

DRAC

**NABIL
AZAB**

the welling up which would not pass
January 22 –
March 13, 2022



About

The exhibition *the welling up which would not pass* proposes an incursion into the abstract and colourful universe of Nabil Azab through two series of recent works, one photographic and the other realized with oil pastels. Multidisciplinary, the artist's practice questions the role(s) of the image in contemporary society.

With his series of photographic works, Nabil Azab departs from the common association between this medium and immediacy. The artist, who has been working with analog photography for years, instead explores slowness through a meticulous and thoughtful process of experimentation. The use of «homemade» filters placed on the lens allows him to turn away from an objective and figurative representation of reality. The distortion and blurring effects created by the filters make the subject captured on film unrecognizable.

The results, printed in very large scale on a thick, textured matte paper, go beyond the traditional framework of photography and are more reminiscent of plastic techniques such as painting on canvas or drawing. By inscribing his works outside of constructed phenomena and outside of all temporalities, the artist opens the way to reflections on memory and on the notion of time. Evocative of a dream or a memory whose limits and details escape us, the abstract and untitled photographs of Nabil Azab offer great freedom of interpretation to viewers.

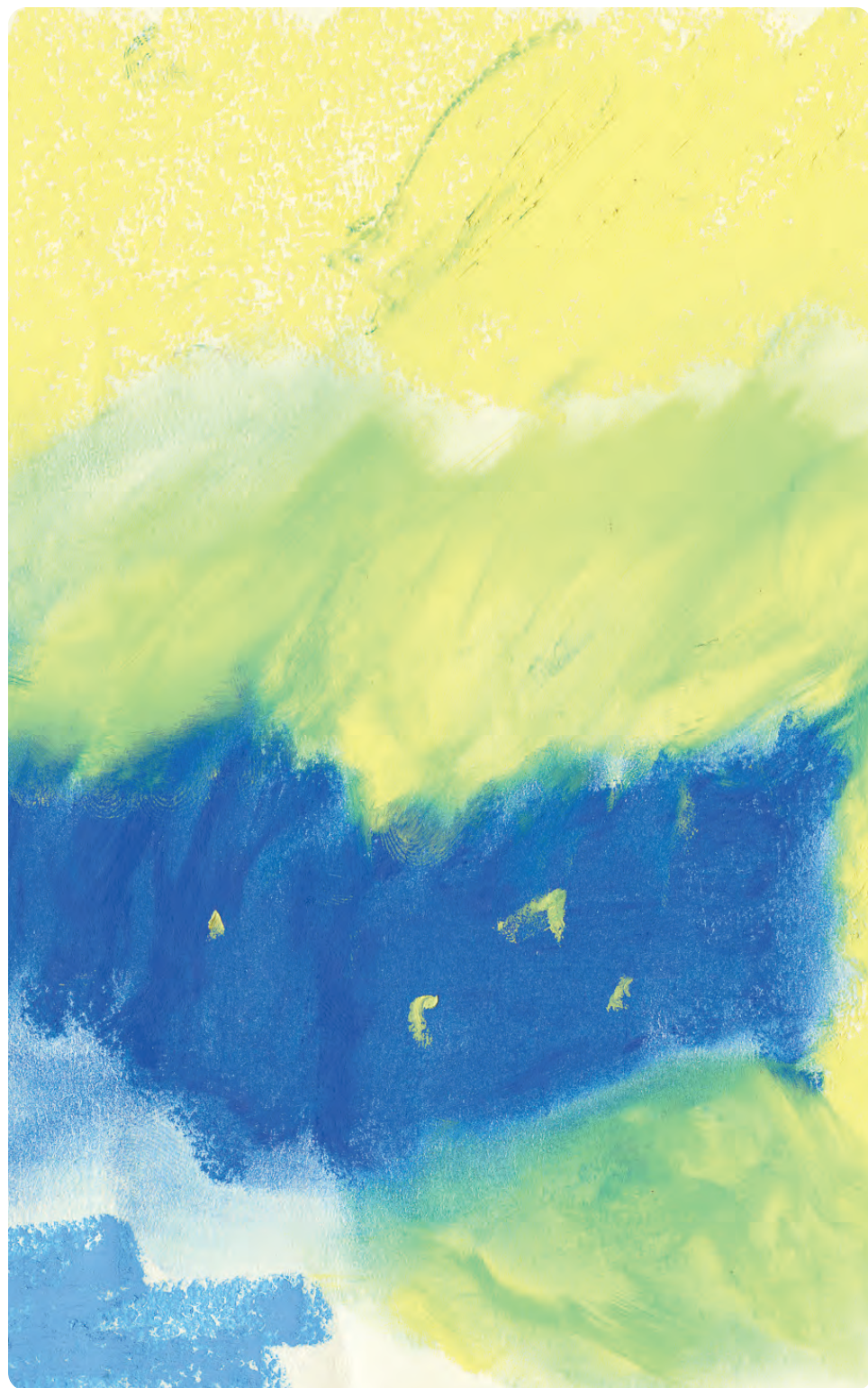
As an avid reader and writer, Nabil Azab draws a great deal of inspiration from fictional and non-fictional literature for his work. The title of the exhibition is a reference to the perception of a non-linear time caused by poet Denise Riley's grief described by psychoanalyst Lisa Baraitser in her book *Enduring Time*.

Complementing his photographic practice, the artist also gives us a glimpse of a series of works in oil pastels on paper. Made in a freer and more spontaneous way, these small formats are more interested in gesture. Their speed of execution contrasts with the long process of the artist's body of photographic work.

Azab's photographs and pastel works are not objective representations of the world. Tinged with a certain poetry, they are an opportunity for the visitor to question his relationship to images, to time and to create his own reality.

Cover image: Nabil Azab, *Untitled*, 2021

Nabil Azab (b. 1994) is a multidisciplinary artist of North African descent. He lives and works in Kanien'kehá:ka/Montreal (Canada). Nabil Azab holds a BFA in photography from Concordia University (2018). His work has been exhibited at April in New York (2021), Art Toronto (2021), Hearth Garage in Toronto (2021), Wil Abale Art Projects in Vancouver (2021), and Calaboose in Montreal (2019).



Nabil Azab, *Untitled (detail)*, 2021

a foggy logic of eternity (3 acts)

by Danica Pinteric

TAKE THE TIME. I scan over these words, handwritten in black marker on a pink binder in Nabil's studio. This mantra is typically used as a directive for approaching a task with a measure of patience. To "take the time" is to be careful, to exercise intention. But as I encounter these words, surrounded by Nabil's recent works, I interpret them differently. Rather than a lesson in attentiveness, what if they relate to time's possession? Instead of a guiding force to orient ourselves around, what if time was a thing we could apprehend? Perfectly, this occurs on the annual reversal of daylight savings time (falling back), and we have just "gained" an hour.

I want to posit that Nabil's work takes time. That this is a framework at the core of his practice. The works take time. Or better yet, they absorb it. Think of the photographs—they are steeped, saturated, even soggy with time. Their initial moments of capture appear with their emotional resonance intact, as though they are still happening, persisting through to the present. Their inherent ambiguity opens up multiple channels of association, troubling the assumption that photographs are stable depictions of the past.

Rather than discrete fragments of a known event, their softened contours become a host for the affective frequencies of their origin. Like memories, they accumulate and overflow into each new thing, the welling up of a certain moment that will never breach. These hazy scenes address the porousness of our experience, the way our present is co-authored by our history. From this reservoir of suspended moments, a foggy logic of eternity reveals itself.

Emerging through a vastly different process, Nabil's smaller compositions have a similar effect. As playful engagements with light, colour, and movement, they bridge the temporalities of the waking and resting worlds. Dreaming is another way of suspending moments which haven't yet ended, allowing us to visit them, to dwell in their textures a while longer.

Walking the dog one evening. Wading through thick August air and cicada chatter. I stop at the corner and close my eyes. Imprinted inside my eyelids is one of Nabil's photographs: dappled greens and pinks punctuating a dark void. It hovers in position before my mind's eye. Having developed vision problems in my twenties, I am prone to doubting my ability to see things clearly. Even with prescription glasses, I lack confidence in saying where one thing ends and another begins. This comes into direct conflict with the desire for control and stability I grew up with, a survival instinct that in this moment does nothing to help me. I'm being visited by the memory. Through its propagation into my prolonged blink, briefly it becomes mine. The chirping grows louder. My temples start to go numb. The dog barks. I wake up, my alarm clock whines.



Nabil Azab, *Untitled* (detail), 2021

It wouldn't be summer without the cicadas. Unseen, but omnipresent, they feel like a fact. Their hum knows no end. It's a score that kneads time: prodding, squeezing, folding it upon itself until elastic, eventually doubling in size.

The chirping signals hot weather, days where the air is so dense that limbs cling to each other. On the warmest evenings, the cicada drone is capacious. We fall asleep within it, swallowed whole by the swarming chorus. Inside the hum, time takes on a different quality, an enduring present unfussed by alarms and calendars. Curled up in the hum, assumptions melt down like alloys. The body's knowledge goes unchallenged. Its experience, sacrosanct.

Within the cicada family, the Magicicada is a genus that is particularly discerning of linear, calendar time. Deemed a 'periodical species', they live underground for most of their lives. A protracted winter, surviving on nutrients from tree roots for stretches up to seventeen years, emerging for a six-week frenzy of proliferation. Their latency is a testament to choosing your moments.

Note: The exhibition's title, *the welling up which would not pass*, is inspired by psychoanalyst Lisa Baraitser's description of poet Denise Riley's non-linear experience of a time clouded by grief, in her book, *Enduring Time*, which considers the influence of emotional events on the psyche's perception of time.

Danica Pinteric (b. 1994) is a curator, writer, and editor based in Tkaronto/Toronto (Canada) working from an ethos of care, collaboration, and sustainability. Her writing has recently been featured by Stedelijk Studies (Amsterdam, NL), BAD WATER (Knoxville, TN), Nanaimo Ceramic Arts (Nanaimo, BC), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, NL) and Laurel Projects (Amsterdam, NL).



Nabii Azab, *Untitled (detail)*, 2021

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DRAC's mission is to contribute to the development of current artistic practices within a multidisciplinary framework that encourages the emergence of new knowledge, while giving a prominent place to partnership and collaboration projects as well as residencies.

By presenting accessible and quality works that resonate with local communities, DRAC conceives and offers mediation activities that contribute to the development of its audiences and the emergence of a community of practice in Drummondville.

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