

On Ahmad Mallah's 'I Wish Everything Was Different'

Tangents x SYB: Artists & Writers in Dialogue

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Things appear to be; at least, they seem to appear —as in the visual economy of ghosts, who economically appear through objects. No more and no less than the necessary apparition required to remain. Perhaps appearance's will to inhabit beyond their immanent cessation. It has been established that to be human in this world is to care and to grow. To be a ghost in this economy of scars—cohabitation must be hard. They too need a house to tend to. They ought to disappear, and yet here they are, dwelling.

I don't know what "dwelling" really means, in the true sense of knowing, meaning the use of our knowledge. I have never used that word in my daily use of the English language, so it represents a border of my knowing. It lies somewhere around a corner, like a brick in a wall.

"Dwelling" in Spanish would be translated as *vivienda*.

Vivienda is where one lives—to *vivir*. To *habitar*, to inhabit, however, would refer to the place where one performs the act of "*viviendar*," which is not the same as "to live." *Vivir* is the word for "to live": to live in a body as a human, as one might live in a vase as a ghost.

Vivir, the word, lives inside *vivienda*, which translates both as household and as dwelling. Because one lives as long as one is alive, and also when one survives one is living.

To survive would be *sobrevivir*. *Sobre* in Spanish literally translates as "envelope." In a mis-use of translation, *sobre-vivir* would be "enveloping life," though this is not rooted in the true etymology of the word. In all truthfulness, you are how you dwell: like an envelope. Fold one arm, then another (elbow to elbow) and in that total hug you get an infinite roof.

A house carries, at the center of its fourfolds, its first wall: a ghost, enveloped and secured.

El viento clama, and the rattle above the kitchen door chants: poppy, red, *mariposa y tulipán*.

In the paintings of Ahmad Mallah, as they appeared on the haunted walls of Syb, images unfold in my mind as they do on the wall like a letter without an envelope. A memory without protection: no tablecloth and no stain.

In his piece *I Wish Everything Was Different*, there is mourning for a home that is now a ghost. A domicile is revealed; the slicing of the walls and the doors, in pink, red and clamorous blue. The killing of a home is the killing of a memory. In the incessant apparition of the figures, we hold on to the remnants. The ghost in the painting, which is itself an object, takes our eye without root or clue, toward a journey without sky. The painting has no borders either. It covers the wall like enveloping life, *sobreviviendo* this instant in which I stand in front of it, witnessing.

"*Vivindar*" is a non-word, made up in the truth of this narration in order to translate the impossibility of dwelling. First in its meaning, and then in its use, as it haunts my understanding of living in a place. *Vivi-andar* would be literally translated into English as "living-going," something along the lines of "to keep on living," or "to live while going." The place(s) where living goes on. When people are stripped of their place of dwelling and given only time to envelope their living, they can only inhabit their memory.

