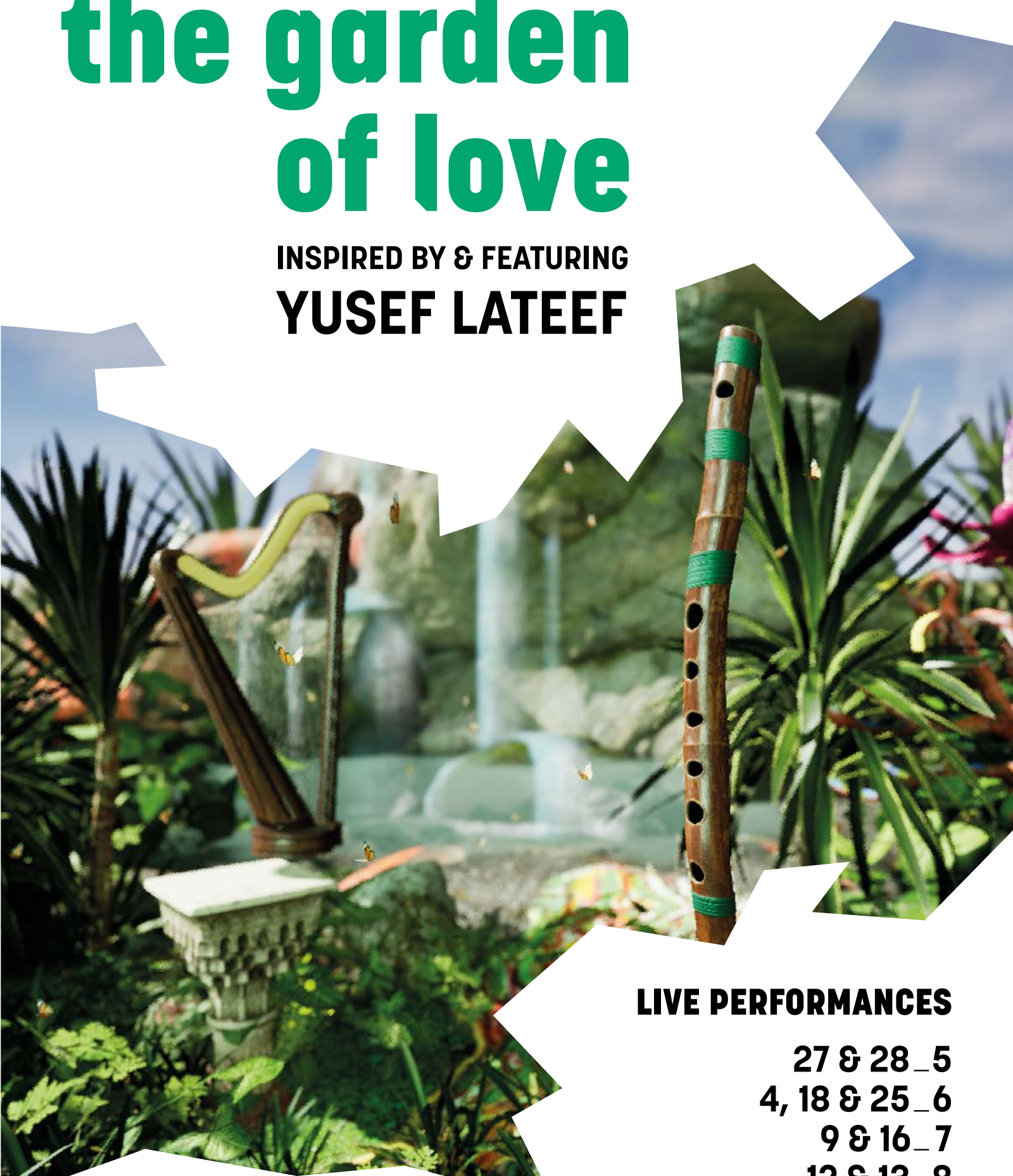


18\_05\_\_\_\_\_13\_08\_2023

**EN**

**Shezad Dawood**  
**Night in  
the garden  
of love**

**INSPIRED BY & FEATURING  
YUSEF LATEEF**



**LIVE PERFORMANCES**

**27 & 28\_5  
4, 18 & 25\_6  
9 & 16\_7  
12 & 13\_8**

**ELS WIELS WIE**

# Introduction

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Shezad Dawood is known for his exploration of non-Western traditions that inform and intersect with established canons, whether in the field of architecture or, as in this case, music. His playful, research-driven work encompasses many forms and media, breaking down the boundaries between the analogue and the digital.

In the new suite of works made for this exhibition, Dawood explores the poetic potential of the garden. In doing so, he connects to a trans-historical and cross-cultural tradition, ranging from medieval Christian iconography to Sufi mysticism and beyond. Dawood's garden takes us into the digital realm, exploring how – in these times of social fragmentation – technology can help us to imagine new forms of togetherness.

Dawood's inspiration for this metaphysical approach to the garden is a novella titled *Night in the Garden of Love* (1988), written by African-American musician, composer and polymath Dr. Yusef Lateef (1920–2013). Lateef pioneered the integration of world instruments to expand the boundaries of jazz traditions. Over time, he developed a methodology called Autophysiopsychic music. "It is about heightened consciousness and aims to activate the physical, mental and spiritual senses simultaneously," states Dawood. Aware of Lateef's music since his own youth, Dawood became fascinated with Lateef's ideas after seeing his drawings – a selection of which are included in this exhibition – and reading his novella. Dawood conceives this exhibition as a dialogue between his practice and Lateef's, like the call-and-response exchanges in musical improvisation.

Lateef's novella attests to the power of music in both its story and rhythmic written style. Dawood sees it as a forerunner to recent cli-fi: sci-fi exploring climate issues. "There are all sorts of portals within Lateef's novella, which moves from a dystopian future Detroit, into radical ideas of ecology and recycling," states Dawood. Investigating the garden as a site of optimism in the face of the climate crisis, Dawood proposes a poetics of environmentalism, exploring how art and music can awaken a new spiritual epiphany that can lead to change.

**Curated by:** Zoë Gray & Helena Kritis

## **Room 1**

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Filled with daylight, the first room of the exhibition is the day garden. It is inhabited by textiles that hang like celebratory banners or political flags through the space. These are new paintings by Dawood on vintage, patchworked textiles. Dawood's deconstruction of Western painting has long been central to his practice. The motifs that he depicts here – from the abstract to the figurative – are informed by the plants described in Lateef's novella and depicted in his drawings, as seen on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

In the centre of the room, Dawood presents an architectural intervention evoking the geometric forms of an Islamic garden. Inside, you are invited to enter the Virtual Reality experience that Dawood has created for this exhibition, based on scenes and ideas from Lateef's novella. It is a dual-player experience – a first for Dawood – in

order to offer the chance for exchange and interaction, rather than the isolation imposed by many VR experiences.

The VR experience immerses you in Lateef's garden of love, as reimagined by Dawood. It features a soundtrack of original recordings by Lateef released on his own label, YAL Records. As a crystallized, post-human avatar, you are invited to wander through different environments. You will also encounter the Mutant, a key figure in Lateef's novella, who dances through the landscape and leads you through the experience. The Mutant's choreography was developed by Dawood together with Brussels-based dancer Wan-Lun Yu and filmed in WIELS before being transformed by coders. A version takes place in real life on most Sundays of the exhibition, when the Mutant dances wearing the costumes otherwise presented on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

“For me, digital and physical media are fully interlinked,” states Dawood, elaborating: “If I'm thinking spatially, I'm editing; whether it's cutting up the fabrics that make up my textiles, literally



Shezad Dawood, *Night in the Garden of Love*, 2023. VR environment, duration variable, produced by UBIK Productions, co-commissioned by WIELS, Brussels and Aga Khan Museum, Toronto. Courtesy of UBIK Productions.

splicing analogue film or metaphorically cutting digital film. [...] I'm thinking through image, symbol, time, duration, fragments, echoes, and it's as much present in painting as it is in filmmaking." Not only does Dawood propose a doubling or slippage between the Mutant in the VR or in real life, he also invites you to move through digital space and through the physical space of the gallery, weaving between the hanging textiles, in an organic choreography.

## Room 2

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The second room is shrouded in darkness, evoking the night of the exhibition's title. It features seven screens, each with the sound of an individual instrument. These come together in the space to compose an experimental soundtrack lasting two hours. The tracks were recorded in January 2023 in New York, where Dawood brought together several of Lateef's former collaborators. Together they recorded an improvisation session following Lateef's Autophysiopsychic methodology, a philosophy of "playing music from one's mental, physical, spiritual self."

The installation is titled *Digital Seedbanks*, evoking the seed collections which exist to preserve a diversity of DNA for future generations. On each screen grows a different type of plant, for example: a fern, a succulent, a tuber. The plants are not only the result of Dawood's visual imagination, but the coding process in which rules and boundaries are set to establish *how* these plants will grow following an algorithm based on Lateef's music. Dawood is pushing both the limits

of credulity (how crazy can a form become and still be read as a plant?) and the boundaries of how Artificial Intelligence (AI) reacts to music.

In the centre, a seven-sided bench invites you to relax in this night garden, as you watch the plants grow. It also acts as the plinth for a new ceramic vase, whose glazed surface features patterns connected to Lateef's drawings and Dawood's paintings. The ceramic contains a new, unique scent, especially created for the occasion. Not all of the plants referenced by Dawood and Lateef have a discernible scent. So, Dawood conceived this fragrance with the help of Headspace technology (first developed in the 1970s to capture the scent of flowers that could not be converted into essential oils), and using the AI database of the fragrance company Firmenich. Named *Xyloflor* – an invented, mutant word that fuses wood (*xylon*) and flora – Dawood's scent traverses the digital and natural world.

# Room 3

The panorama room is painted the same colours as Dawood's architectural interventions on the floor below, its vivid chroma key green – or digi-green – used in VR programming. The two costumes on display are designed by London-based fashion label Ahluwalia, created by upcycling fabrics from Dawood's textile archive. This continues their previous collaborations focused on a mutual interest in integrating costume into contemporary dance and repurposing textiles. Priya Ahluwalia, founder of the brand, draws inspiration from her Indian-Nigerian heritage as well as her London roots for her designs, which repurpose deadstock and vintage materials in factories that employ rural women and pay fair wages. The costumes are worn by the aforementioned Mutant, who appears in the VR and in real life at regular intervals throughout the exhibition.



Shezad Dawood, *Night in the Garden of Love*, 2023. Performance rehearsal, Choreographer and Dancer: Wan-Lun Yu. Costume: Ahluwalia. Image: Miranda Sharp. Courtesy UBIK Productions

# Room 4

Forming the heart of the exhibition, this room presents drawings by Yusef Lateef selected by Dawood, together with Ayesha Lateef, Lateef's widow, and Alhena Katsof, Curatorial Advisor for the Estate of Yusef Lateef. Exhibited for the first time outside the USA, these original works depict constellations of plant- and tree-like forms that hover between figuration and abstraction, often evoking musical notation.

Katsof curated an exhibition of these drawings at White Columns in New York in 2014, the first to take place following Lateef's death. Dawood saw the exhibition and became fascinated by Lateef's practice, beginning a conversation with his work which has led – almost a decade later – to this project. Katsof wrote at the time: "Lateef drew in the same room where he composed at his piano for over forty years, surrounded by instruments he collected from across the globe." A virtuosic wind musician and vocalist, Lateef "activated some of this technique in his works on paper by pouring small puddles of ink onto the page and then blowing through a straw to spread the liquid."

Reviewing the 2014 exhibition for *Frieze*, Joseph Akel noted that Lateef's mix of automatic drawing and contingency recalled André Masson's surrealist-inspired techniques, as well as Joan Miró's works on paper. "And, like Miró," wrote Akel, Lateef's abstract forms "have a distinctly organic feel to them, with spindly tendrils and amoeba-like shapes populating his compositions;" concluding: "Lateef's drawings are music for the eyes."





Yusef Lateef, *Untitled*, N.D. Pen, ink and pastel on paper, 55.8 × 76.2 cm. Private Collection of Ayesha Lateef. Courtesy of the Estate of Yusef Lateef and White Columns, New York.

# Biography

## Shezad Dawood

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Shezad Dawood (b.1974) was born in London, where he lives and works. He studied at Central St Martin's, the Royal College of Art and Leeds Metropolitan University. Dawood is a Senior Research Fellow in Experimental Media at the University of Westminster. Selected solo exhibitions include: Barakat Contemporary, Seoul (2023); Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (2021); Kai Art Center, Tallinn (2020); New Art Exchange, Nottingham (2020); The Bluecoat, Liverpool (2019); MOCA, Toronto (2019); FriezeLIVE, London (2019); Kunstverein, Munich (2019); Rubin Museum of Art, New York (2018); Fondazione

Querini Stampalia, Venice (2017); Pioneer Works, Brooklyn (2015); Parasol Unit, London (2014). Selected group exhibitions include: Folkestone Triennial (2021); Guggenheim, New York (2021); Southbank Centre, London (2020–21); *Risquons-tout!*, WIELS (2020); Manifesta 13 (2020); Lahore Biennial (2020); Dhaka Art Summit (2020); Sharjah Biennial 14, (2019); Gwangju Biennale, (2018); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2016); MOMA, New York (2015); Taipei Biennial (2014); Marrakech Biennial (2014); MACBA Barcelona (2014); Busan Biennale (2010); Tate Triennial, London (2009); Venice Biennale (2009).

# Credits

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## Virtual Reality

Coders & 3D design: Monochrome

Choreography and Mutant dancer:

Wan-Lun Yu

Tracks: *Daydream*, *Phase Transition*, *Instrumental Ritornello #1*, *Monadic Adventure*, *Instrumental Gospel*, *Saturday Morning*, all tracks composed by Yusef Lateef for YAL Records and published by Spirit One Music Crescendo obo Alnur Music (BMI).

Musical trio: Mia Theodoratus (harp), Adam Rudolph (slit drum), Ralph Miles Jones (bamboo flute)

Voices: Ilham Tamet (Arabic & French), Huan Mus (Portuguese), Batya Sobel, Gwen Laster & Ralph Miles Jones (English)

Film footage: Robbrecht Desmet, Ruben Desiere, Lennert De Taeye

## **UBIK Productions**

Miranda Sharp, Laurie Storey, Karolina Svobodova, Inês Geraldes Cardoso, Kaia Goodenough

## **Digital Seedbanks**

Soundtrack Composition & Arrangement: Adam Rudolph, Alexis Marcelo, Ralph Miles Jones

Musicians: Adam Rudolph, Alexis Marcelo, Ralph Miles Jones, Batya Sobel, Matt Waugh, Gwen Laster, Mia Theodoratus, Stephanie Griffin

Sound Engineer: James Dellatacoma

Coders: GumGum Studio

Scent: Nicolas Bonneville, Firmenich & Olivia Bransbourg of Iconofly

Ceramic vase: Shezad Dawood in collaboration with Ofumum

## **Performance**

Choreography & Dance: Wan-Lun Yu

Costume sculptures: Ahluwalia

## **WIELS Interns**

Yehbonne Bien, Miriam Coppola, Rebecca Parma

## **PARTNERS**

**The exhibition and its outreach programme are generously sponsored by GBL.**

**Thanks also to the Ekard Collection, Firmenich, Jhaveri Contemporary (Mumbai) & Barakat Contemporary (Seoul) for their support.**

**Special thanks to the Estate of Yusef Lateef: to Ayesha Lateef for her ongoing support and enthusiasm, and to Alhena Katsof whose initiative and guidance helped make this project possible.**

**The exhibition is produced in partnership with the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto.**

## **EVENTS**

### **Live Performances:**

27 & 28.05

4, 18 & 25.06

9 & 16.07

12 & 13.08

### **Look Who's Talking: Helena Kritis <sup>(NL)</sup>**

Sun. 28.05, 14:30

### **Look Who's Talking: Zoë Gray <sup>(FR)</sup>**

Sat. 17.06, 15:30

### **Artist talk: Shezad Dawood <sup>(EN)</sup>**

Tue. 20.06, 19:30

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Image credit: Shezad Dawood, *Night in the Garden of Love*, 2023. VR environment, duration variable, produced by UBIK Productions, co-commissioned by WIELS, Brussels and Aga Khan Museum, Toronto. Courtesy of UBIK Productions.

