



Saad Ghosn, H. Steven Moffic, and Ahmed Zakaria Hankir

Editor's Statement

Perhaps it was serendipity when I, Dr. Moffic, came to view the artwork of Saad Ghosn, M.D., M.P.H. In the early stages of putting together this book on Islamophobia, I, as a very amateur visual collage artist of sorts, happened upon some of the work of Dr. Ghosn while perusing a magazine devoted to artists, known as “the artist’s magazine.”

On the cover was a reference to one of the articles described as “Prints as Propaganda for Peace and Social Prosperity.” That seemed to be paradoxically suggesting that propaganda could be used for the good, for positive psychology and psychiatry, if you will.

Turning to the editor’s statement, it said that “Saad Ghosn creates Woodcut prints promoting peace, equality and justice among humankind” [3]. Just what we wanted to convey in general in our book, I thought.

Saad Ghosn is the Founder of “SOS (Save Our Souls) Art” and editor and publisher of the yearly *For a Better World, Poems and Drawings on Peace and Justice by Greater Cincinnati Artists*

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Quickly moving on to the article itself, the images right away cut to my emotional quick [1]. The subtitle said that “in Woodcuts of simple, yet powerful design, Saad Ghosn decries injustice and exposes the pain of both psychic and social isolation.”

Who was Saad Ghosn? Was he a Muslim? Was he addressing Islamophobia? No, he wasn’t directly or intentionally, as I found out, yet my unconscious thought so.

Reading the article, I found out that Saad Ghosn was a retired medical physician, just like me. He was born and educated in Lebanon, just like one of our book’s co-editors and contributor to this chapter, Ahmed Zakaria Hankir, M.D. Such serendipity couldn’t be ignored, at least in the sense of the Jungian collective unconscious connections.

The article describes him as Greater Cincinnati’s Thomas Paine, that is, America’s first visual propagandist. His political work began after the 9/11 terror attacks in the form of Woodcuts. He began using the concept of terrorism as a metaphor for poverty and political repression.

Woodcuts seem to have a particular ability to express emotions, such as in the case of screams. One of his prints shown in the article, “Scream of a Broken Dream” (see Fig. 7.1), portrayed circles within circles of Arabic text, seemingly going nowhere. Dr. Ghosn’s accompanying text states:

“For many who have selected America as their adopted country for all the values it once represented, the American dream is broken and torn apart daily. Perceived initially as a land of freedom, opportunity, tolerance, and happiness, the America they live in is increasingly the land of inequality and disparity, injustice, subversive material domination, condoned political lies.”

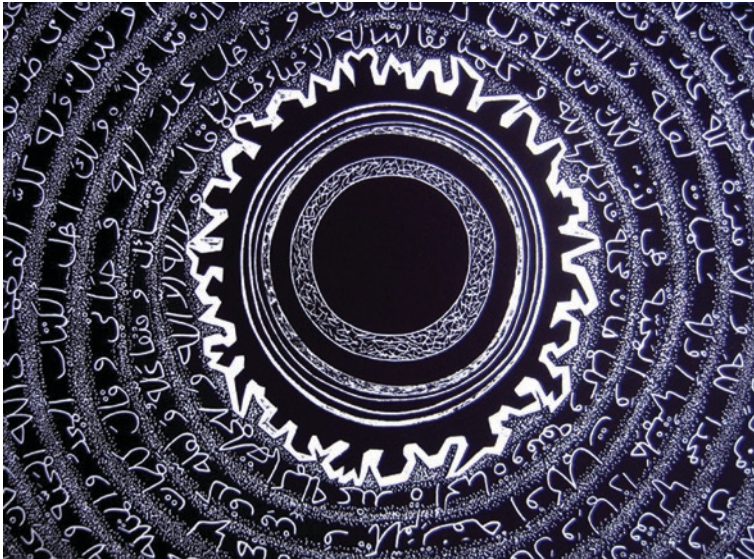


Fig. 7.1 Scream of a Broken Dream. Woodcut print; 22×30”

The Woodcuts of figures seemed designed to represent the “isolation of those not in the American mainstream.” Could that be translated into what many Muslims feel in America?

After being further moved by the article, I had to contact Dr. Ghosn himself, if not only to see if his work could have a place in this book, but to get to know this unusual healer who combines the compassion and skills of a physician with the imagination and skills of an artist. So began a series of e-mail interchanges, during which Dr. Hankir also became involved. Here are some of the initial interchanges, beginning with my outreach to the magazine publisher:

Dr. Moffic (October 3, 2017): “I just read the most moving article in “the artist’s magazine” on the work of my fellow retired physician, Saad Ghosn. I am currently editing a book on Islamophobia and Muslim Mental Health, and had the idea that perhaps his artwork could be included in some way.”

Dr. Ghosn (October 4, 2017): “Yes, I will be happy to consider including some of my relevant images in your book. Please tell me a little more about it and how you would see my images included ... My prints do not relate specifically to Muslims but are meant to be universal. Many have an Arabic allusion since I am originally from Lebanon and that during the Bush’s ‘war on terror’ Arabs became the focus of prejudice, and it has not stopped since, but of course the current prejudice against and stereotyping of Muslims makes the images quite relevant.”

Dr. Hankir (October 8, 2017): “Our mutual friend Steve informed me that you are an artist, academic and physician and that you might be interested in contributing a book chapter on challenging Islamophobia through the power of art. I am more than happy to offer you any assistance and support that you require... I was fortunate enough to launch an anti-stigma program a few years ago that blends the performing arts with psychiatry and the feedback that we received from audiences (particularly students) throughout the world has been exceptionally positive.”

Dr. Ghosn (October 8, 2017): “My personal artistic work and the work I do through my charitable organization SOS (Save Our Souls) ART focuses on promoting the arts as vehicles for peace and justice in general; and in this respect the general issue of prejudice is something I would tackle.”

Eventually, this interchange led to another collaborative endeavor, wherein we all provided our perspectives creating this chapter, followed by the Woodcuts which may convey an infinite number of words.

Contributor’s Statement

As a clinician and academic who has a research interest in pioneering and evaluating innovative programs that challenge mental health related stigma and Islamophobia through the power of the performing arts, I could not help but be intrigued by Dr. Moffic’s introductory description of Dr. Ghosn and his creative work. Even before entering a direct communication with Dr. Ghosn, I could sense that there was a kindred spirit between us not only because we both believe in the healing power of art but also because both hail from “the heart of the world.” Dr.

Ghosn's images transcend time and place; as a proud British Muslim who has been a victim of Islamophobia, it brings me tremendous comfort to behold and experience Dr. Ghosn's artistic expressions through the medium of imagery which, I am sure, will be appreciated for many generations to come. When Islamophobia causes a deafening silence that cannot be stifled by words, may Dr. Ghosn's artistry offer you solace and a means of escapism. His precious contribution, without a doubt, has improved the quality of our book and for that we are immensely grateful.

Artist's Statement

Art can add beauty to the world, as well as celebrate the beauty and the positive that already exist. But also, and more importantly, when it is truthful, art reflects the artist, who the artist is, what she/he believes, and her/his own vision of the world. Art can then function as a force of sensitization and of change regarding what happens in the world. The artist becoming an active, concerned, and engaged participant in the partaking of a better world points to what needs to be changed (flaws and imperfections) as well as imagines and creates the alternative, showing how change and improvement might be brought about. As Ernest Fischer wrote in 1959 [2]:

Art is necessary in order that man be able to recognize and change the world... In a decaying society, art, if truthful, must also reflect decay ...art must show the world as changeable. And help create it.

But what is art? Art is a creative process where the artist uses imagination and skill to bring to life something new and beautiful or to express important ideas or feelings. As a creative expression, it represents an integrative activity that involves the entirety of the individual and during which the artist's experience, intuition, emotions, mind, soul, vision, beliefs, values, views, exploration of truth, and search for beauty all merge together. As such, true art is artist-centered, free to dismiss outside rules and regulations, transcending the immediate moment, the here and now, the material, the conventional wisdom, connecting to the spiritual.

This creative act allows the artist to bring to life a new form, original to the artist and reflective of the artist's self, thought, imagination, and inner self. It does not merely transmit what the artist thinks but also allows the creation of a new possible world that the artist dreams of. Genuine creativity transcends the final product; it becomes embodied in it, the product an expression and a reflection of the creator and of the process. As a result, art acquires a "subversive" and potent quality and becomes an influential tool for a change. The artist, being a creator, and in a way god-like, adds to the creation that already exists.

When art is at its most authentic, it implicates, engages, and reflects the artist. It transcends the material form and ceases to be only for the sake of art itself, or for the

sake of a consumable object, the commodity product that society often expects or even imposes on the artist. It becomes for the sake of the artist, reflecting who the artist is, connected to her/his experience, vision, values, and life path. It becomes the artist's emerging voice, to assert the artist and her/his original identity, to strengthen the artist's voice, to empower and heal the artist, and to reach normalcy and harmony within her/himself and with the surrounding world. Art becomes also the artist's communication tool to touch, inform, dialogue, confront, and trigger emotions.

Though being for the artist's sake, the artist does not function in isolation. She/he lives a daily experience in the society/community where she/he is, communicates, and works. As a result, the artist's creative activity connects her/him to life in general and to the social, political, and spiritual. Art thus becomes for the sake of life in general.

Through the artist's voice, art reflects what is taking place, what needs to be changed, and how to reach the full potential of humanity. Art becomes an active pageant in the ongoing processes of life. This creative, godly quality given the artist implies an ongoing duty and responsibility of the artist not only to commit fully to her/his own work but to confront injustices and to work for peace and contribute positively to creating a better world.

By creating art, artists not only empower themselves and contribute to their own growth and harmony but also engage viewers who respond to their work, resonate with it, are moved or challenged by it, who discover a new possible world, thanks to it, and who are led into thinking and action by it. Art becomes the important, powerful, and motivating communication tool of the artist to change and recreate this world and make it better.

Artists have a distinct advantage through their art, thanks to its free and unlimited creative imagination to transcend established norms, to function outside the boundaries of conventional thought, and outside the framework of traditional society. Through their art, artists can open doors to what can be dreamt, to a utopian world of beauty, different values, and beliefs, to a better world that can be made real.

The Art

We're living an increasing age of profiling and discrimination where an individual is judged based on his looks, clothes, beliefs, the color of his skin, etc. In the USA recently, being Arab or Muslim has been another reason for being suspect (Fig. 7.2).

My print addresses discrimination and prejudice which frame and imprison individuals in preconceived clichés and stereotypes, taking away their freedom and their real identity (Fig. 7.3).

The beauty of diversity should bring enrichment and tolerance to our world. Unfortunately, in our righteous society, racial, ethnic, and religious differences are often causes for discrimination, denigration, separation, isolation, prejudice, enmity, etc. (Fig. 7.4).



Fig. 7.2 Issme Arabee (My Name Is Arab). Woodcut print; 22×30"

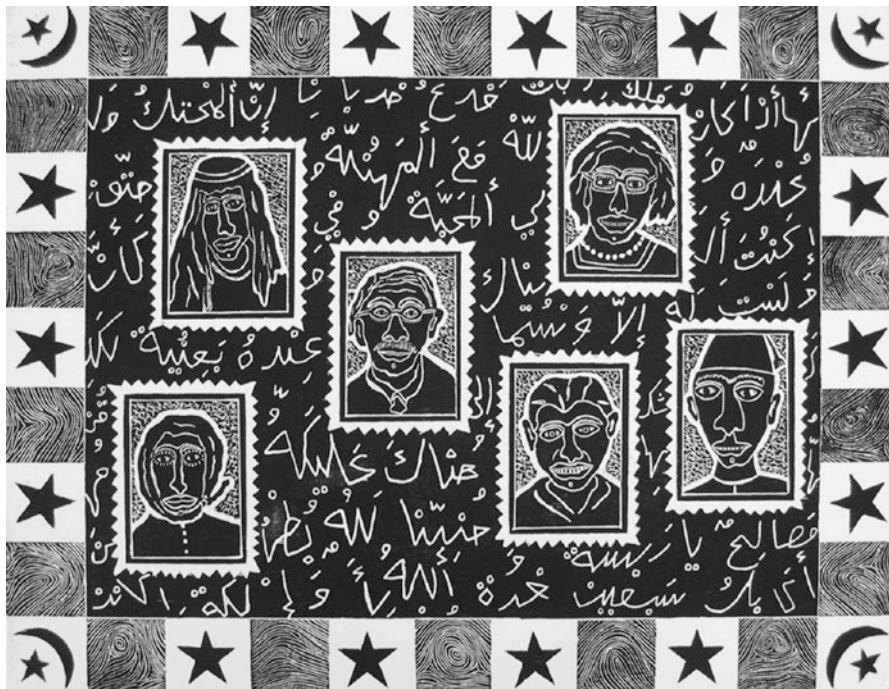


Fig. 7.3 You Are What You Look. Woodcut print; 22×30"



Fig. 7.4 Faces of Races. Woodcut print; 22×30"

How large is the freedom space of these “free,” non-caged, birds, facing persistent obstacles? In America “the land of the free,” we take pride in our “freedom,” while in reality we are daily prisoners of our many lacks and imposed limitations (poverty and striking economic disparity, lack of universal health care, lack of free and equal education, gender, racial, religious and ethnic discrimination, etc.) (Fig 7.5).

John Doe is a target of terrorism, not the terrorism brought upon by foreign “terrorists” but the one he lives daily: lack of human rights (education, health, environmental protection, etc.), lack of privacy and of freedom of expression (secret surveillance, unjustified arrests, patriot act, etc.), poverty, discrimination, etc. (Fig 7.6).

In a world of violence and injustice, one often feels like a helpless observer, an impotent witness to a course gone astray, to belief values trodden upon, to dominating and destructive violence impossible to control and stop. One feels badly in need of active arms to stop the bullying, the circle of despair. Alas, most of the time one feels powerless (Fig. 7.7).

My works address issues of societal injustice, violence, discrimination, and abuse of the vulnerable and the weak. In “We See Nothing, We Hear Nothing,” I point to our deliberate ignorance and dismissal of the wrong around us in order to protect, preserve, and not disrupt our own privileges and comfort (Fig 7.8).

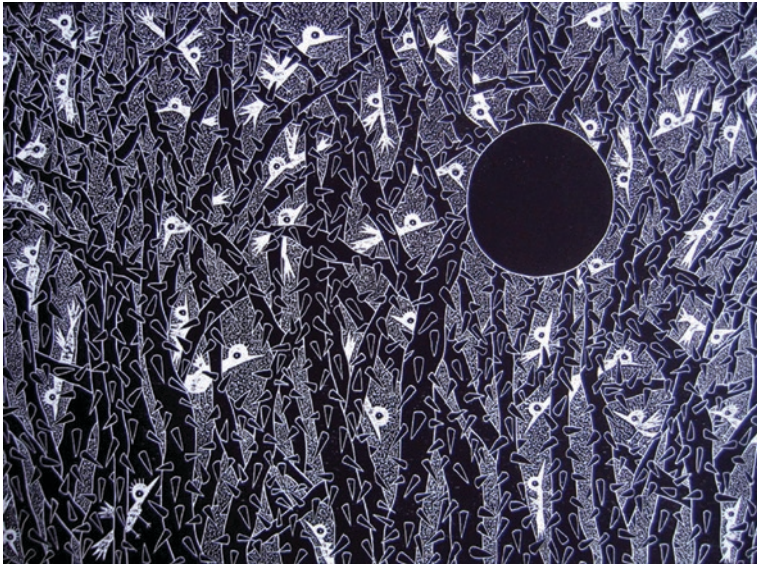


Fig. 7.5 In the Land of the Free. Woodcut print; 22×30"

Fig. 7.6 John Doe. Woodcut print; 30×22"



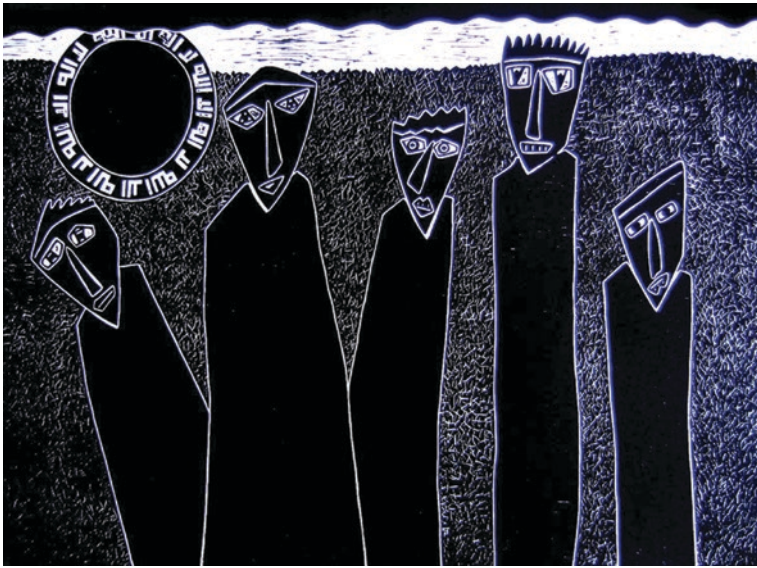


Fig. 7.7 Impotent Witnesses. Woodcut print; 22×30"

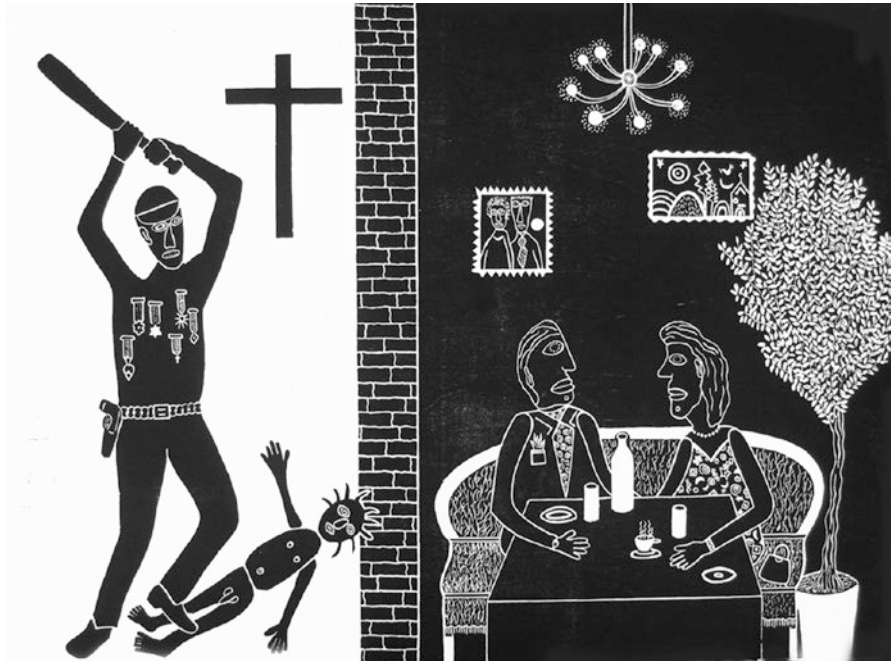


Fig. 7.8 We See Nothing, We Hear Nothing. Woodcut print; 22×30"

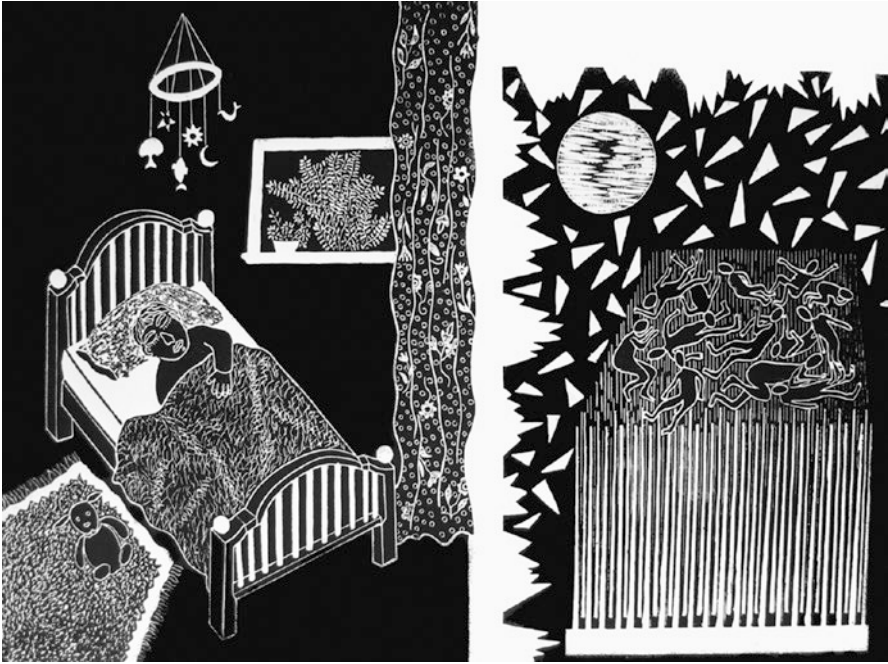


Fig. 7.9 Beds and Beds. Woodcut print; 22×30"

In our society and world, inequality, unfortunately, often starts in a child's bed. Some children have very early on a bed of comfort, while others a bed of nails. These life experiences have a major influence on who we are and what we do. In addition to being cognizant of the unjust disparity of the types of beds that people may grow in, we need to be nonjudgmental, always aware of, sensitive to, and compassionate about the type of beds others have slept in (Fig. 7.9).

My three collages deal with the issue of prejudice, generally born from the fear of the different and of the unknown. Our differences, however, should be viewed as sources of richness; they contribute to the diversity and to the beauty of the world. We're all here together, each an essential and important link, adding harmony and well-being to the circle of life (Fig. 7.10).

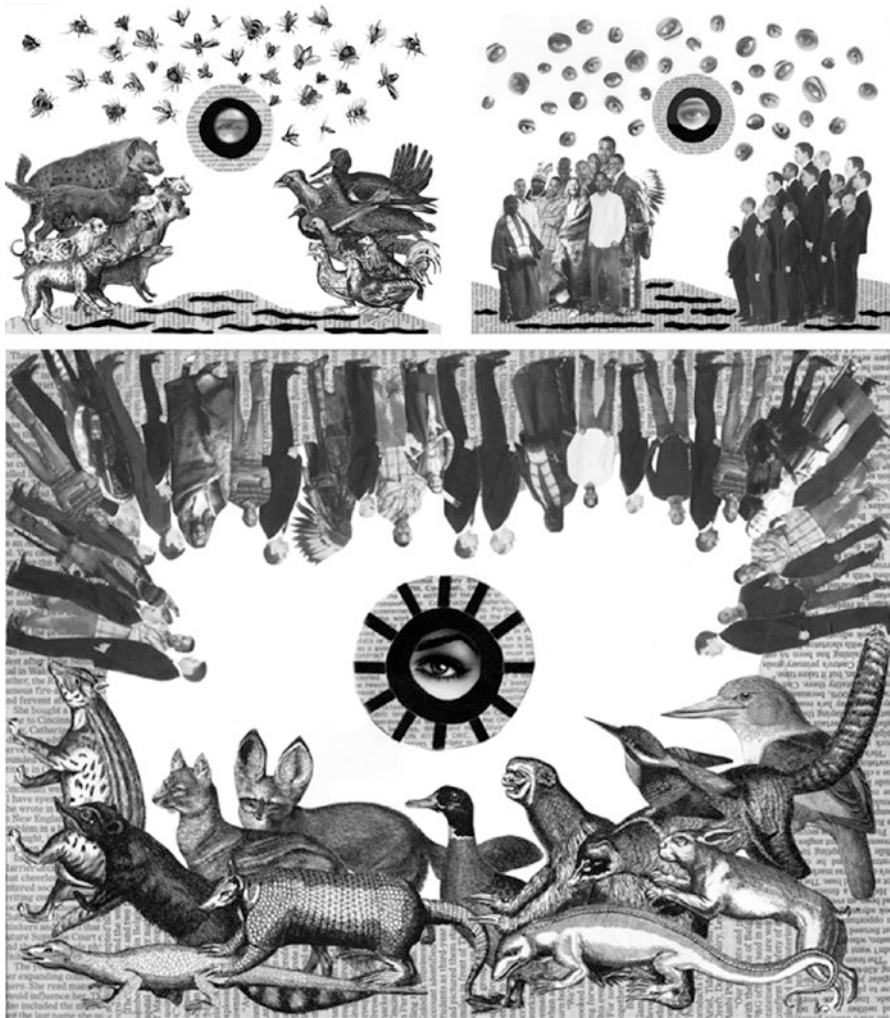


Fig. 7.10 Who Are You, #1; Who Are You, #2; We Are. Collages; each 9.5 × 12.5"

References

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2. Fischer E, Bostock A (translator). *The necessity of art*. Verso: New Edition; 2010.
3. Gormley M. Changing hands. *Artist's Magazine*. 2017 October. p. 4.