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AGENDA, GENDER & SEXUALITY, TECHNOLOGY — 2 WEEKS AGO

AGENDA

At Dover Street Market, Paris, Greek philosophy and surveillance technology illustrate queer bodies

BOOKSHELF

by DALIA AL-DUJAILI

LATEST



Our conversation also looks ahead to Speaking in Dreams, opening this October at Compton Verney's Capability Brown-designed chapel in the UK. Rooted in her Eastern European heritage, folklore, and the crow's urgent symbolism, the installation drifts between waking and dreaming to confront the paralysis of modern anxiety. It will launch a multi-year collaboration with Compton Verney, expanding Mahr's multidisciplinary practice, spanning photography, sculpture, and immersive installation and deepening her ongoing exploration of identity, ritual, and impermanence. Dalia Al-Dujaili: What were the motivations for The Church of Our Becoming?

Yulia Mahr: Two things really came together. The piece is an immediate and visceral reaction to the UK

supreme court ruling on what defines 'woman' and 'sex'. I had completely the opposite reaction to those

celebrating the ruling. I felt dismayed by it. It seems honestly, to me, to be the past screaming at the future 'no, keep everything like it used to be'. As someone who has faced a lifetime of sexism, all I want to do is

the classical ideals of the human form through the unexpected intimacy of military thermal imaging. What

began as a visceral reaction to the UK Supreme Court's ruling on the legal definition of "woman" has become a luminous challenge to centuries-old binaries inherited from Greek statuary. Across thirteen

monumental portraits – trans, non-binary, cis, and fluid bodies alike – Mahr invites viewers to walk

among heat-rendered figures that radiate equality, plurality, and the shared fact of being alive.

to open up the definition of womanhood, and to advocate for a broad acceptance of humans, rather than to close it down.



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concept of beauty and worth.



military technology and thermal imaging particularly is formed by biases towards normative (and let's face it almost exclusively heteronormative male) assumptions. There's been some interesting writing on this by Toby Beauchamp in his book Going Stealth in relation to the trans community, where he writes about systems like ID checks, airport security and the like singling out trans and non-binary people 'as threats' whose bodies don't match normative expectations. Cal Biruk has written on fitness wearables and how they embody binaries and conventional metrics of progress. There's been similar work done on school surveillance programmes. It's clear that we have a severe misalignment between state-of-the-art tech and trans, non-binary and queer rights.

Military thermal technology is principally an instrument of dehumanising tendencies and is regularly used to identify people who are hiding at night or undercover via their heat signatures. I've been working with

investigating representation in lens based (film, photography) work. I started to use the technology myself

artistically as part of an auto-ethnographic project on my own childhood migrations (which had been

this technology since 2010. At the time I was involved in the world of social science, where I was

I started to imagine a work which might challenge this binary, not through confrontation, but through

intimacy. I wanted a story of rewriting, together and differently. A story of equality. A story of becoming.

DA: I'm very interested in the use of military or surveillance technology being subverted

technology in the lives or queer, trans and non-binary communities?

to portray queer bodies. Can you expand on this and speak to the role of surveillance and

YM: Technology, while seemingly neutral, is never neutral, especially in the hands of humans with all our

biases and the culturally ingrained stereotypes that we knowingly or unknowingly carry. Medical and

particularly traumatising for me). I just loved the idea of subverting this awful tool of domination into something that could create a thing of beauty, commonality and compassion instead.



this work too. We are all part of the divine. The monumental no longer has to serve nationalism,

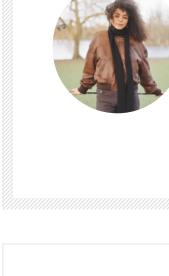
masculinity, or control, but becoming, softness, multiplicity.



TAGS: BLACK-AND-WHITE, COMPTON VERNEY, EXHIBITION, FASHION, FOLKLORE, FRANCE, HUNGARY, INSTALLATION, MAX RICHTER, MILITARY, MYTHOLOGY, PARIS, QUEER, SITE-SPECIFIC, THERMAL IMAGING, TRANS, DALIA AL-DUJAILI

The Church of Our Becoming runs until 24 August, 2025 at Dover Street Market, Paris. Speaking in

Dreams opens in October 2025 at Compton Verney, Warwickshire.



PREVIOUS ARTICLE

collective identity

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to Nowhere magazine and the author of Babylon, Albion. You can pitch to her at dalia@1854.media. daliaaldujaili.com

Aperture, Atmos, It's Nice That, Huck, Elephant Art and more. She's the founder of The Road

Dalia Al-Dujaili is the online editor of BJP and an Iraqi-British arts writer and producer based in London. Bylines include The Guardian, Dazed, GQ Middle East, WePresent,

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