

*Portraits***Tahmina Negmat**

16th March, 2024 - 20th April, 2024

There were three sittings. For the second one, I was falling for someone and by the third it was over. I was dreading being in that same position again, already not recognising who I had been at the previous sitting. 'We are always changing anyway' was the banal answer he'd given me. Maybe these are the two parts of my face, one that dreams and the other that sees the real.

'When you're moved, you do this with your hand.

Really?

Yes.

And when you are embarrassed, you bite your lips. And when you are annoyed, you don't blink.

You know everything.

Forgive me, I'd hate to be in your place.

But we're in the same place. Exactly the same place. Come here. Come. Step closer. Look. If you look at me, who do I look at? When you don't know what to say, you touch your forehead. When you lose control, you raise your eyebrows. And when you are troubled, your breath through your mouth.'

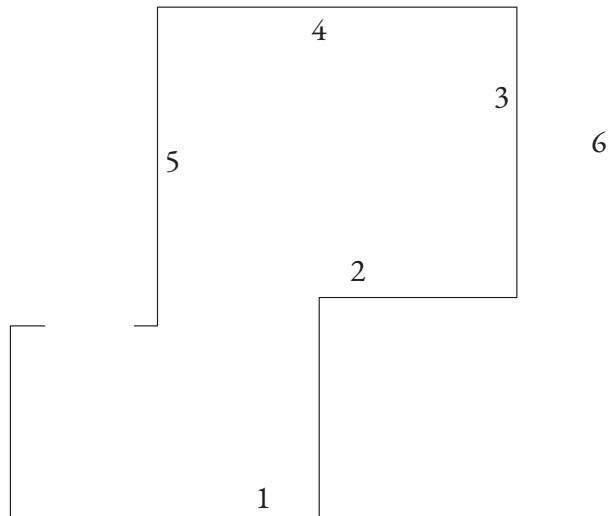
I had never sat for anyone and did not know Tahmina well. I was curious to see what she would make of me, also hoping I would be able to look at her paint. In *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* by Celine Sciamma, Marianne paints Heloise. Towards the end of the film, a secret in plain sight is revealed, all along, while Marianna paints, Heloise has been studying her too.

When I asked Tahmina where to look, she said I should turn my gaze to the side. I was a little gutted.

I arrived with a bunch of grapes and my book of Patti Smith "Just kids", ready to get naked, pose and eventually read. Tahmina offered me a tea, but she just had one mug. We shared around two hours, mostly talking about family, grief and love. While she was priming the fabric, I had to look at her eyes. Sometimes, I felt really uncomfortable, so I decided to focus in between her eyebrows. It felt unique to create an intimate contact without touch.

Tahmina is eating noodles out of a paint container. There is music coming from her phone, she asks if I have any objections to Steely Dan. I say something like 'I love Steely Dan..' She quotes a song title to me, I've never heard of it. Our sitting is going well, there are comfortable silences as she is drawn into the paint periodically, her eyes tracing the canvas. My mind is still as she moves between the canvas and the palette and then to me. Time seems to have lost all meaning until a Youtube advert breaks the peace, I am a little gutted.

My head is a chemical can,
I never lie, you never know.



Work List

1. *Neil (Boy with no skin / Happy boy)*, Oil on leather and felt, 60 x 100 cm, 2024
2. *Daniel (angelic boy with sadness in his eyes)*, Oil on canvas, 30 x 42 cm, 2024
3. *Freddie (and His Frogs)*, Oil on leather, 60 x 81 cm, 2024
4. *Barbara (Woman in Love)*, Oil on felt, 74 x 106 cm, 2024
5. *Jazbo (as King Philip the 4th of Spain)*, Oil on leather, 62 x 86 cm, 2024
6. *Anna (la Reina)*, Oil on felt, 50 x 60 cm, 2024