



Stéphanie Saadé, *The Encounter of the First and Last Particles of Dust*, 2019, carpet, embroidery, 11' 1/8" × 11' 1/2".

Stéphanie Saadé

GREY NOISE

Using artifacts and recollections from her childhood, Stéphanie Saadé has developed a rich conceptual practice that is not just analytic or linguistic, but also affective, engaging both memory and forgetting. Her recent exhibition “The Encounter of the First and Last Particles of Dust” presented a series of visual and material propositions for recording temporal and spatial experiences—alternatives that acknowledge the importance of what other modes of mapping and measuring fail to capture. The journey, a type of lived experience that unfurls through both time and space, was a recurring theme.

The show opened with *Elastic Distance*, 2017, a smartphone displaying a changing number that quantified, without specifying the measure used, the distance between Saadé and her exhibition in real time. Symbolically tethering the artist to her work, it also abstracted the

physical gap between them into data, its hollow objectivity failing to reveal what that separation might mean or even feel like. Nearby, *A Necklace of Found Beads*, 2014–19, was a work in progress, with twenty-five round beads on an eighteen-karat-gold chain; the beads were meant to be added to until their number coincided with the artist's age. The process enacted an uneasy equation between the erratic frequency of a chance encounter and the calendrical measure of life. The necklace's individual units opened up to countless other narratives. Was each part a cheap trinket or a treasured heirloom? Was it lost or intentionally discarded? Can and do the beads hold remnants of their lives before Saadé found them?

Suspended from the ceiling, the exhibition's titular centerpiece, from 2019, was a large, somewhat dingy blue-gray carpet that originally covered the floor of the room Saadé lived in, as a teenager, from 1995 to 2001 in the mountains outside Beirut. Embroidered in gold thread, jagged lines of varying lengths precisely trace eighteen of the most significant journeys she took during that time. While a particular repeated stretch suggests a route frequented from either necessity or habit, the lack of accompanying cartographic information renders the lines nonspecific, almost universal, transcripts of embodied trajectories reconstructed from memory. This period, following the end of the Lebanese Civil War, was marked by a gradual return to normalcy and increasing movement across a previously fractured nation. Branded with a series of specific but ultimately inaccessible itineraries, the dust-laden carpet serves as a mute material witness to a formative period for artist and country, characterized, in both cases, by growing freedom and autonomy.

Dust, literal and metaphoric, was presented as an alternative unit for measuring time and space, as the exhibition's almost cosmological title suggested. For *Accelerated Time*, 2014–18, Saadé broke a vase into ever smaller pieces, reducing some of it to a chalky white powder, speeding up a process of physical degradation that might otherwise have taken centuries. The resulting dust was presented as the fundamental trace of any material entity, animate or inanimate. It is the very medium of time, marking temporal unfolding through deposition and accumulation, whether visible or not. And dust appeared in and as an image in *Digiprint*, 2019, an enlarged photograph of the artist's smartphone screen that reveals the greasy fingerprints, smears, and scratches left on its surface through use. These dusty marks are forensic evidence of a banal yet intimate encounter with technology. Decoupled from their intended effects, the habitual swipes and taps produce a monochromatic gestural abstraction,

an entirely analog accumulation of incidental embodied traces of transit through our increasingly digital worlds, a journey charted by a palimpsest of touches rather than a line on a map.

— Murtaza Vali

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