

## CATHERINE YASS

1963. London, UK.

The idea of suspension is regularly applied to the reception of literature and narrative; we speak of our “suspension of disbelief” when faced with unimaginable events to which we must respond with unresisting allegiance to the creative act. W. G. Sebald’s literature has been described by Amir Eshel as a “poetics of suspension”, suspending chronology, succession, comprehension, and closure. Such suspension is also at play throughout Yass’ art: suspension in space, suspension in time, suspension in thought. Her film *High Wire* (2009), in which a trapezist attempts to cross a wire stretched across two highrise buildings in Glasgow, is a literal depiction of suspension, but this is a theme revisited metaphorically elsewhere. *West Bank* (2006), a film which follows the wall between occupied areas of Israel and Palestine, traces an in-between place unanchored within the continuum of time and space but which floats instead in a kind of geo-historical void. In the film *Lock* (2006), a giant Chinese shipping vessel in the Three Gorges Dam is slowly raised (the whole process takes four hours) to another water level in a vast concrete lock, the slowness and weight of the Herculean engineering contrasting so beautifully with the principle of the thing: a levitation in water, a gentle floating upwards. In *Descent* (2002) we are again suspended in an endless drop downwards – a descent down the Canary Wharf skyscraper in London’s financial district which, in the wake of last year’s near collapse of capitalism, takes on particular resonance. (We crashed in neither.) Of course Western art history’s best known “descent”, that from the cross at Calvary, also images a brief in-between moment: that between death and divine eternity.

In writing about *Star* (2001) Yass’ photographic work of Indian Bollywood movie actors, Vikra Chandra cites the last line of Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* – we are like “boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past” – to speak of the dream-like qualities of the *Star* portraits in relation to Fitzgerald’s Hollywood-inspired characters. Fitzgerald’s floating place – between past and present, real and unreal, here and there – is pictured in her photographic series *Corridors* (1994) and *Portraits* (1996), in which the colour photograph’s positive is overlaid with its negative. The resulting unearthly, acidic colours cause objects and people in the images to “float” in a blurred and barely recognizable space. By making us acutely aware of the process of their creation, these photographs suspend us between that past moment of making and the now-moment of viewing. Framed by heavy lightboxes, the work’s weighty physicality emphatically reminds us that they share the same space as the viewer. The condition of all works of art, it can be said, is exactly this: being perpetually suspended between making and viewing. For an artist as different from Yass as the painter Willem de Kooning, all artists are doomed to occupy this groundless, suspended space forever. This “trembling” modern, suspended space is what Yass rehearses again and again in her art: falling yet never crashing to earth, floating but never leaving the ground of reality, sailing yet never moving forward, like the “boats against the current” patiently trapped in *Lock*. **Gilda Williams**

La idea de la suspensión se aplica con regularidad a la forma en la que recibimos la literatura y la narrativa; hablamos de “suspensión de la incredulidad” cuando nos enfrentamos a acontecimientos inimaginables a los que debemos responder con una lealtad que no oponga resistencia al acto creador. Amir Eshel ha descrito la literatura

otro nivel de agua (el proceso completo dura cuatro horas). El peso y la lentitud de la hercúlea ingeniería contrastan maravillosamente con el principio técnico: la levitación en el agua, un delicado flotar hacia arriba. En *Descent* (2002) nos vemos nuevamente suspendidos en una caída interminable –un descenso por el rascacielos de Canary Wharf en el distrito

fotográficas *Corridors* (1994) y *Portraits* (1996), en las que cada positivo de una fotografía en color está recubierto con su negativo. Los colores resultantes, ácidos y como de otro mundo, hacen que los objetos y las personas de las imágenes “floten” en un espacio desdibujado y apenas reconocible. Haciéndonos plenamente conscientes del proceso de

