

Lisa Mara Batacchi

Sand Storms in Medio Mundi

Shamal Sand Stone Stars

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Text by Federica Forti

8.11 – 13.11.2022 - Dubai Design Week

Among the many civilizations of the past, there is a reference to the Zoroastrian-Mazda one that focuses on the cult of nature and on a dualistic vision: good / evil, human / inhuman, spiritual / material. (Lisa Batacchi)

In a world where we can replace our physical presence and be constantly connected, will we restart traveling on the basis of old, yet completely new, time and space patterns? What will be the temporary architecture of travel? In the wake of new technological frontiers, will our clothing be made of smart fibers capable of feeding and caring for us? Will we be able to give up quantity without renouncing beauty? Will we be able to reconnect to heaven and earth?

It is not a coincidence that just this year, after a half-century of work, land artist Michael Heizer has completed his installation *City*, a visionary architecture reshaping the desert. Inspired by ancient pre-Columbian, Egyptian and Native-American constructions, the mega sculpture offers a visionary stage to reflect on a post-human world (R. Pepperell, 2005) and rethink projects like *Nüwa City on Mars* by ABIBOO architects.

A new important chapter is opening today in Dubai with the support of Polimoda: it is part of an ongoing and ambitious project by Lisa Mara Batacchi, an established visual artist and former Polimoda student.

The first step of the project was *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi*, created during the pandemic with the support of the Goethe Institute of Baku (Azerbaijan) and Tblisi (Georgia) for the group show “Silk”,

curated by Alfons Hug, that opened during the 59th Venice Biennale *The Milk of Dreams* curated by Cecilia Alemani.

The work – two tapestries manually woven by the artist on a loom – was supposed to be created during a residency in Baku. Unable to move due to the Pandemic, Lisa Mara decided to combine Eastern thoughts and studies with the great Italian tradition for handmade craft. The artist worked with the restorers of the prestigious Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, founded by Ferdinando I de' Medici (1549-1609 Florence). Women and local communities holding a tangible and intangible heritage, contaminations between the artist and the artisans in a mutual exchange of ancient skills and creative visions, solutions combining hand-making and conceptual thinking.

Following the ancient tradition of prayer rugs, the tapestries are “cloud-portals” inviting to an introspective reflection but also to a connection with the Celestial Kingdom through the reference to *Medio Mundi* in the subtitle, inspired by a passage from *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (1960) by Henry Corbin. In this book, the author explained the existence – in the ancient Persian culture – of an intermediate world between the sensible and the intellectual, heaven and earth, to which man aspired to ascend.

Today we present *Shamal. Sand Stone Stars*, the second step of the project. Produced for the Dubai Design Week-Design With Impact, this site-specific environmental installation includes *Sand Storms In*

Medio Mundi and invites the public to embark on an ancient journey into the future, traveling at light speed, yet carefully observing those details that the sand may hide, reveal and suddenly conceal.

The upheavals of Nature and the restlessness of current times - so fragile, precarious and emotionally chaotic - are visually translated by the artist into the image of a sand storm. Shamal is the hot, dry and dusty wind blowing from the northwest over Iraq, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula. Lisa Mara is wishing for a possible positive regeneration in the aftermath of extreme events such as a sand storm: the rebirth of humankind for the sake of a greater spirituality and harmony.

In the urgency of the times we live in, among environmental, political, social and health crises, our security as humankind is more and more precarious and the gap between us and the other living species, us and the Planet, is evident. As a result, we need to go back to an ancestral contact between heaven and earth, between man and planet, between the Earth and the other planets.

Shamal. Sand Stone Stars offers the opportunity for an intimate and reflective moment for us to imagine our future life on Planet Earth through open questions. But it also aims to be a hub for exchange and sharing during the Design Week.

Shamal. Sand Stone Stars draws inspiration from the ancient ruins of Caucasian architecture, but it is also intended to create a mystic aura that allows the viewer to imagine future scenarios by entering its light fabric structure.

Inside are two precious tapestries, *Meditating on Earth* and *The World is so far Reversed*, manually woven by the artist who has used only raw and naturally dyed yarns (coffee, artichoke, tea), including some lacquer silks dating back to the 1930's.

You will embark on a “journey” through the precariousness of existence and its traces: the ephemeral fabric architecture is hanging, seemingly floating upward or downward at the mercy of a storm. But you will also experience the grandiosity of humankind who can create beauty and splendor.

Last but not least, a message calling for a reconnection with the divine, the supernatural, through the tapestries and their cloud-portal medallions, as well as for a return to “seeing the stars” (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Inferno, XXXIV canto, line 139), a reminder that it is “love that moves the sun and the other stars”, quoting one the most famous journeys in world culture.

Light can be (re)found through love that should unite people, not by making them all equal, but by preserving their social and cultural identities. These same ideas currently form the core of the 2030 Agenda and are incorporated and endorsed by Dubai, Creative City of Design, along with Polimoda who has just signed an agreement with the United Nations to support future generations towards a sustainable future in fashion industry.

At the heart of Lisa Mara Batacchi's research lies the exchange between cultural heritages to be preserved, just as you can see in these ochre-colored, irregularly textured tapestries, inspired by the sand continuously changing its form but not its appearance. These works are reminiscent of archaeological finds, slow erosions, wars, climate change, globalization.

1 *Shamal Sand Stone Stars*, site specific installation for Design With Impact, Dubai Design Week, promoted by Polimoda, 2022
Lacquered threads (with a silk core), natural silks of various origins, ramie, steel structure, 436 cm x 436 cm x 400 cm high
sound installation: *Middle East Poems #1, #2, #3* by the pianist Stefano Maurizi

2 *The World Is so far Reversed*, 2021-2022, tapestry, lacquered yarns with silk core, silks from various sources, ramie, raffia, 162 x 170 cm

3 *Meditating on Earth*, 2021-2022, tapestry, lacquered yarns with silk core, silks from various sources, ramie, raffia, 110 x 148 cm

Shamal Sand Stone Stars

Site Specific installation for *Design With Impact*, Dubai Design Week, (UAE)

promoted by Polimoda, curated by Federica Forti, 2022



Shamal Sand Stone Stars (Drawing), watercolor 70x100 cm on watercolor paper, 2022

Dubai Design Week Opening

The artist in conversation with Kate Berry, director of Dubai Design Week and Her Highness Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairperson of Dubai Culture & Arts Authority (Dubai Culture), 2022





Installation view of Shamal. *Sand Stone Stars* together with the tapestries from the series *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (Meditating on Earth)*, Dubai Design Week 2022



Installation view of *Shamal*. *Sand Stone Stars* together with the two tapestries (*Meditating on Earth*) & (*The World is so far Reversed*) from the series *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi*, Dubai Design Week 2022



Shamal. Sand Stone Stars, site specific installation, Dubai Design Week 2022



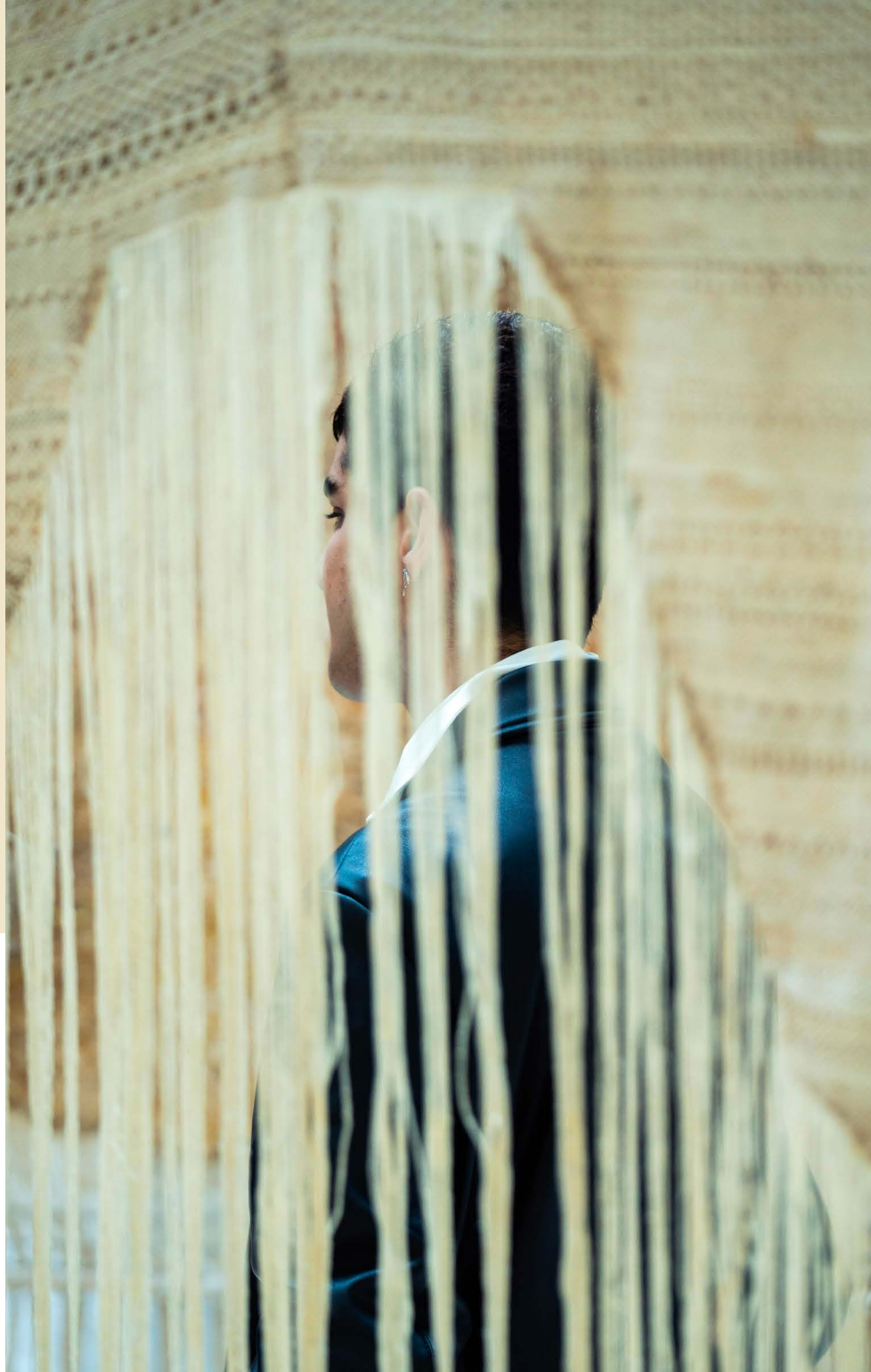
Installation view of Shamal. Sand Stone Stars together with the two tapestries *Meditating on Earth & The World is so far Reversed* from the series *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi*, Dubai Design Week 2022



Detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (Meditating on Earth)* within *Shamal*. *Sand Stone Stars*, installation view, Dubai Design Week 2022



Detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (The World is so far Reversed)* within *Shamal. Sand Stone Stars*, installation view, Dubai Design Week 2022



A viewer walking inside *Shamal*. *Sand Stone Stars*, Dubai Design Week 2022



A spectator walking inside *Shamal*. *Sand Stone Stars* and view of *Meditating on Earth* tapestry from the series *Storms in Medio Mundi* (seen from its back side), Dubai Design Week 2022



Detail of *Shamal*. *Sand Stone Star*, Dubai Design Week 2022



Detail of *The World is so far Reversed* tapestry from the series *Storms in Medio Mundi* (seen from its back side) within *Shamal. Sand Stone Stars*, installation view, Dubai Design Week 2022



Installation view of *Shamal. Sand Stone Stars* together with the two tapestries *Meditating on Earth & The World is so far Reversed* from the series *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi*, Dubai Design Week 2022

Sand Storms in Medio Mundi I- III

Text by Alessandra Tempesti

13.06 – 28.07.2024 - Lottozero, Prato

Sand Storms in Medio Mundi is a work that has evolved over time, drawing on experiences from previous travels of the artist (from the Gobi steppes in Mongolia to the desert dunes in Egypt, Azerbaijan, Arab Emirates), as well as literary and philosophical influences. A work that required the slowness of the laborious, drawn-out process of weaving, which the artist approached as a self-taught artist before surrounding herself with a community of expert weavers and restorers who taught her the tapestry technique.

Lisa Batacchi was fascinated by the historic textile artifacts that attest to the exchanges and contaminations of cultures and traditions on the Silk Road routes, so she chose to devote herself to hand weaving, developing a series of tapestries in dominating ochre, the color of sand in the desert.

The storms mentioned in the title, in addition to being natural cataclysms that have buried temples, monasteries, minarets, and entire civilizations along these trajectories that have ploughed through Eurasia for more than a millennium, are also a call for a “storm of the spirit” that can generate new arrangements in a world devastated by wars, climate change, massive globalization, and the prevarication of humankind over other species.

Lisa Batacchi's research is characterized by a spiritual tension, which has led her to investigate the subtle forces and connections between sky and earth. It is that intermediate world between the sensible and the intelligible that Henry Corbin, a philosopher and Orientalist who inspired the artist, describes as a middle ground to be explored with the power of creative imagination.

- 1 *The Spirt will Return to Us*, 2023-2024, tapestry, lacquered yarns with silk core, silks from various sources, ramie, raffia, 145 x 220 cm
- 2 *The World Is so far Reversed*, 2021-2022, tapestry, lacquered yarns with silk core, silks from various sources, ramie, raffia, 162 x 170 cm
- 3 *Meditating on Earth*, 2021-2022, tapestry, lacquered yarns with silk core, silks from various sources, ramie, raffia, 110 x 148 cm

The artist is guided by the image of a sandstorm, borrowing the shapes of the medallions that occupy the center of Persian carpets, concentric and symmetrical figures envisaged as windows leading onto another, otherworldly realm.

The tapestries inscribed within these medallions contain symbolic motifs and references to spirituality rooted in ancient religions like Zoroastrianism.

The first piece created, *Meditating on Earth*, introduces the concept of earth (one of the five elements according to Taoist philosophy) as the project's central focus. The triangles created of brocaded weaves, one facing north and the other upside down to the south, represent the dichotomy between good and evil, yin and yang, positive and negative, extremes of an earthy, feminine energy field used to try to govern the sandstorm.

The cross depicted in the center of *The World Is so far Reversed* suggests a more masculine and rational character, alluding in the title to both the upheaval of today's world and the possibility of another storm, one that may change humanity's fortunes, not necessarily in a negative way. The final work in the series, *The Spirit Will Return to Us*, appears to resolve oppositions and dualisms through the concentric movement produced by the pole star in the center, from which four directions, or petals, shoot out in an infinite and timeless circularity.

Sand Storms in Medio Mundi is a metaphorical image of an essentially earthly state, rendered precarious and fragile by the crises disrupting the current world, but charged with a tension of spiritual elevation.

It is no coincidence that the project follows *The Time of Discretion* (2016-2021), a multi-year research project that brought the artist into contact with an ethnic Miao community in southern China's Guizhou province, where she learned first and foremost the value of discretion, also known as an act of dedication without end, an expanded time that opens up spaces of freedom, collaboration, solidarity, and co-creation. Consequently, via a shared life experience with the women of the community, she was able to become more acquainted with their culture and traditions, learning the techniques of batik and indigo dyeing.

If there it was the blue of indigo that guided her research, orienting it toward the element of the sky, here it is the ochre of raw silk, scattered like sand in every inch of fabric, that gives the element of earth body and materiality. Over the years of labor at the loom (first shared and then individual), this becomes a performative and contemplative act in which the prolonged time of discretion continues to lend depth and meaning to an artistic practice based on encounter and relationship, radical poetic gestures of the present.

* Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Heavenly Earth*. From *Mazdean Iran to Shiite Iran*, (1960), Adelphi, Milan, 1986.

** The works *Meditating on Earth* and *The World Is so far Reversed* were made with the support of the Goethe Institute of Baku (AZ) and Tbilisi (GE).

Sand Storms in Medio Mundi

The Spirit Will Return to Us, 2024





Lisa Mara Batacchi, installation view, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Lisa Mara Batacchi, detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (The Spirit will Return to Us)*, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Lisa Mara Batacchi, Installation view, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Lisa Mara Batacchi, detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (The Spirit will Return to Us)*, installation view, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Detail of the back part of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (The Spirit will Return to Us)*, installation view, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi* (*The World is so far Reversed*), installation view, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Lisa Mara Batacchi, detail of the back part of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (The World is so far Reversed)*, installation view, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Lisa Mara Batacchi, detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (The World is so far Reversed)*



Lisa Mara Batacchi, detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (Meditating on Earth)*, installation view, Kunsthalle Lottozero, 2024



Lisa Mara Batacchi, detail of the tapestry *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi (Meditating on Earth)*

SILK

Text by Alfons Hug

21.04 – 20.07.2022 - Giudecca Art District, Venice

More than 10 000 years ago goats and sheep were first domesticated in the Caucasus and Mesopotamia ushering in a sophisticated tradition of carpet making and textile art as well as laying the foundations for human settlement, culture and civilization.

Textile art continues to be very important until today in many countries of the region between the Caspian and the Mediterranean Seas. For centuries, women in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Balkan countries and the Caucasus have passed on the tradition and art to their children. The intricate designs and materials used in carpets make it an elaborate art. Silk-printing was a very important product of manufacture in the Caucasus region, of which the silk factory and especially the silk museum in Tbilisi as well as the Carpet Museum in Baku serve as testimonies.

In textiles the history of trade and industry has resonated since ancient times, and fabrics reflect the ever changing conditions of global production. At the same time they give insight into social practice. But they are also an aesthetic realm with their own poetic potential.

At the same time the project revisits the western part of the old Silk Road which started in China and ended in Venice. Our exhibition approaches the Silk Road as a poetic resonance chamber and positive myth where ideas, technologies and artifacts are exchanged and “traded”, rather than merely merchandise. Venice is an iconic city not only for the Silk Road but also for the century old trade and cultural exchange with the Orient. Rather than insisting on contemporary conflicts and frictions, the exhibition which will be shown in the Caucasus later invites the public to reflect on common heritage and artistic excellence.

Faig Ahmed is well known for his conceptual works that transform traditional decorative craft and the visual language of carpets into contemporary sculptural works. His art reimagines ancient crafts and creates new visual boundaries by deconstructing traditions and stereotypes.

Nino Kvrivishvili produced two handwoven tapestries, that tell the story of their making in the now defunct Soviet textile industry. Numerous studies for these tapestries were created and later transformed into woven pieces. The titles of the simple, abstract weavings AISI and DAISI (Sunrise /Sunset in Georgian) reference the names of the fabrics produced by the Soviet era Georgian silk industry.

Based on the principle of fragmented tapestry, puzzles or patchwork, **Araks Sahakyan**’s drawings made with markers on paper are made up of dozens of A4 format free sheets on which the artist has brought together snippets of her personal memory, itself punctuated by multiple trips.

In **Lisa Batacchi**’s latest installation a melancholy vein prevails, as if trembling while waiting for a new predominant ideology that could initiate a subsequent human cycle on earth, thus facing the current ideology of progress understood as a machine insatiable of available energy.

“I wish you were a mulberry tree leaf and me a silkworm“ is the Georgian poet’s quote that **Olaf Nicolai** prints on posters that depict silkworms. The artist has done extensive research in the iconic Silk Museum of Tiflis which is a huge archive of old photographs,

objects and handicraft. The museum’s general state of disrepair serves as an ideal study for contemporary art for which the ruin has always been a privileged realm.

Artists:

Faig Ahmed (Azerbaijan)

Lisa Batacchi (Italy)

Nino Kvrivishvili (Georgia)

Olaf Nicolai (Germany)

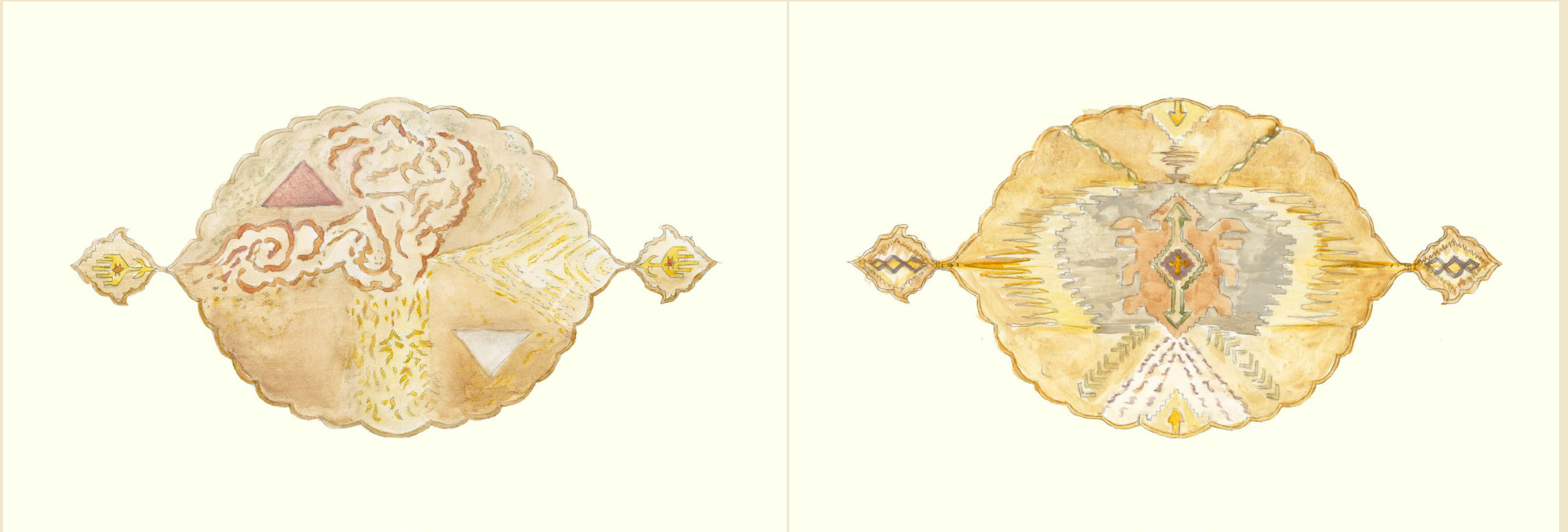
Araks Sahakyan (Armenia/France)

Sand Storms in Medio Mundi

Meditating on Earth & The World is so far Reversed

Two tapestries promoted by the Goethe Institut of Baku (AZ) and Tblisi (GE)

for *SILK* exhibition curated by Alfons Hug, during the 59.Venice Biennale, GAD - Giudecca Art District, 2022





Meditating on Earth, detail of the tapestry



Installation view, *SILK* exhibition curated by Alfons Hug during the 59.Venice Biennale, GAD Giudecca Art District



Meditating on Earth, detail of the installation



The World is so far Reversed, installation view, *SILK* exhibition curated by Alfons Hug during the 59.Venice Biennale, GAD - Giudecca Art District



The World is so far Reversed, detail



The World is so far Reversed, detail

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