

CARESSING WALLS

2021-2022

P O R
T F O
L I O

tanger, engo, burn

ESMERALDA KOSMATOPOULOS

"In caressing the Other, I cause her flesh to be born beneath my caress, under my fingers."

— **Jean-Paul Sartre**, *Being and Nothingness*

Caressing Walls

Caressing Walls explores touch through the boundary that simultaneously separates the self from the world and makes contact with it possible. Throughout the series, skin and walls function as parallel surfaces: both protect an interior, both communicate through their exterior, and both can be caressed, marked or damaged. Rather than imagining intimacy as the dissolution of distance, the works consider separation as the condition through which one body can encounter another.

Across sculpture, photography, installation, language and light, the series moves between flesh and architecture, physical presence and representation, desire and prohibition. Hands extracted from historical paintings finally touch; traces left during lovemaking become bodily landscapes; biblical metaphors pass through fruit before reaching skin; philosophical language relocates existence from thought to sensation. The wall never remains a neutral support. It becomes skin, border, page and luminous surface. Together, the works approach touch as a reciprocal event: the gesture through which something outside the self becomes perceptible, while the self simultaneously experiences its own vulnerability, materiality and limits.

Toccati da

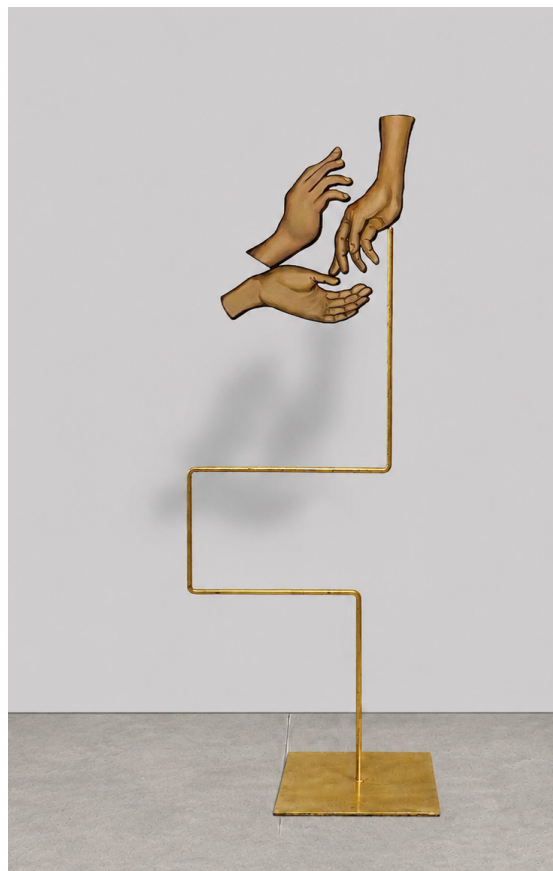
2022, Wood, egg tempera, metal and gold leaf

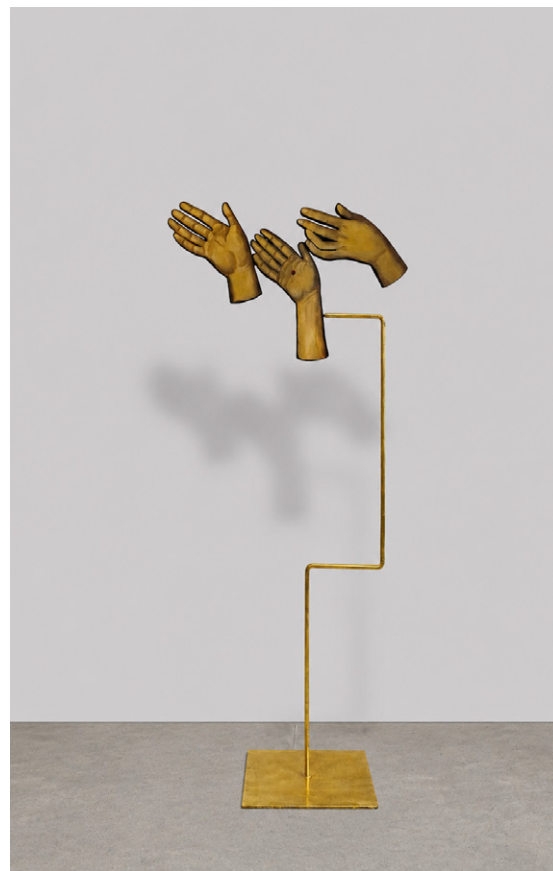
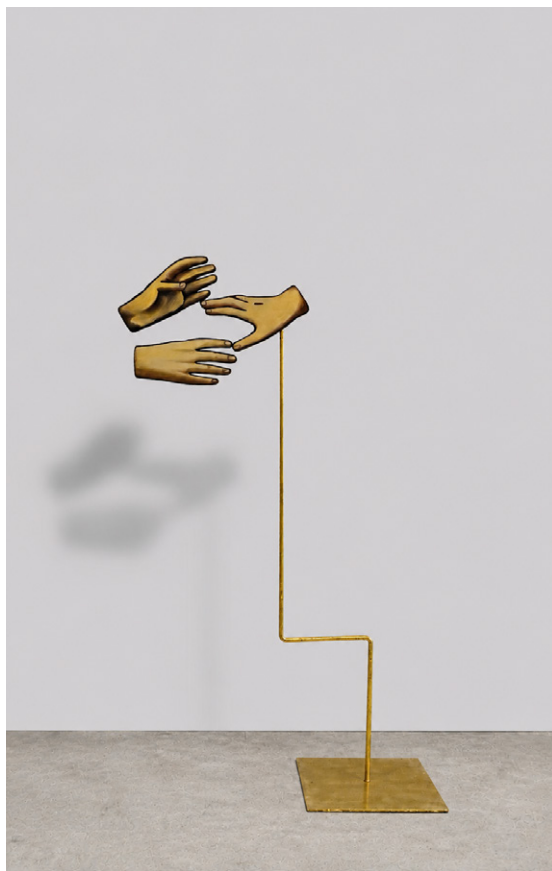
Toccati da examines the boundary between the image of a body and its physical presence. The work revisits six Italian representations of the *Noli me tangere*, in which the resurrected Christ appears to Mary Magdalene but forbids her to touch him. From these historical paintings, Kosmatopoulos removes the figures, landscapes and religious settings, retaining only the hands through which the interrupted encounter is expressed.

The original gestures remain unchanged, but their positions are shifted until the hands finally meet. Extracted from the pictorial plane and reconstructed as three-dimensional sculptures, the bodies are reduced to the parts through which contact becomes possible. The distance maintained within the image is replaced by a material encounter between two surfaces. At the point of contact, each hand becomes simultaneously touching and touched, recalling Merleau-Ponty's understanding of touch as a reversible experience. What was visible but physically inaccessible acquires weight, surface and resistance. The work therefore transforms the biblical scene without illustrating another ending: what the image held apart, sculpture brings into physical relation.









Noli me tangere

2022, Neon

Noli me tangere transforms a biblical prohibition into a luminous spatial command. The phrase—traditionally translated as “Do not touch me”—is spoken by the resurrected Christ when Mary Magdalene recognises him and reaches towards his body. The injunction can also mean “Do not hold on to me,” introducing a distinction between the momentary encounter of touch and the desire to retain, possess or prevent the Other from leaving.

Written in white neon across a gold-leaf wall, the words occupy the space once reserved for the sacred figure. The body has disappeared, leaving only the boundary it established. Gold recalls the radiant grounds of religious icons, while neon shifts the intimate command towards the public language of signs and warnings. Yet the light contradicts the sentence it carries: although the words refuse contact, their glow spreads across the wall and enters the viewer’s space. The work therefore stages a boundary that cannot entirely contain its effects. Within *Caressing Walls*, the prohibition becomes a condition of relation: approaching another body does not grant access to it, and touching does not mean holding.



Inhabit Your Body

2021, Enlarged photographs, fabric, poetry fragments and materials recovered from demolition sites

Inhabit Your Body returns love from the language of emotion to the physical experience of the body. The photographs record marks left by the artist on her partner's skin during lovemaking. Enlarged until the body can no longer be recognised as a complete figure, these traces become landscapes of pressure, colour and abrasion. Love is no longer described as an interior feeling; it appears as an event materially inscribed upon the skin.

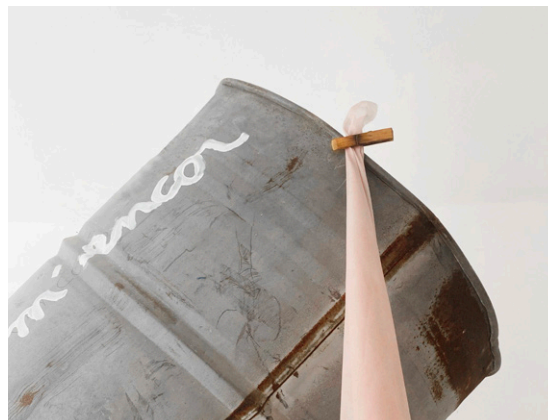
Combined with fragments of poetry and materials recovered from demolition sites, the photographs establish a correspondence between body and architecture. Skin becomes the wall of the body: the surface through which another person can reach us, but also the boundary that prevents two beings from becoming one. Erotic intimacy intensifies the desire to overcome this separation—to enter, absorb or inhabit the beloved—while simultaneously revealing the impossibility of complete fusion. Bricks, mesh, fabric and fractured construction materials give this desire an architectural form. The work does not treat separation as the failure of intimacy. It presents the limit between two bodies as the necessary condition through which touch, desire and relation can exist.





Baise m'encor, rebaise-moi et baise

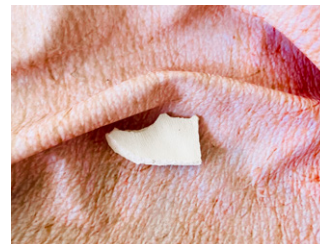
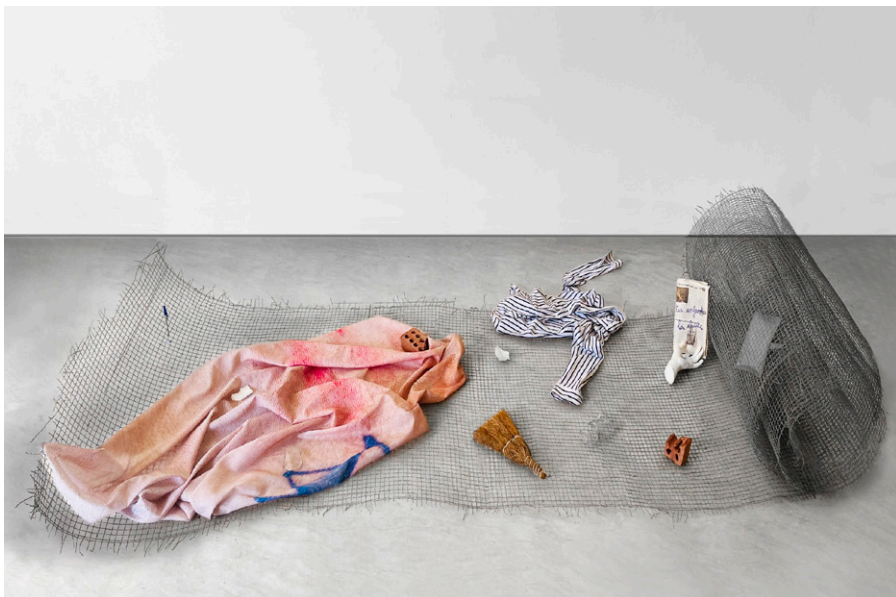
Metal, digital print on fabric, paint



tu nous brules

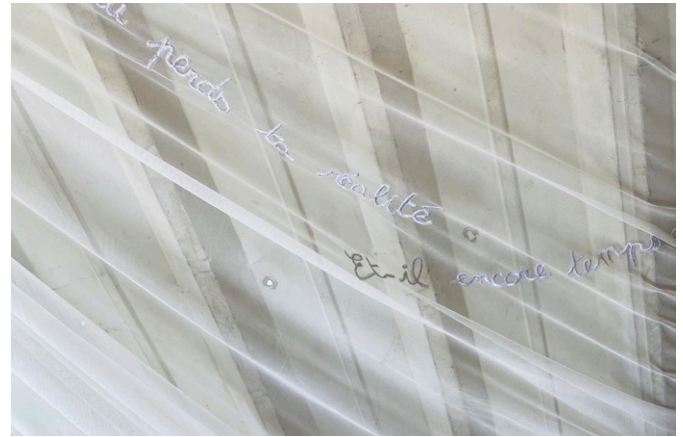
metal, digital print on canvas, bricks, ash





Toi la seule et j'entends les herbes de ton rire

Metal, digital print on fabric, bricks, glass, paper, straws



j'ai tant rêvé de toi

Metal, concrete, paster, embroidery on tulle

La nature à l'homme

Metal, bricks, paint, digital print
on canvas





Fleurs du mal
Metal, paint, digital print on canvas,
bricks, ash



La mort l'amour la vie

Metal, concrete, plaster, dirt, glue,
wood, digital print on canvas



je vis, je meurs

Metal, digital print on fabric, bricks, rope



la chaire des choses

Metal, digital print on fabric, bricks, paint





Puisqu'il le faut

Wood, digital print on fabric,
bricks, light bulb



le dedans d'un mur

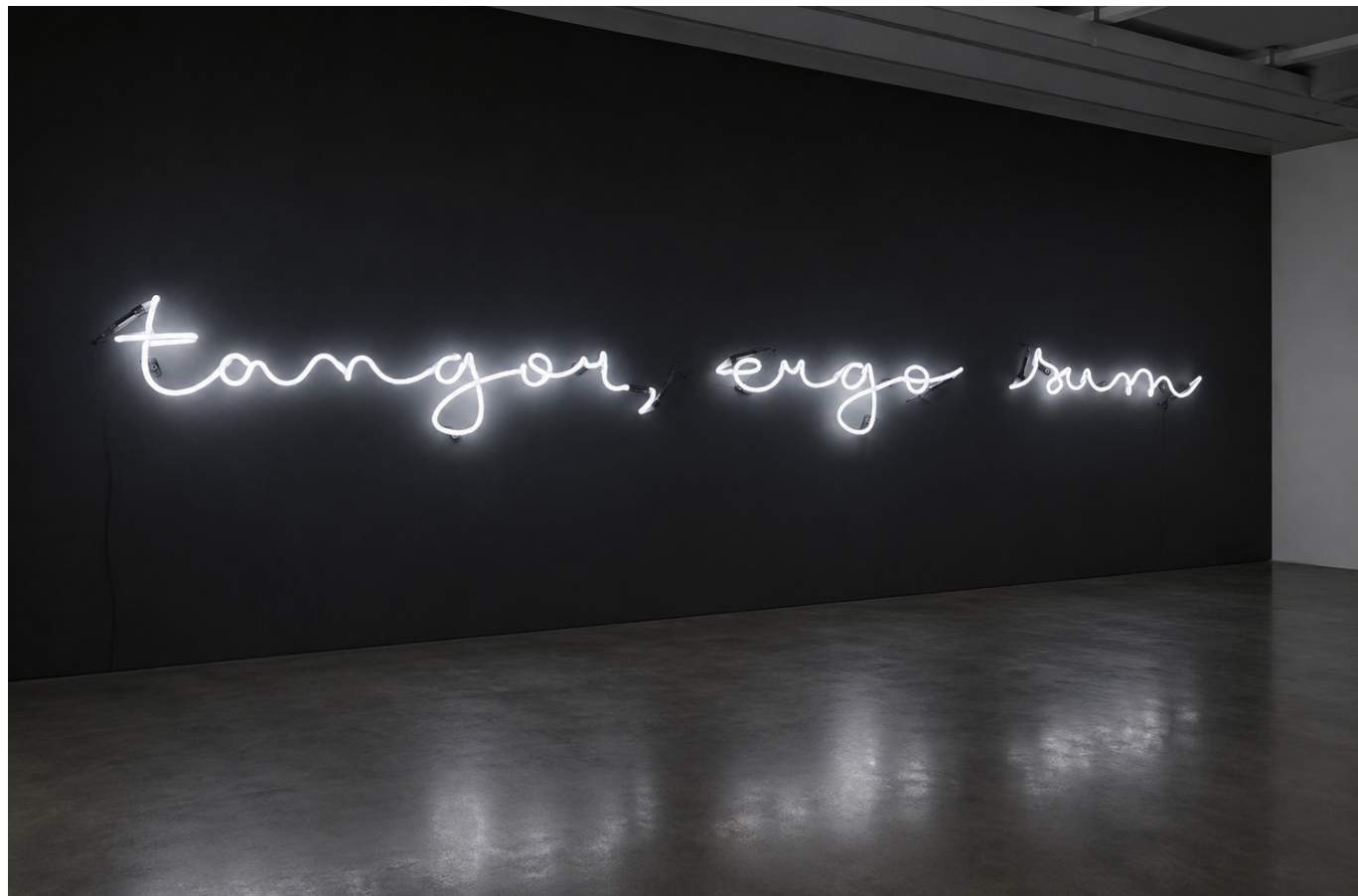
Bricks, metal, digital print on fabric,

tangor ergo sum

2021, Neon

Tangor ergo sum — “I am touched, therefore I am” — relocates existence from the certainty of thought to the vulnerability of the body. Reworking Descartes’s Cogito ergo sum, Kosmatopoulos replaces the active certainty of thinking with the passive experience of being touched. Existence is no longer established by an autonomous mind reflecting upon itself, but experienced through a body exposed to something outside its control.

The proposition begins not with an action performed by the self, but with an encounter that happens to it. Another body or surface reaches the skin, confirming both the presence of an external reality and the self’s existence as sensitive matter. This reciprocity recalls Merleau-Ponty’s touching-touched body: the hand that touches simultaneously discovers its capacity to be touched. Rendered in neon, the sentence becomes physically present while remaining impossible to grasp. Its light crosses the boundary of the wall and enters the viewer’s space, touching without possessing a tangible surface of its own. The work proposes relation — not isolated thought — as the condition through which embodied existence becomes perceptible.



Canticum canticorum meum

2021, Series of Archival print photographic triptychs

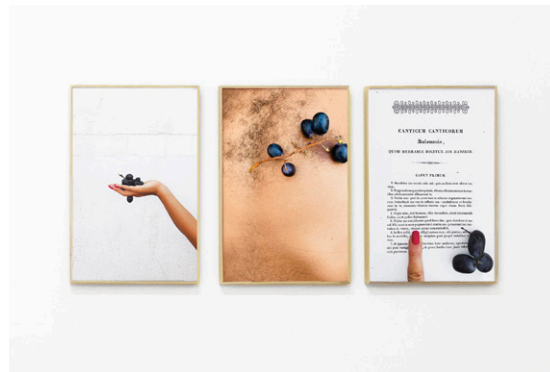
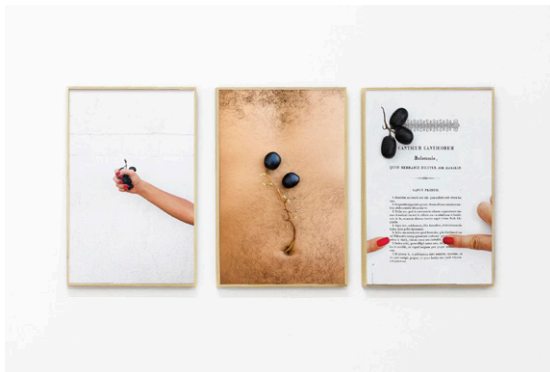
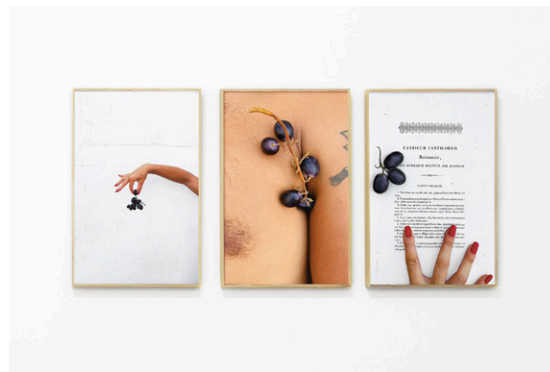
Canticum canticorum meum transforms the erotic metaphors of the biblical Song of Songs into a sequence of physical encounters. Although the ancient poems describe the desire shared by two lovers, sexual touch is rarely named directly. Instead, intimacy passes through pomegranates, grapes, apples, figs, honey, milk and wine. Food becomes an intermediary between language and the body, allowing desire to be imagined through taste, texture and consumption.

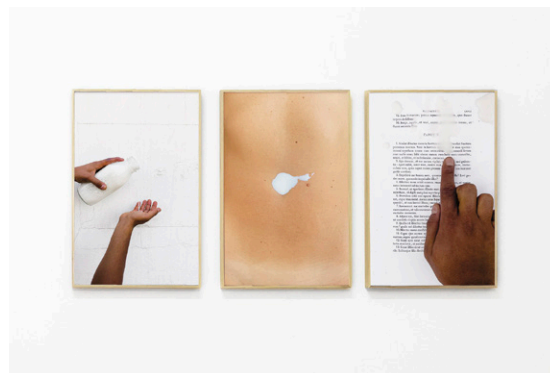
Each triptych develops from a verse in which one of these substances appears. The first photograph shows a hand touching the real food; the final image shows the same hand touching the word that signifies it. Between matter and language, the central photograph gives the metaphor a body: transformed into the fruit or substance itself, the hand comes into contact with the lover's skin. Each sequence therefore moves from object to sensation and from sensation to sign. By placing herself and her partner within the poems, Kosmatopoulos turns the biblical text into a personal yet open erotic score. The hand briefly makes fruit, word and body touch without collapsing their differences.



my own vineyard I had to neglect.

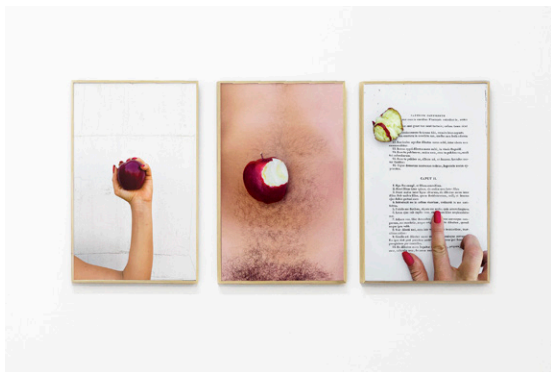
archival print in wood floating frame





**I have come into my garden, my
sister, my bride; I have drunk my
wine and my milk.**

archival print in wood floating frame

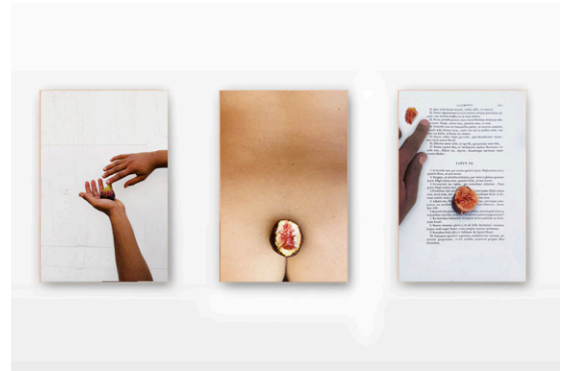
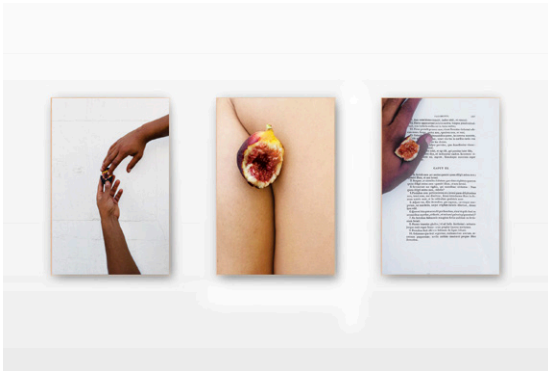
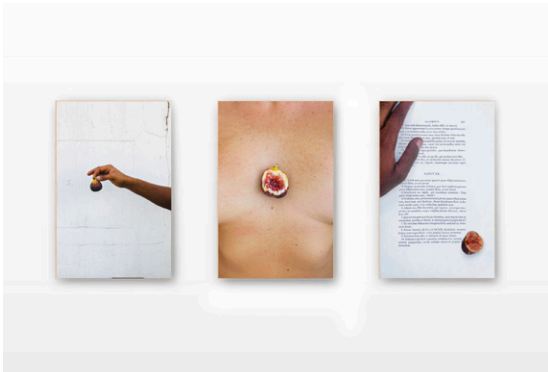


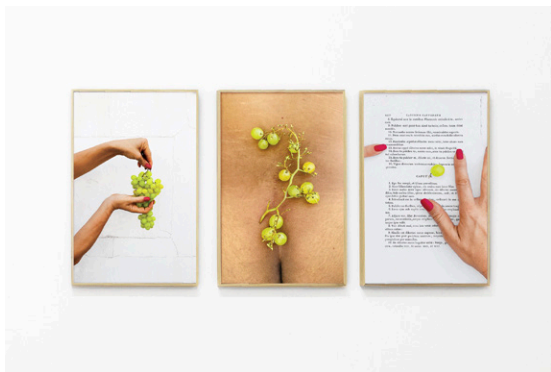
**My beloved is like an apple tree. I
delight to sit in his shade, and his
fruit is sweet to my taste.**

archival print in wood floating frame

**The fig tree forms its early
fruits. Arise, come my darling;**

archival print in wood floating frame

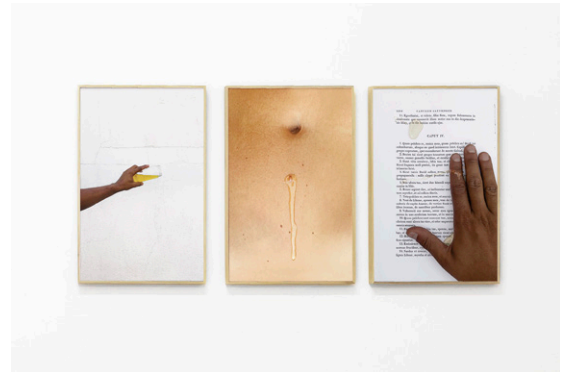




My beloved is to me a cluster of blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi.

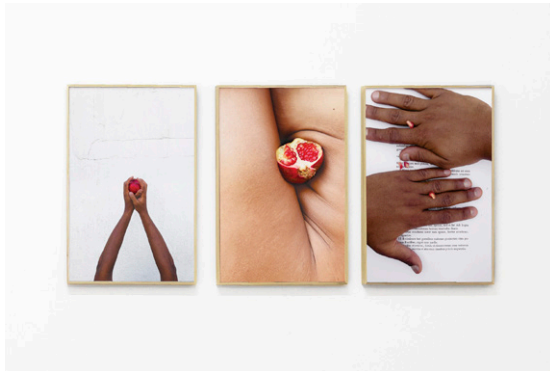
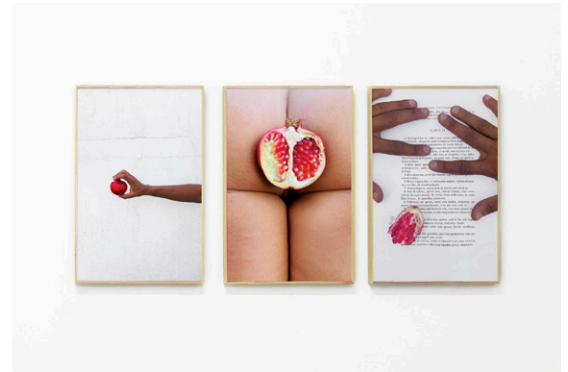
archival print in wood floating frame





Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb.

archical print in wood floating frame



**Your plants are an orchard of
pomegranates**

archival print in wood floating frame



But my own vineyard is mine to give;

archival print in wood floating frame

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