

The inhabitants of Abu Al-Khassib in Basra call any land surrounded by two rivers “bab”; a door...

There is a fable that says that the villages and canals amidst the rivers and palm trees would shut at night with doors made of tree trunks and wood...

Who opens these doors?

And for whom?

...the guest arrives in a boat from the river...two giant mulberry trees, their intertwining branches frame the entrance, red and white berries fill the old courtyard, a slight breeze shakes the branches and some berries drop into the hollow of the boat.

As the guest approaches from the shore, berries crush under their feet, staining the surroundings. The water splashing the shore washes the berries and the horizon turns red.

Red water and red sun dissolve behind green branches, the earth moist with water from the shore, you hear its joy between your footsteps, perfumed air surrounds you, a bed of fronds and reed await you, you are the tired guest arriving, a carpet of grass spread under your feet...

Excerpts from “Before the Ruin of Basra: Biography of water and date palms”, Taleb Abdul-Aziz. Translation from Arabic by asmaa al-issa and Shawk Ayman.

يطلق الخصيبيون (سكان أبي الخصيب في البصرة) كلمة باب على الأرض المحصورة بين نهريين ...

هناك رواية قصيرة تقول بأن القرى والقصبات التي تتوسط النخل والأنهار كانت تُغلق في الليل ببوابات من جذوع وخشب...

ومن يفتح الأبواب هذه؟

ولمن؟

كان الضيف قد قَدِمَ من جهة الشط بقارب عشاري... شجرتا توت عملاقتان، تعاضدت أغصانها على مدخل الشريعة، التوت أحمر وأبيض، يملأ باحة المسناة، وحين هبت نسمة خفيفة سقط بعض منه في جوف القارب. عند اقترابه من الجرف ينمرد التوت تحت أقدام الضيف، فيصطبغ المكانز الماء بترداده على الآجر يغسل التوت فيحمر الأفق.

ماء أحمر وشمس حمراء تتملص مائعة من الغصون الخضراء، الأرض المرشوشة بماء المدّ، تسمع فرحها بين أقدامك، عطر يأتيك من حيث تحتسب، أريكة من جريد وقصب فارسي بانتظارك، انت القادم التعبان، وسجادة من عشب تنفرش تحت قدميك...

من كتاب (قبل خراب البصرة: سيرة الماء والنخل) لطالب عبد العزيز

400 meters west of the Esker Foundation is the confluence of the Bow & Elbow Rivers. A historic gathering place, significant to all indigenous nations of the region. Fresh water flows southeast from the mountains through the plains, nourishing the trees, grasses, wildflowers, birds and critters.

Standing attentive at the shore, I pick up autumn-dropped leaves, and thank the land for her generosity.

I wander, and arrive under the shade of the palm trees, seeking guidance from the past to imagine a revived future—one full of dates, bananas, mangos, apples, grapes, *mishmish*, *lalengi*, *nabug*, *tikki*...

Materials include: mulberry paper, starch paste, raspberry, birch charcoal, artist charcoal, digital print on paper, hydrostone, potter's plaster, woodland sage (*Salvia nemorosa*), mountain cornflower (*Centaurea montana*), catmint (*Nepeta*), hollyhock (*Alcea rosea*), blue grass (*Poa pratensis*), cut leaf weeping birch (*Betula pendula* 'Gracilis'), northwest poplar (*Populus jackii* 'Northwest'), blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), mountain pine (*Pinus uncinata*) & miscellaneous plants.

أسماء العيسى
asmaa al-issa

باب السوسة bab el-soosa

26 June - 15 October 2023
Esker Foundation Project Space

With deep gratitude to the land of the Treaty 7 region and its traditional stewards including the Niitsitapi (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Iyârhe Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations), and others who call this place home including the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.