

# TURN ME INTO A FLOWER

SUKAINA KUBBA

Exhibition Notes | Sat 27 April – Sun 4 August 2024

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**DCA**

Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate  
Dundee, DD1 4DY  
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Scottish Charity No. SCO26631

Open Wed - Sun 11:00-18:00  
Open late Thu 19:00  
Admission free

[www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)

## INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition marks the first major show in a UK institution from Toronto-based artist Sukaina Kubba. The exhibition debuts a new body of work created during a production residency with DCA Print Studio.

Kubba is a multidisciplinary artist whose work is strongly rooted in material and cultural research, storytelling and drawing connections. The artist works with industrial and packaging materials, and explores travelling objects, textiles and vehicles as carriers of cross-cultural histories. Her practice spans the mediums of drawing, painting, printmaking, fibres, audio, video and installation, and interrogates narratives of appropriation and cultural and material assimilation.

The artist's recent experiments with materials derived from industrial processes (such as latex, PLA filament and found plastics) led to the production of rug-like, rolled artworks which move like textiles. Her work invokes the histories of these materials: their origins, extraction, manufacture, packaging and trade, and deployment of their textures and visual properties. This subsequently prompted research into the Persian rugs she had encountered through family and domestic interiors, fictional stories and museums, seeking to transmit narratives of their travel, trade and acquisition into collections.

The exhibition begins with a drawing produced during a residency in the Atacama Desert in Chile undertaken in 2022. There the artist encountered by chance a Senneh rug, which originate from the province of Kurdistan in Western Iran and are known for their fine weave. By laying tracing paper directly onto the rug, the artist spent the remainder of the residency carefully producing a facsimile of its design. This drawing is the starting point for the series *Corners of Your Sky* installed across Gallery 1, within which the original image is mirrored, re-drawn on latex and rubber, and becomes sculptural in black, clear and white PLA filament.

Rugs and textiles in general are intricately tied to histories of exchange and transport. It is in their nature to be rolled: they are nomadic units of architecture carried on the backs of horses or in the bellies of shipping vessels, and unfurled to make familiar a home elsewhere. Kubba talks of the rugs that have followed her family to numerous cities: Baghdad, London, Abu Dhabi, Montreal, Dubai, Glasgow and now Toronto. Persian rugs held in museum collections have followed trajectories from East to West, similar to those undertaken by the artist's own family and other diasporic communities.

The artist's process starts with drawing – using various methods to trace and re-trace the rug designs, creating ever increasing distance between the original object and its drawn likeness. Drawing here acts as a kind of documentation. It emphasises that the designs of the historic rugs she draws from in Western

collections were composites, bringing together many different patterns and pre-existing motifs into a new object. The artist describes rugs seen from above as akin to a symmetrical and ornamental garden, containing a foreground, walled parameter, terraces, ponds and flower beds. Equally, she recalls playing games with marbles sitting on top of rugs as a child, the outline of specific designs becoming a boundary marking out territories.

Kubba's tracings are either made directly from rugs or large digital images, such as those in the archives of former manufacturer Stoddard-Templeton held by the University of Glasgow. Her drawings are then scanned, processed, 3D printed or re-drawn with 3D pens using filament. During the artist's residency at DCA Print Studio, her works in filament were used as matrices for new work spanning paper pulp casting, embossing, screen printing and laser etching.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Sukaina Kubba is an Iraqi-born, Toronto-based artist. She was in-residence at La Wayaka Current, Atacama Desert, Chile in 2022, and at ISCP International Studio & Residency Program, New York in 2022 and 2023. Kubba is currently showing as part of the year-long SPACE Billboard commission at Mercer Union, Toronto, and at Greater Toronto Art 2024 Triennial at Museum of Contemporary Art, Toronto.

Kubba's work has been included in recent exhibitions at the plumb, Toronto (2023); The Next Contemporary, Toronto (2023); Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (2017); Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow (2016); and Glasgow International (2016, 2014). Kubba is a sessional lecturer in Visual Studies at the University of Toronto, and previously served as curator and lecturer at The Glasgow School of Art (2013–2018).

## GLOSSARY

**Acquisition:** A term used in the museum and gallery sector to describe a legal process where the collection takes formal ownership of an object or artwork, making a commitment to care for the item long-term. Present day guidelines and standards now take a clearer ethical stance, in comparison especially to the early days of museums when objects often arrived through unclear or immoral routes such as looting.

**Appropriation:** Within art and art history, appropriation is the practice of artists using pre-existing objects or images in their art with little transformation of the original. Appropriation has been used widely by artists, especially since the 1980s. More generally, appropriation is the act of taking something (such as an idea, custom or style) from a group or culture that you are not a member of and using it yourself, usually referred to as cultural appropriation.

**Cultural assimilation:** Often discussed in relation to multiculturalism, cultural assimilation is the process where a minority group or culture comes to fully or partially resemble a society's majority group or assimilates the values, behaviours, and beliefs of another group. Assimilation can vary in scale, and minority groups are expected to adapt to the everyday practices of the dominant culture through factors such as language, appearance and employment.

**Atacama Desert:** The Atacama is a desert plateau located on the Pacific coast of South America, in the north of Chile. Stretching over a 1,600 km strip of land west of the Andes Mountains, it is home to a number of internationally significant telescopes due to its cloudless skies and low amount of atmosphere between the telescope and stars.

**Diasporic communities:** Diaspora refers to a large group of people who share a cultural and regional origin, but are living away from their traditional homeland in newly forged communities, dispersed through forced movement or immigration.

**Embossing:** A printmaking technique used to impress an image or text into the surface of paper. There are various ways that the design to be embossed might be prepared before it is then taken through the printing process with paper which has been soaked in water. When done without the inclusion of ink, this process is known specifically as blind embossing.

**Extraction:** The removal of raw materials from the environment for human use – for industrial production and profit – including fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal), rocks and minerals, deforestation, fishing and hunting, and water. This extraction disproportionately impacts the Global South, and often has a lasting impact on the landscape and its people.

**Laser etching:** This technique uses a laser to create marks with high precision directly onto surfaces such as paper, acrylic, rubber, linoleum and wood. In Kubba's work, it has been used to burn into the surface of the paper at various depths, leaving some areas almost transparent.

**Paper-pulp casting:** A technique which involves making a pulp with paper fibre which is then formed in a mold. The pulp can be made from pure paper or include other materials to help binding. The mold can be three-dimensional or low relief, known as bas-relief.

**PLA filament:** Threadlike plastic produced from natural sources and converted into Polylactic Acid (PLA). The resulting plastic has a low melting point and is used for modelling in 3D printers and 3D printer pens.

**Senneh rug:** A handwoven floor covering prized for its fine weave, from the Kurdish city of Sanandaj (formerly known as Senneh) in Western Iran. Their designs often involve repeat patterns, centrepieces or lattices surrounded by an intricate border.

## NEW PUBLICATION & EDITION

We are producing a new publication to accompany Kubba's exhibition. It will contain an interview with the artist by Montreal-based artist and curator Swapnaa Tamhane, and a newly commissioned poem by Glasgow-based writer Daisy Lafarge. The publication will be available to buy on our website and in DCA Shop.

In addition, Kubba has worked with DCA's Print Studio team to develop a duo of laser etched editions on black Somerset paper, launching at the exhibition preview. They are available to purchase online and in DCA Shop. Please see our website or enquire in DCA Shop for further details.

## INFORMATION SPACE

Visit the Information Space next to the galleries to learn more about the exhibition. Here you will find a filmed interview with Kubba, and a selection of reading materials on the bookshelves chosen by the artist and influential to her thinking, listed below.

## READING LIST

Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy*, 1957

Daisy Lafarge, *Life Without Air*, 2020

Gabriela Mistral, *Selected Poems*, 2006

Ghassan Kanfani, *Letter from Gaza*, 1956 (Marxists.org, May 2014)

Laleh Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula*, 2020

Mahmoud Darwish, *The Butterfly's Burden*, 2007

Primo Levi, *The Periodic Table*, 1975

Richard Lockridge, 'Mr Ireland's Magic Carpet' in *The New Yorker*, 30 April 1938

Sheila Heti, 'My Life Is A Joke' in *The New Yorker*, 11 May 2015

Vincent Bevins, *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade & the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World*, 2020

## MUSIC LIST

The songs and albums listed below have been selected by the artist and will form the basis of the playlist for our regular listening group, *In the Evening There is Feeling*, on 23 May. Further information can be found in the Talks and Events section of this booklet. All songs and albums are available to listen to on YouTube and can be streamed on other online platforms.

### Albums

Agar Agar, *Cardan*, 2016

Floating Points, Pharaoh Sanders & The London Symphony Orchestra, *Promises*, 2021

Kelly Lee Owens, *Inner Song*, 2020

Sabreen, *Smoke of the Volcanoes*, 1999

Silvia Tarozzi and Deborah Walker, *Canti di guerra, di lavoro e d'amore*, 2022

Tinashe, *Songs for You*, 2019

Weyes Blood, *And In The Darkness, Hearts Aglow*, 2022

### Songs

Fairuz, *Mechwar* (from album *Old is Gold*, 2021)

Mustafa, *Name of God*, 2023

Robert Wyatt, *Maryan* (from album *Shleep*, 1997)

Warda, *Batwanes Beek* (from album *Batwanes Beek*, 1992)

# EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN



## Gallery 1

1. *Corners of Your Sky, Alula*, 2022. Ink on vellum
2. *Corners of Your Sky, Al-Qantoor*, 2022. Hand-drawn PLA filament
3. *Corners of Your Sky, Tania*, 2022. Found embroidery thread on lingerie packaging. Collection of Susie and Vahan Kololian
4. *Corners of Your Sky, Ankaa*, 2022. Alcohol ink on sheet latex
5. *Corners of Your Sky, Tair Alfidaus*, 2022. Alcohol ink on gum rubber
6. *Corners of Your Sky, Alphard*, 2023. Hand-drawn PLA filament
7. *Corners of Your Sky, Achernar*, 2023. Hand-drawn PLA filament
8. *Corners of Your Sky, Atawoos*, 2023. Hand-drawn PLA filament. Collection of Jamila El-Assaad and Salah Kubba
9. *Corners of Your Sky, Althubaba*, 2022. Alcohol ink on sheet latex
10. *Corners of Your Sky, Carina Nebula*, 2023. Hand-drawn PLA filament



## Gallery 2

11. *Mountain In The Room III*, 2024.  
Silk screen ink on Fabriano Artistico  
300gsm, Traditional White

12. *Late Guests: Show Girl Duck Bird*,  
2024. Hand-drawn PLA filament

13. *Late Guests: Angry Bird For Alys*,  
2024. Hand-drawn PLA filament

14. *Mountain In The Room IV*, 2024.  
Silk screen ink on sheet latex

15. *1970.302.8*, 2022.  
Alcohol ink on acetate

16. *Afterfeather III*, 2024.  
Embossed Fabriano Rosaspina  
Avorio, 285gsm

17. *Jealousy: Now the House is  
Empty*, 2024. Red photo emulsion  
on yellow silk screen mesh.  
Commissioned by Mercer Union,  
Toronto

18. *Afterfeather IV*, 2024.  
Embossed black Somerset paper,  
280gsm

19. *Late Guests: Flowers for MM*,  
2024. Hand-drawn PLA filament

20. *Afterfeather V*, 2024.  
Cast black Somerset paper, 280gsm

21. *Jealousy: Now the Shadow*, 2024.  
3D printed TPU filament.  
Commissioned by Mercer Union,  
Toronto

22. *Mountain In The Room II*, 2024.  
Laser etching on Fabriano Rosaspina  
Avorio, 285gsm

23. *Mountain In The Room I*, 2024.  
3D printed TPU filament

24. *Afterfeather II*, 2024.  
Laser etching on black Somerset  
paper 280gsm

25. *Afterfeather I*, 2024.  
3D printed TPU filament

## TALKS AND EVENTS

For more information and to book tickets visit [www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)

All events in the exhibitions programme are Pay What You Can on a sliding scale from £0 - £8.

### Meet the Artist

Fri 26 April, 18:30–19:00

Gallery 2

Please book in advance

Join Sukaina Kubba and Tiffany Boyle, DCA's Head of Exhibitions, as they introduce and discuss *Turn Me Into a Flower* ahead of its official opening.

### In the Evening There is Feeling: Listening Group with Morwenna Kearsley

Thu 23 May, 18:00–19:30

Create Space

Please book in advance

*In the Evening There is Feeling* is DCA's reading and listening group. It takes its name from Gertrude Stein's 1914 book *Tender Buttons* and focuses, in an informal and welcoming way, on texts from the worlds of art, literature and music.

Led by artist Morwenna Kearsley, during the event and discussion we will spend time listening closely together to a selection of songs and albums which have influenced Kubba, including musicians and groups Weyes Blood, Robert Wyatt, Mustafa and Sabreen.

Links to the artist's selection will be sent out to all participants after booking. You can listen to the tracks chosen on YouTube and stream them on many online platforms.

Kearsley is a Glasgow-based artist working predominantly with text, photography and moving image. Her work often features objects which carry within them the historical, social and political circumstances of their making, as do photographs.

### In the Evening There is Feeling: Reading *The Periodic Table* by Primo Levi

Thu 20 June, 18:00–19:30

Create Space

Please book in advance

For this session led by DCA's Exhibitions team, we will consider one of the artist's selected books by author Primo Levi first published in 1975.

Primo Levi (1919-1987) was a Jewish-Italian chemist, writer and Holocaust survivor. *The Periodic Table* is a collection of short stories based on his experiences under the Fascist regime in Italy and its aftermath, each titled after a chemical element. We will focus on *Nickel*, *Cerium* and *Vanadium*.

Digital copies of selected excerpts from the book will be sent out to all participants after they have booked a place.

**In Conversation: Dr Jonathan Cleaver and Dr Maryam Ohadi-Hamadani**

Wed 3 July, 18:00–19:30

Gallery 2

Please book in advance

Join us for an evening discussion centred around Kubba's work, and the textile histories and objects the artist has consulted in the making of the exhibition. Dr Jonathan Cleaver will discuss his PhD research into the archive of the Stoddard-Templeton carpet factory archives, now held at the University of Glasgow, followed by a response to the exhibition from art historian Dr Maryam Ohadi-Hamadani.

Dr Cleaver is a textile researcher and weaver. He studied Tapestry at Edinburgh College of Art and gained an MLitt in Dress and Textiles Histories at the University of Glasgow. His PhD, awarded by the University of Glasgow, generated fresh perspectives on the interrelationship of industrial carpet design and weaving technology using the archives of the former manufacturer James Templeton and Company, Glasgow. His research into the cultural histories of British carpet production continues to be informed by his prior professional experience as a Master Weaver with Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh.

Dr Ohadi-Hamadani is an art historian and curator specialising in modern and contemporary art of the global diasporas, focusing on the postcolonial histories of African, Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Black British art in the UK and beyond.

She received her PhD, titled *The Commonwealth of Abstraction: Black Artists in London, 1948-72* from the University of Texas, Austin, in 2019. As a postdoctoral research associate at the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven Connecticut, she co-curated the exhibition *Bridget Riley: Perceptual Abstraction* (2022).

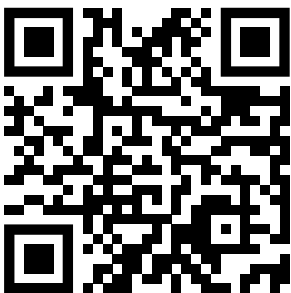
## AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

Listen to descriptions of the current exhibition written by artist and visual describer Juliana Capes.

With more than 15 years' experience providing audio descriptions and interpretation for galleries across Scotland, Capes has developed a poetic and emotional describing style which expands on and illuminates artworks in new ways, particularly for audiences who are blind, have low vision or sensory impairments.

This online tour, available soon, will move through Kubba's exhibition offering visual descriptions of selected artworks. Capes will spend time elaborating on the exhibition to encourage slow looking, listening and contemplation.

The tour will be accessible on your own device through the Bloomberg Connects app and DCA's SoundCloud which you can access by scanning the QR code below.



## ARTIST'S CHOICE SCREENINGS

The following films have been selected by Kubba to accompany her exhibition. Please see website for prices and to book tickets.

### **Nostalgia for the Light**

Tue 21 May, 18:15

Cinema

Master director Patricio Guzmán travels 10,000 feet above sea level to the driest desert on earth for this remarkable documentary. Here, the sky is so translucent that it allows astronomers to see the boundaries of our universe. Yet the Atacama Desert climate also keeps human remains intact: pre-Columbian mummies; explorers and miners; and the remains of disappeared political prisoners. Women sift the desert soil for the bones of their loved ones, while archaeologists uncover traces of ancient civilisations and astronomers examine the most distant and oldest galaxies. Merging celestial and earthly quests, *Nostalgia for the Light* (*Nostalgia de la Luz*) is a gorgeous, moving and deeply personal odyssey into astronomy, archaeology, geology and human rights.

Dir: Patricio Guzmán / France / Germany / Chile / Spain / 2010 / 1h 30m / 12A / Spanish with English subtitles

## **The Pearl Button**

Wed 19 June, 18:15

Cinema

After the acclaimed *Nostalgia for the Light* (*Nostalgia de la Luz*), with its study of the desert, the stars, light and time, as well as the recent memory and remains of disappeared people in North Chile under Pinochet, Patricio Guzmán takes us on a journey into the waters and ocean of Southern Chile.

The sea holds all the voices of the earth and those that come from outer space. Water receives impetus from the stars and transmits it to living creatures. Water, the longest border in Chile, also holds the secret of two mysterious buttons which were found on its ocean floor. Chile, with its 2,670 miles of coastline and the largest archipelago in the world, presents a supernatural landscape. In it are volcanoes, mountains and glaciers. In it are the voices of the Patagonian Indigenous people and their tragic history, the first English sailors and also those of its political prisoners. Some say that water has memory. This film gives it a voice.

Using both archival images and gorgeous new footage, *The Pearl Button* (*El Botón de Nácar*) manages once again to convey different periods of history and geography in a gripping tale of our modern world.

Dir: Patricio Guzmán / France / Spain / Chile / Switzerland / 2015 / 1h 22m / 12A / Spanish with English subtitles

## **Feet in Water, Head on Fire**

Mon 15 July, 18:00

Cinema

Terra Long's feature debut is a breathtaking experimental documentary portrait of California's Coachella Valley that is both anchored in the specifics of place and community, while freely exploring the limits of cinematic time and space.

Shaped by seismic forces of the San Andreas Fault, the Coachella Valley is home to an agricultural community built around the date palm trees introduced to the region in the early 1900s. Today, the land and its people face combined threats from economic upheaval, US immigration policy and climate change. With an elliptical grace, Long's film spans vast expanses of geological time and sweeping desert landscapes into extreme close-ups of the region's plant and insect life, where microscopic views of cellular biology trace intimate stories of human connection.

Beautifully shot on 16mm film and featuring hand-processing techniques that incorporate plants native to the Coachella Valley into the film, Long's documentary is grounded in place even on a material level.

Dir: Terra Long / Canada / 2023 / 1h 30m / Cert tbc

## FOR YOUNGER VISITORS AND FAMILIES

### **Create Space**

Tue – Sun, 11:00–18:00

Free, drop in

Children must be accompanied at all times

DCA Create Space is a comfortable and imaginative space in which people of all ages can see, think, make and do together. The space includes displays, child-safe materials and art activity sheets inspired by the current exhibition.

You can have a go at DIY art making activities exploring rugs and their beautiful designs, motifs and patterns. Our art library for children is also there for you to browse and the Play Box has a small, safe play space for very wee ones and their grown-ups.

Create Space is occasionally closed for workshops: please check our website for full opening hours.

### **Family Art Lab: Sukaina Kubba**

Sun 12 May, 11:00–13:00

Sun 9 June, 11:00–13:00

Sun 21 July, 11:00–13:00

Pay What You Can: £0 - £8

Please book a ticket for everyone who is coming along, adults and children. Suitable for ages 3+ accompanied by an adult.

Family Art Labs, held in Create Space, offer relaxed time and space to get making as a family, with creative

activities and techniques introduced by local artists. Try to come for the start and introduction, then you can stay as long as you like or leave when you feel you need to.

You can expect a gallery visit and time spent viewing Kubba's work, which explores rug designs, motifs from nature and printmaking techniques with lots of different materials. We look forward to sharing and making with you!

### **Messy Play for 0-3s**

Tue 14 May, 10:00–11:00 and  
11:30– 12:30

Fri 17 May, 13:00–14:00

Sun 19 May, 10:00–11:00

Pay What You Can: £0 - £8

Please book a ticket for everyone who is coming along, adults and children. Suitable for ages 0-3 accompanied by an adult.

Join our Art at the Start team in Create Space for messy, sensory and creative sessions for little ones. Sessions will respond to the exhibition with activities designed to engage our youngest visitors together with their big people.

You can expect an art activity, a sensory play activity and lots of ideas for things to do at home or out and about. Each session will be led by an art therapist and an artist tutor.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The artist would like to thank the team at DCA, especially Beth Bate, Tiffany Boyle, Adrian Murray, Kay Hamlyn and Valerie Norris. For their support during her production residency and with her print edition, she thanks the whole DCA Print Studio team: Marion Ferguson, Marianne Livingstone, Scott Hudson, Claire McVinnie, Annabelle Gralton, Katie Ravenscraig and Annis Fitzhugh. To the install team for their support in presenting her work, the artist thanks Anton Beaver, Mickey Fenton, Guilia Gentili, Marc Johnston and Jessie Giovane Staniland.

A special thank you to Daisy Lafarge and Swapnaa Tamhane for their contributions towards the forthcoming publication.

Sukaina Kubba thanks Canada Council for their support of her DCA production residency. For the commissioned works in Gallery 2 produced as part of their SPACE billboard programme, the artist thanks the team at Mercer Union, Toronto: Aamna Muzafar, Sonya Filman, Abby Kettner and Theresa Wang. For his assistance in accessing the Stoddard-Templeton archives at the University of Glasgow and the richness of his research, the artist thanks Dr Jonathan Cleaver.

With thanks to The Next Contemporary, Toronto; Powerhouse Print Studio NYC; La Wayaka Current Residency; and to Susie and Vahan Kololian for their loan to this exhibition.

The artist extends her gratitude to Omar Kaltrachian for his technical and production assistance, to Salah Kubba, Jamila El-Assaad, Muthana Kubba, Hamza Kubba, Owen Fenn, Ralph Ghoche, Patrick Foster, Philip Schmerbeck, Nandini Bagchee, Craig Mulholland, Carmel O'Brien, Farnoosh Talaei, Sameer Farooq, Anu Ramdas, Marcus Mazurek and Bernie.

## LARGE PRINT, AUDIO & BRAILLE

Large print, audio and braille versions of this leaflet are available, please ask a Visitor Assistant for more information.

## BLOOMBERG CONNECTS

The Bloomberg Connects app is available for download from Google Play, the App Store, and via the QR codes at the entrances to our galleries. On it, alongside our content you'll find free digital guides to cultural organisations around the world.

Offering a new way to explore our exhibitions programme, the app allows you to listen to our exhibition notes, watch exclusive artist interviews, and find out what's on.

Please see our website and the Bloomberg Connects app for further details. For assistance locating these recordings, please speak to one of our Visitor Assistants.

## JUST ASK

Our friendly Visitor Assistants are always happy to help with your questions.

## KEEP IN TOUCH

Keep up to date with the very latest from DCA by visiting [www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk) or by following us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Share your thoughts on the exhibition using **#helloDCA**.

## SUPPORT DCA

Our exhibitions are always free to access, but DCA is a charity and donations are welcome and appreciated. You can tap to donate at one of the contactless points in our building or donate online at [dca.org.uk/support/donate-to-dca](http://dca.org.uk/support/donate-to-dca) Thank you for your support!



This leaflet is printed on recycled paper. DCA is proud to be an Active Member of the Gallery Climate Coalition: for more information about our work to reduce carbon emissions, visit our website.