauma, memory, and silenced histories live on in the body and in form. Together with Ingo Niermann, she codirected several films that explore shared intimacy and love under the umbrella project the Army of Love. She cocreated and cowrote the Netflix miniseries *Unorthodox* (2020).

Ingo Niermann is a speculative writer, artist, and the editor of the Solutions Series at Sternberg Press. His latest book is *The Monadic Age: Notes on the Coming Social Order* (Sternberg Press, 2024). Based on his novel *Solution 257: Complete Love* (Sternberg Press, 2016), Niermann initiated the Army of Love, a project that tests and promotes a need-oriented redistribution of sensual love. His work has been featured at Yokohama Triennale, Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, Triennale di Milano, Berlin Biennale, Istanbul Biennale, dOCUMENTA(13), La Biennale di Venezia, MACBA, MoMA, mumok, Castello di Rivoli, ZKM, Steirischer Herbst, and Guggenheim New York. Niermann is a lecturer at the Institute Art Gender Nature, HGK Basel FHNW.

Maryam Tafakory, who was born and raised in Iran, works in film and performance. In 2024, she received the Film London Jarman Award. Her films have won seven awards that qualify them for consideration for the Academy Awards. Her work has been shown at venues including the Tate Modern in London, as well as at the New York Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival, and the BFI London Film Festival. Solo exhibitions and presentations of her work have taken place at venues including MoMA in New York, BOZAR in Brussels, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Academy Museum in Los Angeles. Her work has been reviewed in publications such as *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, and *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*.

Born in Spain, **Chus Martínez** has a background in philosophy and art history. She is currently the Head of the Institute of Art Gender Nature of the FHNW Academy of Arts and Design in Basel, Switzerland, and associate curator of TBA21 in Madrid/Venice. She is currently the curator of the Danish Pavillion at the Venice Biennial, *Things to Come*. She is board member of CIMAM (International Committee for Museums) and serves on the advisory boards of numerous international art institutions, including Castello di Rivoli, Turin and Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin. She has been the Chief Curator at El Museo Del Barrio, New York and dOCUMENTA (13) Head of Department. Previously she was Chief Curator at MACBA, Barcelona, Director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein. Martínez has organized numerous exhibitions and publications with contemporary artists. She lectures and writes regularly including numerous catalogue texts and critical essays, and is a regular contributor to international journals.