



Some Very Fine People

works by Eyal Danieli

Text by M Kennedy Volcofsky

Afterword by Robert Storr



We, image mummies. Word chimneys.

α - β —the *alpha-beta*: the human earth's border wall.

Inside Outside—Otherwise & Being miracled by this اب 'alif-baa'.

א-ב *alef-bet*—its own beginning cloaked in dark.

Name, tribe, origin, eternity, mamapapa, god—singing & signing from this wall.

Somewhere in Buber ... remember the *stutter* being true a prayer as possible ... somewhere in Levinas remember Hebrew called *the square letters*; somewhere in history ('mine') penmanship training—each letter traced in its box; the growing train of linked boxcars: become word; line; page. Name.

And so—I want to, I do, just—*see*.

Yet: I read.

Eyal Danieli's *Salutes*—a calligraphy of the stutter? Prayer?

What is prayer if not a total-body *spelling*? If not an embodied *curse*? If not the body's pulverizing a hole in the *alef-bet* and—just for a breath—getting through that wall?

These forms—mounted and installed in unframed grids—through repetition—become ideographs, and by sheer accumulation instate their own history: of light impeded; of time thought, and lost; of the border; of the trace.

Pursued, the etymology of *silhouette* ultimately dissolves into montage: a 19th C French politician ... an image technique ... a hole ... abundance ... Then, like Freud's dream-*navel*, without origin or conclusion, vanishes.

It is said: in body-image affliction, one's outline haunts.

Prosecutes and persecutes.

It is said: for [Jewish] immigrants of the 20th C (to the USA), the nose-job was a version of the name change: lop off a protruding suffix, alter an offending *i*.

Mutilate, assimilate.

Altar.

Empty body shaping, and shaped by, dark.

Here we are, now, when being human is being the subject of science—subject to its essentialist and regressive mythologies.

A growing awareness—perhaps—of being-human as fundamentally being-immigrant?

One's body—one's name to change. One's hole to change? One's name to hole? A montage of holes? One hole, many names? Holes, which are—names?

2.

In his *Salutes* series, Danieli's *heil* silhouettes—ink or charcoal and/or black pastel on paper—make the Nazi salute. Depicted in profile or straight on, always alone, captured at various moments of the gesture. Which, in the metaphysics of *series*, includes its own absence: some simply stand, before or after the hail. Some pee. Some depict only the arm-in-question, or its forearm and hand. In some this arm is seen in a kind of time-lapse, a multiple exposure of its rise or fall. Some salute the paper's right edge; some the left. Some are fully surrounded by the paper; some cut off by it, above or below.

This figure—its outline—its exhaustion—is masculine. Otherwise there are no identifying marks regards nation or tribe. Those of the artist—a dual-national American-Israeli Jew—saturate it, complicating its gesture in suicidal-fetishistic ways.

Interrogating the line at which *reduction* becomes *annihilation* is a core pursuit of all Danieli's work—and reveals its fascination with abstraction as a work of epistemology and ethics.

What is irreducibly compelling—and visible—in the *Salutes* is the implied isolation of the *They* or *The One* being hailed. Aloneness, absence, transmitted by this *One*, and mirrored in the *Salute*.

What is moving is this off-screen beyond-the-margin space which has called, but (here) never answers.

What is true is the danger, the hope the obedience the violence, the exhaustion and

impending catastrophe—even, terribly, *the love*—immanent in the *heil*—the encounter with this Other who's not—and apparently (here) never can or never will share space. Danieli's grids/series have been said to, and inevitably do, cite animation and film frames. So, in animation terms—an unseen Other who never can or never will share a 'cell'—and yet one who demands response and so is that cell's—your—*raison d'être*. The Other—as in Levinas—outside and above the subject.

It is crucial to remember: the *heil* is a response to a call.

As is art. The conflation not accidental.

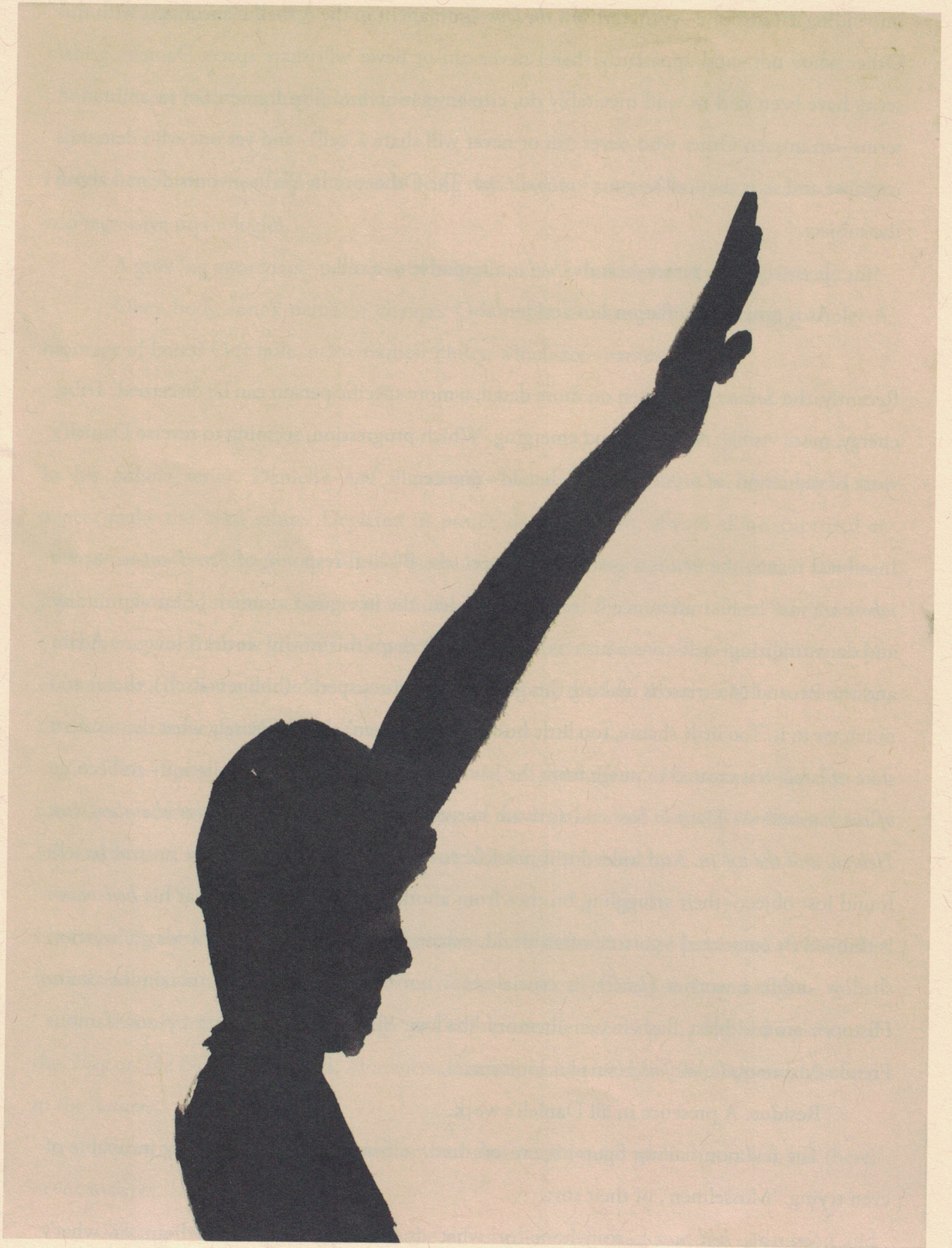
Recently, the *Salutes* have taken on more detail; a more specific person can be discerned. Tribe, energy, more visible. A personhood emerging. Which progression, seeming to reverse Danieli's work of reduction *ad nihilo*, seems to herald—disaster.

In ethical terms, the *heil* is a gesture of *hineini*, the Biblical response of *here I am* to YHVH's *where are you?* Its first utterance is by Adam in Eden, the inaugural moment of human nudity and denaturalizing—self-consciousness and shame. Perhaps this is why we don't imagine Adam and the Pa- and Ma-triarchs making this gesture—it abjures speech (holiness itself), there's too much *me* in it. Too little shame, too little humility. But—aren't those precisely what the modern state of Israel was created to purge from the Jewish body? The price of assimilation—to become *of the nations?* As Danieli has said (private correspondence): *Yiddish and gas chambers out, Hebrew and the IDF in*. And indeed it is possible to read in these silhouettes the state of Israel's found lost object—their struggling brother from another *mOther*. And so, that his *heil-mann* is thin—even emaciated—posture often timid, exhausted, slumped, not in any way a 'warrior' shadow—more a worrier (*Jew!?*)—is crucial. He's not only reminder, but remainder. Stain. History's atomic blast flash-frozen memory shadow. Skid-mark of Lacan's by-now-famous Freudo-Marxian *plus-de jouir* (surplus jouissance).

Residue. A presence in all Danieli's work.

The few non-hailing figures seem too tired, self-involved, or just utterly incapable of even trying. 'Musselmen', of their sort.

So, this *heil-mann*—to whom—or what—is he responding? To whom or what's



appearance? What call?

When do you hear the call? ask the rabbis.

When you respond is their answer.

Counterintuitive, biblical, traum-ethical order: *we will do and we will hear* ... The temporality of subjection, not marketplace freedom.

3.

The late Emmanuel Levinas, mentioned above—philosopher of ethics, teacher and Talmud instructor—suggested the *Shoah*—the Nazi extermination—is the Jewish equivalent of the Christian Passion. Its moment defining the human-god relationship, each shaping, and shaped by—not dark (?), but—a radical moment of holy absence; installing an indestructible kernel of atheism in the heart of belief itself.

... around the neck? A yellow star? A chimney? *Arbeit macht frei*? A pillar of smoke?

Christ's cross: G-d x Human, Heaven x Earth, Eternity x Time.

Read 'x' as *in ... against ... bereft of ... in search of*.

And each formula—forward and back.

The 'x'—this in-splitting—is the effect of language—and the sign of human being.

Human language's *lived effect*, not its material or biologic fact: our internal not- (or less than-) oneness; our awakening into haunting, aloneness, time, death.

The Other, signing our *I*, our name and our shame, for us.

Coring us out, for its place to live.

Creating our interior, émigré status.

In Euclidian geometry the point where two lines cross is, aptly, called *the empty set* [∅].

Eyal Danieli's *saluting man*—the Jewish cross?

4.

The *Salutes* series is considered unfinished—Danieli's stated intention is to produce the famous number of them: *six million*. In this aspirational figure we can hear: a series both impossible and endless, as *6,000,000* signifies not a 'real number' but shorthand for what is, finally, uncountable—unaccountable—immeasurable; outside the margin. In this multiple—this

multitude—this multiplication—we're made audience to a stutter which (as all true art) inflicts its affliction on its witness, and—in this case—asserts a particular freedom is—much like the number itself—myth.

Here, repetition, in its ritually haunted, ideographic, viral power, is inextricably linked to penmanship. Penmanship—haunting par excellence—inextricably linked to compliance and control—minimal, fundamental requirements of discourse and sociality.

As the Big Three Jews of the 20th C made clear: there is no *One*: reality is constant mitosis, a sustained, ecstatic, unspeakable disuniting—a schizogenesis which, of all earthly creatures, we express most vividly, most mortally. (See under: climate change.) And—further—that all assertions of *One* are—ultimately—hygienes, haunted by margins of domination and violence; sourced and scoured in suffering—no matter the *Good* or *Awakening* they affirm and traverse. And so any attempt: any effort to monumentalize the *six million*—*die sechs Millionen*—ששת המיונים—is a recapitulation of *die Endlösung*—The Final Solution™. Is this true? Why oh why? And isn't this the—our—true sos: י o י?

How about a yellow star factory—initial run, say, six million?

What would it mean to have one (or a series of) *Salutes* on one's wall

if not the pinning of a *yellow star* to the jacket of one's room?

What would having *one* vs having a series mean?

And isn't the demand of [one's] history *repeat—but this time ENJOY?*

And isn't a work of repetition a work of—erasure? Of abandonment? Of forgetting through action? Of making footprints marking—flight?

And isn't a work of repetition extending the hope of death past the end of history?

And isn't this repetition's final—and ultimate—disuniting wish: not to die, but: to live having never been born?

To become some ... thing ... that never once blocked the sun, and yet—basks forever in its light?

To become the sun itself? Empty body shaping, and shaped by, dark?

... the lamp of darkness.

No. It is not 'recapitulation'. It is not just more miserable *Shoah Business*. It is—also—its antidote: not a *totaling up*, but an inscription of true counting: *One. One. One. One. One ...*



No. Because—stop reading and *see* for a moment: it is not to memorialize the victims, but to accuse, endlessly, *sechs Millionen* times, you—and only you—of raising that very arm, the one that wears that *strange glove* in you—on that very hand that points the way to *the front wall of the Treblinka gas house, [where] underneath the gable, was a Star of David. At the entrance hung a heavy, dark curtain taken from a synagogue ... bearing the Hebrew words “This is the gate through which the righteous pass.”* That arm in you that pulls the election lever, no different than a slot machine’s. That arm in you that raises a hand to say *pick me* and *help me* and *hi!* and *do it to him, do it to her, not me*—all at once—always. That arm in you that lifts your cell to take a selfie before the Western Wall or the Magic Kingdom or the *arbeit macht frei* gate; that arm in you that raises a hand and swears to tell the whole truth—knowing very well the whole truth doesn’t—and *can’t*, if we want room to breathe—be said. That arm in you that’s hand is called *right* or *left*—and which knows not what the Other does.

A Danieli *Salute*, sometimes to the left, sometimes to the right. And so: I see left-right and seeing think: yes, politics; and: yes, Mengele at his crossroad; and—yes: OkCupid, Bumble, Tinder. Swipe. Just swipe. *Left, Left, Left, Right*. You to the oven. You to my bed. *Sei schnell oder sei tot*. Forward. March.

5.

With the enthusiastic, suicidal, erotic passion of tortured for torturer, the gene-splice of art and business is now generally, and positively, affirmed by the *effervescent* as a fait accompli. Encountering a work anathema to this credo instigates—and is indicated by—certain states. One is an experience of one’s gaze being a violation. Not witnessing a violation, but of one’s own gaze effecting eviction, exposure—tearing shelter from a vulnerability located *between* one’s self and the work; the site allowing this contact itself. A third space. (An experience often badly – defensively & punitively—expressed in reverse: one’s gaze *being* violated.)

Outsider is a diagnostic often used to re-house this space ... a meaningful, paradoxical name for work that is profoundly, almost unreachably interior ... but *the diagnostic* now is always a language-act on behalf of markets, emotional or financial; diagnosis one of capitalism’s enzymes for ingesting *everything*.

This work is often world-axis work, private work of world-historic scope, of universal

responsibility. Work in which some *thing* has not been *properly* vetted, properly censored or primped or un-fluffed. Work in which some social mirroring has not occurred; a thing just too close to itself, its *Grundsprache* (the 'root' language, as Judge Schreber called it). Too immediate, too relentless, too ... plain. Too needy too rejecting, all at once. A helplessness, a stutter a plea a prayer—seen & heard. An ethical call. A chromosome—a mutation, the stranger—jamming the machine.

For a moment. Justforamoment.

World-axis work, private work of world-historical scope, of universal responsibility.

Hallmarks of Jewish work?

Let's say yes, *tetelestai*, it is accomplished, this gene-splice of art + commerce. Or, more accurately, human + machine. So what? It's been evolution's horizon from the start. We've always been the rivet at the crossroads of use and desire. Jamming the machine ultimately refines its efficiency. I call the court's attention, here—Los Angeles, 2019—to the uprising in *Vernichtungslager* Auschwitz-Birkenau, Crematorium IV, October 7th, 1944.

Are these *Salutes* such work?

6.

Danieli is a skilled enough draftsman to create his *heil* images in solitude, as he does his other work.

And, indeed, his first art-school versions were a few *Self-Portrait[s] As A Nazi*—drawings done in jealous-resentful-inspired reply to Kiefer, having more to do with costume and appearance rather than gesture or encounter. In fact, one series of *Salutes* was exhibited as *Good Morning, Mr Kiefer*.

But the *Salutes* are created from the live model.

Now, decades later, one result of an other being required—or at least used—to make the *heil* is that the wound of history, Time \times Eternity, is reopened over and over again.

In the *Salutes'* real—epistemosomal—effect—an obsessive, anxious, bodily-eaten delicious pain—*jouissance*—is sensed, over and over again, for each person—the one performing

/ deforming it, the other commanding and recording it.

The series exists at—or more literally *points to*—penmanship's origins.

Over and over again. History attempts a midnight escape, gets its foot stuck in a train rail, in dark is woken, being pinned, being shaped by and shaping (wounded by and wounding), a stranger.

Your name shall be Israel—over and over again.

And the neoliberal market myth of freedom—even, perhaps, of the past itself—refuted, over and over—and over—again.

The *Salutes* are, in intent and effect, meant to choke the machine; to inflict a holy limp; to resist—to stutter—justforamoment—the genetic hybridization of art + commerce. A result consciously desired or not: certainly the artist would like them to sell. They are—art and artist—objects, after all.

7.

This writer will always remember September 27th, 2018. Reality rising up, like leviathan, tearing through the floor of a disgraced court: Dr Christine Blasey Ford's testimony before the Senate Judiciary. Testifying it was her dreamhouse (my phrase) which led her to speak. Since insisting, in 2012, to the confusion of those around her, that the new house she and her husband were designing must have *a second front door*.

Eyal Danieli's *Salutes*—endless innumerable impossible—are kin to, in flight to and from, this dreamhouse architecture—one *insisting*, insisting insisting insisting that there is another home we live in—and whether possible or not, whether even *stutterable* or not—one we need, must, draw up and keep redrawing the blueprint to build. Over and over and over again. That its form is illuminated, ghost briefly, in the blown-circuit flash of the encounter between two. Between desire and its image, between demand and its reply, between submission and care, between language and history, between memory and machine. Justice and compassion. Its insistence will not—will never can never—be quelled; it is human being (itself a blown circuit), eternal internal émigré—never at home, never alone, never *one*.

That it seems there's *no safe place* for these pictures to be hung—or, more accurately, *where* they hang becomes ethically at bay —makes them all the more essential. When we met in



the fall of 2018, the artist's plan was to use a corner of the room as a vanishing point and install the pictures emerging, as I understood it, from this one point perspective, out into the room.

Being cornered—structured by this dream architecture, anatomical in form, a site of real collision, or intersection—seemed a perfect way to hang this show.

Ultimately, whether it was or not—I link this install strategy with one of Danieli's other series, *Holy Smoke*: silhouette whirlwinds on paper, made by a fist's dark scrawl. Plume after plume—hopefully, eventually *sechs Millionen* of them too—rising and spinning. And—like the *Salutes*—each alone. One. Textured black oil stick on paper, rippling profiles evoking Hasids, trees, Oz-twisters, piles of shit, landscapes, oilfields afire. Yet, unlike the *Salutes*, beyond their margin is—nothing. *The end*, the smoke of

ג-א

α-β

ب-ا

the human border wall, destroyed at last. Beautiful, sculptural, vicious, making audible the deafening silence cowing, muting, driving his *Salutes*. A crematoria's plume, a sacrificial altar's pleasing odor, a book burning ... a shadow of non-existence itself, the *cloud* which preceded the Hebrews in the desert (etymologically related to *stench*)—all these. And also—just a *scrawl*—more compulsive itch-scratching than image making; more a series of self-inflicted wounds than an act of *drawing*. A sense of a final attempt to *say*—or, finally, rage at being unable to. Either way, their sense of being a summation produces shrapnel of meaning impossible to duck or confine. A gesture *against* penmanship, language, speech, and yet remaining signs of all these.

I imagined that proposed install of *Salutes*—emerging, exploding, even, in various sizes, from a corner, as engulfing room and viewer in a *Holy Smoke* whirlwind composed of Nazi *heils*. An genetic microscope on a single crematorium's plume ... or a coal plant's. Six million instances of the catastrophe of relationship; six million neglected pleas of loss and need; six million gestures of memory destroyed, memory imprisoned, memory invented; six million calls of the lover's wish time *stop* and expand—forever.

As to (my eye) that more recognizable personality emerging now in the *Salutes*, a

shadow in shadow ... every artist is burdened by the call his response hears ... it may, in years to come, be looked back on only as one more leg of his march, a moment of horror or romantic grieving at the *numb* in numbers, a moment when loneliness, the dreamhouse, the desire to *stutter*—insisted *someONE* be there.

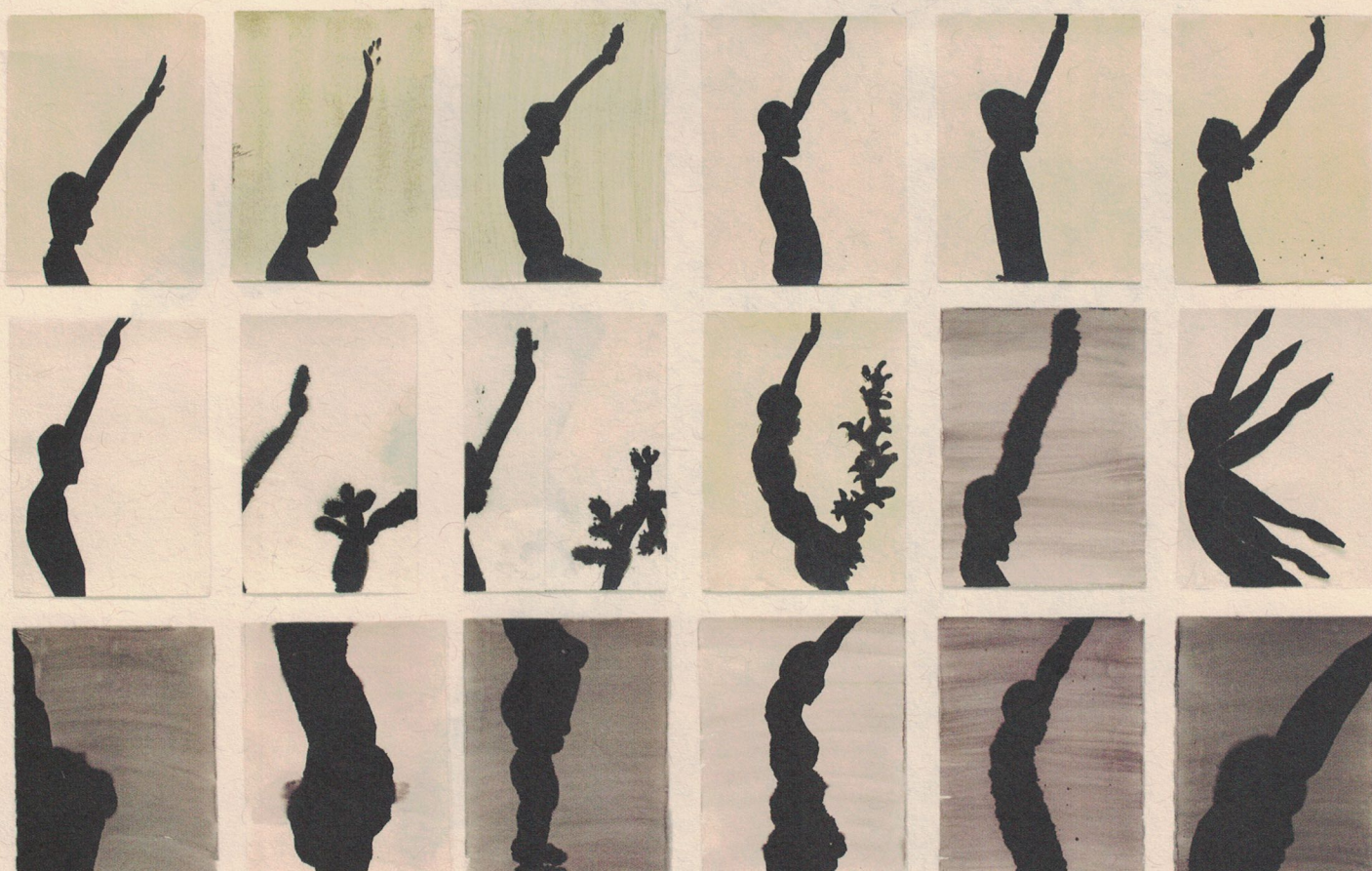
When the artist opened that other door.

m kennedy volcofsky

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works by Eyal Danieli

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Notes On The Index, ink on paper, 2006–

Good Morning Mr. Kiefer, charcoal and pastel on paper, 2008–

Mandrake, ink on paper with collage, 2002–

Some Very Fine People, ink and paint stick on paper and Mylar, 2000–

Aura, ink, gouache and paint stick on paper and board, 2019–

Thank you

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Angel Lopez, Daniel Newsome, Bob Stern, Matthew Seidman

Robert Storr, Lobsang Tsewang

Noam Murro, above and beyond.

Paul Baumann gave me of his space and time,
his mind and spirit, and shared his unstinting faith,
all with boundless generosity. And then some.

I can never thank him enough.

E.D.

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