

Azza El Siddique & Teto Elsiddique, fire is love, water is sorrow—a distant fire, Towards Gallery, Toronto

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Azza El Siddique & Teto Elsiddique

fire is love, water is sorrow—a distant fire

Azza El Siddique and Teto Elsiddique's exhibition *fire is love, water is sorrow—a distant fire* at Towards is the encounter of two bodies of work, one generated from the other in a thoughtful expression of love and grief. The series of paintings are the last ones Teto Elsiddique made before his tragic death in 2017. For this exhibition, Azza El Siddique conceived a large metal scaffold to hold her brother's paintings, alongside a series of metal pieces she created in direct response to his work. In the exhibition, each painting finds its sculptural counterpart, a formal twin with which it is coupled. Through this gesture of replication, Azza had to carefully consider each of her brother's paintings, studying them by heart to weld their portrait on the metallic surface. The sculptural works, devoid of colours, only retain the essence of the painting to which they speak. They simply, yet effectively trace the contours of the shapes imaged by Teto in his studio. In this way Azza's works are quasi-spectres, made only more elusive by their reflective surface.

Both the paintings and their metallic doubles are intimately nestled within a metal structure that occupies the gallery's entire exhibition space. In fact, this architectural frame has been designed from the floorplan of Towards's former space at 87 Wade Ave., mirroring an analogous gesture of duplication present within the smaller pieces described above. It becomes evident that this is a project that deals with things that no longer are. There is an undeniable attempt to pursue a connection to a distant, yet palpable past that remains charged with emotion and affection. That being said, *fire is love, water is sorrow—a distant fire* is just as much about the past as it is about the future. The exhibition text addresses the impossibility of returning—to something, to someone, to one's own self. In this way, the exhibition is about how we carry the past forward in an attempt to achieve, in Teto's words, "a kind of connective tissue through history."

This truly resolves itself with the last gesture of the exhibition, hidden behind the metal structure on the back wall of the gallery. Azza catalogued Teto's entire oeuvre and working with a computer engineer, she created a generative algorithm that produces speculative paintings pulled from formal elements in Teto's work. This final piece finds meaning in the words of an email written by Teto Elsiddique to Yale students before his death and used as the epigraph for the exhibition text: "We invent powerful magical stories which say that dying was only a transition to another, more real existence." Ultimately, *fire is love, water is sorrow—a distant fire* is a powerful and compelling gesture of love in which Azza El Siddique undertakes the complex and idiosyncratic artistic vision of Teto Elsiddique to carry it forward, creating an indivisible connection between his work and her own.

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Azza El Siddique & Teto Elsiddique

fire is love, water is sorrow—a distant fire, exhibition views, 2021.

Photos : Laura Findlay
Documentation, courtesy of the artists & Towards Gallery, Toronto

Towards Gallery, Toronto
September 23—November 6, 2021