

STUDIO VISIT ([HTTPS://BOMBMAGAZINE.ORG/SERIES/STUDIO-VISIT/](https://bombmagazine.org/series/studio-visit/))

## Studio Visit: Levani

Disrupting the boundaries of art and identity.

BY LOUIS BURY ([HTTPS://BOMBMAGAZINE.ORG/AUTHOR/LOUIS-BURY](https://bombmagazine.org/author/louis-bury))

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([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/studio-Levani1\\_2022-06-07-092202\\_hssz.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/studio-Levani1_2022-06-07-092202_hssz.jpg))

Both times I've visited Levani's studio it coincided with their having recently deinstalled an exhibition, and both times the deinstalled work had been reconfigured like refrigerator magnet poetry after a house party. During my most recent visit, Levani had recently taken down *127.1 bpm (for my dancing peers)* (2021) from its display at Socrates Sculpture Park. The work consists of two rectangular steel trays, each with symbolic sculptural objects affixed to their airy interiors, that paid homage to the resourceful joys of New York City's underground queer dance scene.



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Resituated in the studio, *127.1*'s constituent parts were in various states of use and repose. The gates rested against a wall and were partially stripped of their ornamental interior objects. Both types of object—steel palm leaf symbols of the Bossa Nova Civic Club and resin casts of palm tree buds—had been arranged on nearby tables among photographs and latex prints from previous installations as well as among new works, including an autumnal botanical drawing and the cracked-open and dried-out husks of actual palm tree buds. The arrangements—ways of testing out display combinations between exhibitions—evidence the artist's willingness to let different projects cross-pollinate one another.





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“I’m not attached to any preexisting forms,” explains Levani, citing how insights from epigenetics—in particular, that there are no clear boundaries between human cells and bacteria—have influenced everything from their understanding of identity to the way they make and display art. “My work always starts from ideas,” they elaborate, “even if these are not superficially apparent in the work itself.” Levani opens their notebook to a page where they transcribed the definition of “meta code”: an “active conceptual and functional component that is not visible.” The definition is an apt, oddly poignant way to conceive of the unseen forces operative in their work.



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THE LANDSCAPE IS THE DIVINE BODY, AND SOME PLACES IN THE WORLD ALLOW US TO EXPERIENCE THAT SENSE OF THE BODY MORE CLEARLY THAN OTHERS. Rachel P. Black "PLACE OF BIRDS"

"THE DIVINE GARDEN OF MATTER FROM WHICH WE NEVER LEFT."

TIMUR SI-QIN "A NEW PROTOCOL"

"ACCORDING TO THE META-CODE OF THE HUMAN-TREE THE STRONGER AND DEEPER ONE'S ANCESTRAL ROOTS. THE MORE DURABLE ONE IS AS A PERSON"

TOSTANOVA . OF BIRDS & TREES . P. 17

"I STUDY THE PATTERNS OF THE LIFE FORMS" (the form in which the life manifests itself).  
LEVANI

02.18.2022

VERNACULAR architecture doesn't go through fashion styles. It is nearly immutable, indeed, unimprovable, since it serves its purpose to perfection. As a rule, the origin of indigenous building forms and construction methods is lost in the distant past.  
Bernard Rudofsky "ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT ARCHITECTS"

→ ARCHITECTURE GOVERNED WITH DOMESTIC and functional rather than monumental buildings.

"YOU ARE A FLOWER IN THE GARDEN OF HUMANITY"

Thich Nhat Hanh (too human-centric but kinda poetic).

MULTI-SPECIES ALLIANCE



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/studio-Levani10.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/studio-Levani10.jpg))

Similar dynamics are at play in Levani's most recent series, *Gardens of Eurasia* (2022), the centerpiece of which is an impressive twelve-panel wall hanging of what appear to be scuffed and sooty mirrors painted with faded, rosy-brown renderings of sacred stone carvings from Georgian antiquity. The panels, however, are actually panes of transparent glass whose obverse sides have been treated with liquid mirror paint, a technique the artist previously used to create the silvery iconography of their 2018 *Studies for Impossible Image* series. Levani's use of reflective paint began as a response to the conditions under which images are made and disseminated online in which there is no clear separation between creator and consumer. As we stood before Levani's contemporary rendering of an ancestral depiction of a sacred garden, our dusty images reflected back at us, I could see the importance of honoring preexisting forms along with the necessity of not getting attached to them.

*Levani's work can be seen in the group exhibition [The earth leaked red ochre](https://miriamgallery.com/exhibition/the-earth-leaked-red-ochre) (<https://miriamgallery.com/exhibition/the-earth-leaked-red-ochre>) at Miriam Gallery in New York City until June 12.*



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Louis Bury is the author of *Exercises in Criticism* (Dalkey Archive Press, 2015) and *The Way Things Go* (punctum books, forthcoming). He is Associate Professor of English at Hostos Community College, CUNY, and contributes regularly to *Hyperallergic* and *Art in America*.

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