

NICOLETTI

TAREK LAKHRISSI

SPIT

19.09.24 - 02.11.24



+44 7 842 347 140
91 Paul Street
EC2A 4NY, London
nicoletticontemporary.com

Exhibition text by Giulia Civardi:

To restore a blind person's sight, the Holy Scriptures recommended spitting on eyes. Although divine power was required to perform this act, oral fluids came to be considered a curative medium, both in a symbolic and literal sense. Ancient Arab physicians and mediaeval sages reported that saliva, often mixed with mercury or mud, had therapeutic powers so great that they could save plague victims. Today, Biomedicine recognises this fluid as a 'window of the state of the body' for its diagnostic potential. Spit is also a playful tool to question social taboos and ingrained rules about what is repulsive or animalistic. Author and activist Jean Genet narrated its irresistible erotic powers in regards to his lover:

'A large part of his power over me (...) lay in the spittle he passed from one cheek to the other and which he would sometimes draw out in front of his mouth like a veil. "But where does he get that spit," I would ask myself, "where does he bring it up from?" Mine will never have the unctuousness or color of his. It will merely be spun glassware, transparent and fragile.' – The Thief's Journal, 1949

Spitting, of course, has also come to embody expressions of violence and disdain. When Oscar Wilde was sentenced to hard labour for 'gross indecency with men' and forced to stand, handcuffed, in Clapham Junction to be spat at and abused by the crowd around him, he was so hurt that – as he wrote in an 1897 letter to his partner Lord Alfred Douglas, later published in *De Profundis* – he wept every day for a year after the event.

In June 2024, Tarek Lakhrissi was spat on and verbally attacked during Pride in Paris for carrying Algerian flags. Something was disgusting about him being both Arab and queer and supportive of Palestine, according to the aggressors. It feels ironic that ten years ago, Tarek shared a post on Tumblr with the word 'spit' written on repeat. I use the word ironic intentionally, as Tarek tells me about the event with a hint of humour, which is typical in his work. Although having been the target of an unjust attack, he had the support of the other people marching: their bodies and sweat moving around him as a formless yet protective shield.

Considering the crowd as a productive space for poetic creation and embodied thinking, the exhibition SPIT takes inspiration from the physical act of ejecting liquid from one's mouth, and from the erotic and aggressive dimensions of this act. Playing at the intersection between desire and disgust, Tarek looks at liquid exchanges between bodies to explore ideas of violence and subversion, protection and community.

The exhibition takes as its starting point the figure of the devil, presenting reinterpretations of it in a large-scale sculpture, alongside a new series of drawings and glass sculptures. While deriving from existing bodies of work, the show marks a shift in Tarek's practice: a move toward a more physical

and material approach, as well as an intuitive process that favours hand-made productions. For example, Tarek uses drawing – which he defines as 'an everyday joy' – as a form of personal re-writing, to regain autonomy and process emotions at their rawest stage, as well as to open up a space for experimentation and new relationships with written and visual language.

In a new series of works on paper, the alien and superhero-like characters, with their horns and tails (but also human appearance), display painful yet liberating transformations. Black lines of different forms and densities recall the minimalist gestures of Etel Adnan, who turned to charcoal in the last year of her life to reconnect with her roots and reach a fundamental form. Meanwhile, the angel-like, dark-haired figure in one of the drawings reminds me of the flying characters in Faith Ringgold's quilt *Tar Beach 2*. Young girls float among the stars on a hot summer night, becoming heroic explorers who overcome obstacles.

By combining dreams and fantasies with references to pop culture and sexual histories, Tarek puts a queer spin on the traditions of sculpture, drawing, and storytelling. This twist is also visible in the sculpture *THAT EVIL PART INSIDE OF ME IS LAUGHING*, realised for his solo exhibition *BLISS* at Migros Museum, Zurich (2024). The large head of a devil – usually a creature of male semblances but which appears here with diva-like eyelashes – references Pokemon characters and purple devil emojis. Tarek samples and remixes recognisable traces used to communicate playfulness and desire to confuse the usual appearance of characters, especially the ones associated with evil, creating hybrids that elude canonical forms.

The contrast of materials and their elemental symbolism plays a crucial role throughout the show. The fragile transparent glass lays close to the durable car paint of the devil sculpture; obscure charcoal next to the shiny resin. Blown glass is turned into a liquid with fire before taking ecstatic new forms. Tarek combines different textures, densities, and processes as if alchemically transforming the materials and elements that make up a world.

There is an ongoing tension in the work – between vulnerability and strength, closeness and separation, clarity and contradiction. This tension is visible in the glass-blown sculptures: tongues that try to kiss but never touch. Or 'door knockers' – a body of work that we presented for the first time at *Clima* in Milan last year – which become protective symbols, rather than signals of arrival.

These diaphanous forms conjure the spit described by Jean Genet – transparent and fragile, but they also recall the sun – a symbol of power and destruction, 'the most abstract of all objects' (according to Georges Bataille), that is impossible to look at without being blinded. These forms can be seen as a solar cry, a longing for something almost within reach; the spit that is as powerful as to hurt, but also cure.

Giulia Civardi





NICOLETTI



UNSEEN SUN I (PURPLE), 2024
Blown glass
D: 25 cm | D: 9 13/16 in



NICOLETTI



UNSEEN SUN II (PURPLE), 2024
Blown glass
D: 25 cm | D: 9 13/16 in



NICOLETTI



UNSEEN SUN II (DARK PURPLE), 2024
Blown glass
D: 25 cm | D: 9 13/16 in



NICOLETTI



UNSEEN SUN I (DARK PURPLE), 2024
Blown glass
D: 25 cm | D: 9 13/16 in



NICOLETTI



UNSEEN SUN I (RED), 2024
Blown glass
D: 25 cm | D: 9 13/16 in



NICOLETTI



UNSEEN SUN II (RED) 2024
Blown glass
D: 25 cm | D: 9 13/16 in







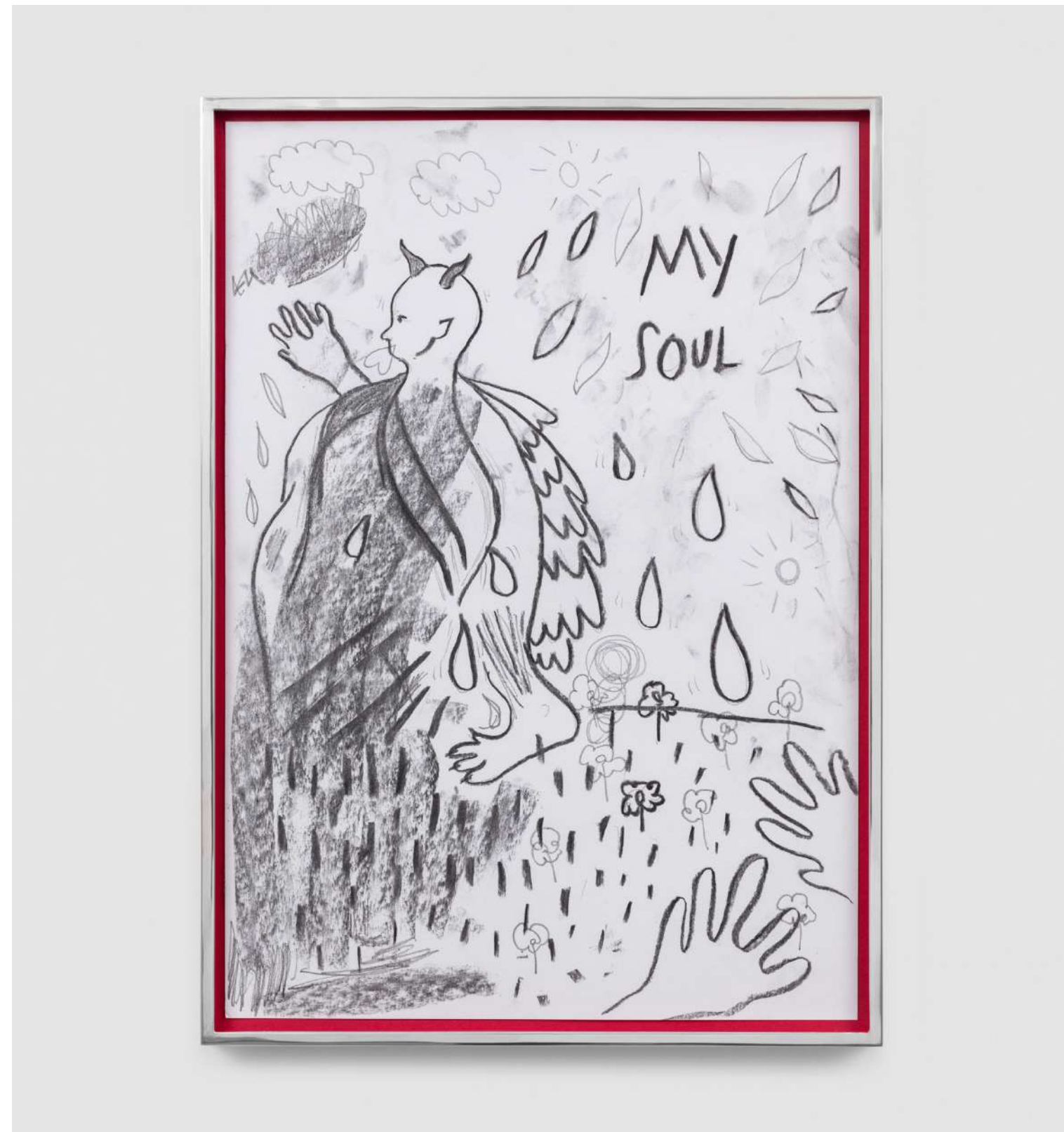
NICOLETTI



Solar Cry, 2024
Charcoal and graphite pencil on paper, metal frame
42 x 29 cm | 16 1/2 x 11 3/8 in

SOLAR CR





Silence!, 2024
Charcoal and graphite pencil on paper, metal frame
42 x 29 cm | 16 1/2 x 11 3/8 in



MY
SOUL

NICOLETTI



My soul, 2024
Charcoal and graphite pencil on paper, metal frame
42 x 29 cm | 16 1/2 x 11 3/8 in





NICOLETTI

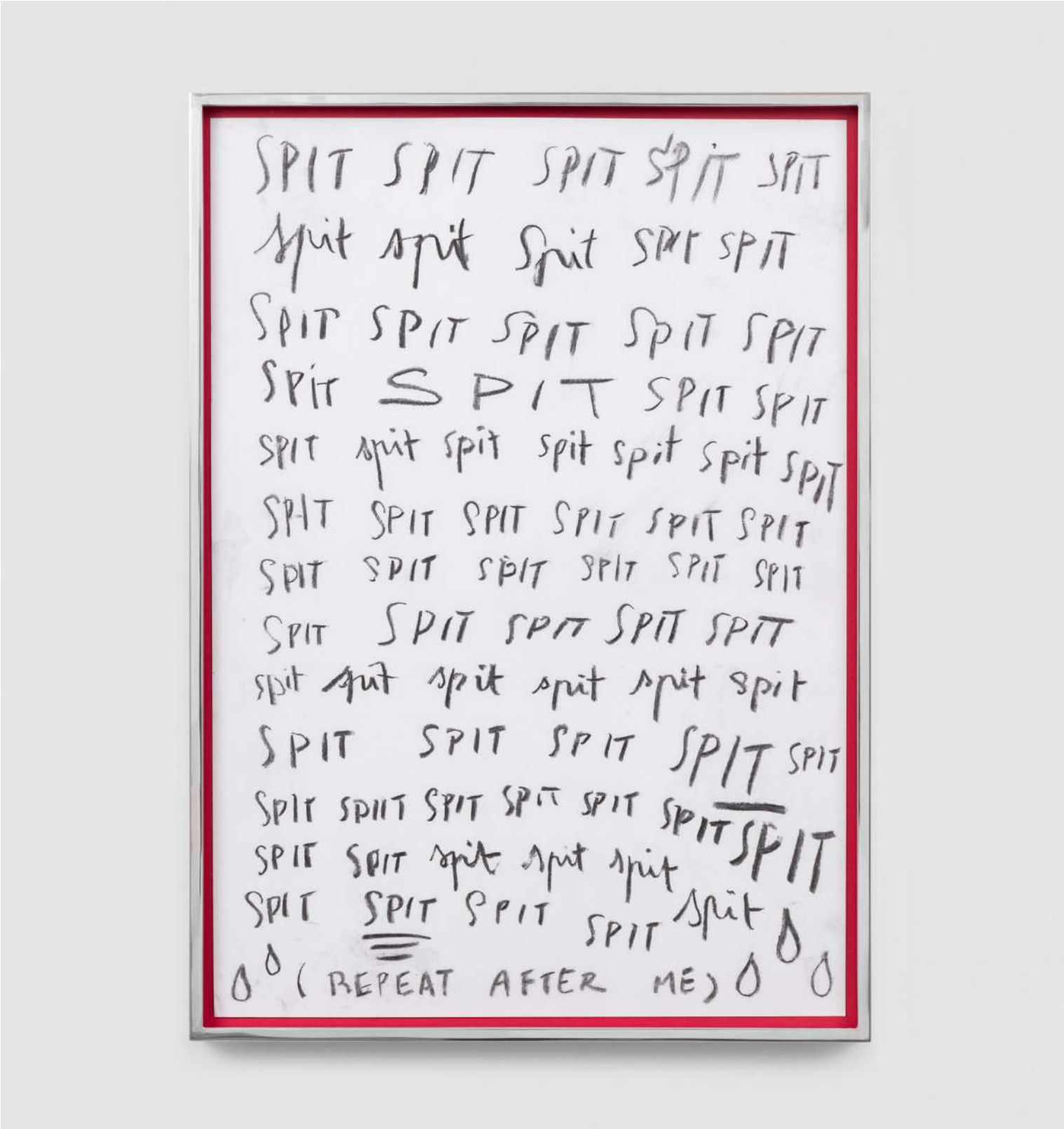


THE EVIL PART INSIDE OF ME IS LAUGHING, 2024
3D printing, polystyrene, epoxy resin, metallic paint
150 x 230 x 140 cm | 59 x 90 1/2 x 55 1/8 in









Spit (Repeat), 2024
Charcoal and graphite pencil on paper, metal frame
42 x 29 cm | 16 1/2 x 11 3/8 in

SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT

Spit Spit Spit SPIT SPIT

SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT

SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT

SPIT Spit spit spit spit spit SPIT

SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT SPIT



NICOLETTI



AN IMPOSSIBLE DESIRE (TWO TONGUES), 2024
Two tongues made of blown glass
22 x 11 cm (each) | 8 5/8 x 4 5/16 (each)







Portrait of Tarek Lakhrissi
Photo courtesy of the artist

Tarek Lakhrissi (born 1992 in Châtellerault, France. Lives and works in Paris) is a French artist and poet with a background in literature.

In 2024, Lakhrissi has been selected by artist Ugo Rondinone for the Reiffers Initiatives mentorship programme, which will lead to a duo exhibition at Reiffers Art Centre, Paris, opening on 14 October 2024. This exhibition will coincide with the artist's participation in Art Basel Paris and Art Basel Miami, both with Galerie Allen, Paris.

Lakhrissi has been exhibited internationally in galleries and institutions including Hayward Gallery, London; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney as part of the 22nd Biennale of Sydney; HKW, Berlin; Kanal Centre Pompidou, Brussels; Fondation Lafayette Anticipations, Paris; Wiels, Brussels; Palazzo Re Rebaudengo/Sandretto, Guarene/Torino; Mostyn, Llandudno; Tinguely Museum, Basel; Shedhalle, Zurich; Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris; Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Roma as part of the Quadriennale di Roma; High Art, Paris; La Verrière, Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, Brussels; Kevin Space, Vienna; Auto Italia South East, London; Fondation Gulbenkian, Paris; Veda gallery, Florence; CRAC Alsace; Kim?, Riga; La Gaité Lyrique, Paris; and SMC/CAC, Vilnius.

Lakhrissi's artworks are held in private and public collections such as Fondation Lafayette Anticipations, France; Fondazione Sandretto Collection, Italy; Fiorucci Art Trust, UK and Italy; Defares Collection, Netherlands; ONAP, France; FRAC Aquitaine MÉCA, France; FRAC Grand Large, France; IAC Villeurbanne, France; FMAC, France; Mauro Mattei Art Trust, UK and Italy; and the Johns Hopkins University Collection.