INTRODUCTION
The world’s greatest magic show right before your very eyes is based on a simple premise: the show takes place at night, in your sleep; it is none other than your own dreamwork. As such, the artwork happens entirely in your own mind.

This booklet – together with the images and objects displayed in the room – contains a number of imaginary magic acts. However these are all incomplete; the invitation is for you, and your subconscious, to engage with and absorb the suggestions offered in the book and the room, and to rework and complete them in your own dreams. It is only during sleep that the imaginary magic acts have a chance of coming alive, according to logics that may not be obvious or decipherable.

All too often dreaming is dismissed as trivial; yet every night dreams provide a portal to mystery, through modes of thinking that we don’t have access to during the day.

This artwork is about giving dreams a place of honour: to treat their content as inventive and poetic, and to pay attention to the ways they rework the material from waking consciousness. Tonight you might dream of magicians, playing cards, suspended coins, invisible thread, all reimagined according to personal combinations of thought and feeling.

You might of course forget what you dreamt. That’s okay too; shows get forgotten all the time.

The artwork is partly inspired by the line ‘Nobody on the inside, nobody on the outside’, which the 20th century magician and Blackpool resident, Shek Ben Ali, would use as a catchphrase during his stage act, repeating it nonsensically over and over again. The sentence echoes the descent into sleep, which features the dissolution of the self (inside) and of the world (outside).

There are 3 steps involved in The world’s greatest magic show right before your very eyes:

1. At a time of your own choosing, uncover and observe the various images and objects around the room.

2. Read this booklet (either from start to finish, or by dipping in as you please).

3. Before you go to sleep, make sure to cover up the images and objects in the room.

Then go to bed. And enjoy the show.
THE WORLD’S GREATEST MAGIC SHOW RIGHT BEFORE YOUR VERY EYES
The magician tells you:
‘Think of a card, any card’.

You do.

‘Now, look inside your pocket…’
A single coin is tossed in the air. It does not fall to the ground. Instead, it remains spinning there, as though attached in mid-air. It is still there now.
The magician tells you:
‘Don’t blink, or you will miss it!’
But you can’t help blinking.
So you miss it.
The back of the card is the same as the face of the card.

And the face of the card is the same as the back of the card.
The best way to obscure an object is to leave it in full view.
The best way to obscure an object is to cover it with a piece of fabric, preferably of the same colour and texture as the background.

For instance, against a black glittery curtain, a card will become invisible if covered by a piece of the same black glittery fabric.
The ‘chameleon coin’ transforms into whatever element or material it touches.

If you press the coin against a wall, it takes on the colour and texture of the wall.

If you drop the coin on a black rug, it turns dark and soft.

If you slide the coin into your pocket, it morphs into the smooth fabric of the pocket lining.

If you toss the coin in water, it becomes liquid.
Few magic feats cannot be explained.
Few explanations are magical.
There are no trapdoors here.
There are no hidden wires here.
There are no secret mirrors here.
There are no magnets here.
There are no secret helpers, stooges, plants or confederates here.
There are no phoney props here.
There are no objects hidden up my sleeves here.
There are no doves or pigeons concealed inside my jacket here.
There are no distracting lines of patter here.
There are no cheap swindles or hoaxes here.
There are no quick gestures or fanciful movements here.
There are no confusing lights or sudden puffs of smoke here.
Here it is all trapdoors, and wires, and mirrors, and magnets, and secret helpers, and phoney props, and objects concealed up the sleeve, and doves and pigeons, and distracting lines of patter, and cheap swindles, and quick gestures, and confusing lights and sudden puffs of smoke.
After carefully displaying his empty hands, large silver coins begin materialising at the magician’s fingertips.

‘Nobody on the inside, nobody on the outside!’

That’s what the magician keeps repeating, as the coins continue appearing magically.

The coins materialise one by one, and are then tossed into a metal bucket, each landing with an audible ‘clink’.

‘Nobody on the inside, nobody on the outside!’

Coins appear in mid-air, coins appear from behind the knee, the elbow, the neck, the ear.

‘Nobody on the inside, nobody on the outside!’

Coins and coins, more and more coins, endless coins...
On a corner shelf is a bell jar, and inside the bell jar is a small wooden hand, flipping a coin in mid-air.

This is all just misdirection. As you peer down at the trick to discover its method, you do not realise that your feet are beginning to lift off the ground.
Every magic trick bears the marks of its secret method, like the stitching visible on items of clothing.

Sometimes the magician will brazenly point towards the stitching, in an apparent double bluff. For example, the magician might actually say: ‘The trick is invisible thread’.

In this way, spectators discard the possibility of invisible thread, believing that the secret method must lie elsewhere.
The magician secretly holds the thread.

In reality, it is the thread that secretly holds the magician.
Swirls of smoke take on the exact shape of whatever number you’re thinking of.

Clouds in the distance take on the exact shape of whatever word you’re thinking of.
Long before he’s been handcuffed and lowered in the water cell, Houdini has already made his escape.
Houdini was so successful at escaping that even his image in photographs and posters would break out of the frame. Today nobody knows what he really looked like.
A magic show for adults,
performed entirely by children.

A magic show for rabbits,
performed entirely by doves.

A magic show for magicians,
performed entirely by spectators.
A box inside a box inside a box.
A show inside a show inside a show.
A dream inside a dream inside a dream.
The magician’s assistant is sawn in half.
A magic wand is sawn in half.
The show’s running time is sawn in half.
Magic is sawn in half.
Everything that can happen in a magic show (levitations, appearances and disappearances, destructions and reformations, mind readings, etc.) all happening at once.
Due to a technical fault, the smoke machine can’t be switched off.

The stage is now completely engulfed in thick white plumes of smoke, as is the entire auditorium. In fact, the whole theatre is engulfed in smoke, as is the street outside, and all neighbouring roads and buildings.

Smoke is now everywhere, all the time.

The magic show can never end.
Despite his sudden demise on stage, during a 1984 live television broadcast, comedy magician Tommy Cooper appears for a final comeback special, ‘just like that!’
‘Now you see it, now you...’ The magician can’t complete the sentence, since all his props have suddenly transformed into sand. Rather confused, the magician looks out into the audience, where he spots a rival conjuror sitting with his arms crossed, grinning.
With a tap of the wand, 
the Moon swaps places with the Earth.

With a wave of the hand, 
The Sun flips upside down.
At night, the trees in the park swap places with the lampposts.

By morning, everything returns to its original position.
Time stands still.
Gravity slackens.
Space is folded like a sheet of paper.
All matter is simultaneously liquid, solid, gas, plasma.
As the curtains open, the whole audience gasps in unison, as though instructed to do so on cue.

Their reactions are not so unique or personal: spectators are constantly mirroring each other, so that their impressions and experiences are shared by everyone in the theatre.

You sigh because I do.

I smile because you do.
‘Pick a card, any card’, says the magician.

‘But I don’t want to see a card trick!’, retorts the spectator.

Quickly the magician inserts the deck of cards into his mouth, munching and swallowing the lot.

‘Okay, no card tricks then’, he says, and walks off.
The female assistant sits on a chair.

The magician covers her with a large red sheet, so that the shape of her body is clearly discernible underneath: the contour of the head, the shoulders, etc.

The magician pauses for effect, then whisks the sheet away. To the magician’s great surprise, the assistant is still in place, holding a sign that reads: ‘Tired of disappearing’.
The magician doesn’t actually levitate off the ground: it is the whole audience that is secretly lowered.
The curtains open.

The magician is tied to a chair, unable to escape.

The curtains are closed for a few seconds, then opened again: the magician is now standing on the chair, having escaped from the ropes.

The curtains close and open again: the magician is once more tied to the chair, unable to escape.

Again the curtains close and open, revealing him to have escaped from the ropes.

This continues for several weeks.
Time starts running backwards.

First, the magician bows, as people applaud enthusiastically.

Then a piece of rope is held aloft, as the magician exclaims ‘And finally, the rope is whole again! Thank you!’

Then the rope is shown to be in two pieces.

Then the magician cuts the rope in two pieces.

Finally, the magician shows a single piece of rope, announcing: ‘And now, the mystery of the cut and restored rope…’
Inside the photographer’s studio, the escapologist announces: ‘No chains can bind me. I can escape from anything’. The photographer says: ‘But you cannot escape from this photograph, or from publicity. Because you cannot escape from your desire for fame...’

The escapologist doesn’t reply.

Later, when the photographs are developed, the image of Houdini is mysteriously missing from each print, as though chemically erased.
Without any mechanical apparatus or trick paper, magicians depicted in photographs close their eyes at night time.
Swirls of stage-smoke keep shape-shifting, giving the appearance of forming sequences of different letters and words: ‘sleep’, ‘day’, ‘seaside’, ‘mother’, ‘tomorrow’, and so on.

When the word ‘smoke’ appears, it suddenly dissipates.
The magician’s hand opens, slowly releasing a few yellow feathers. They fall to the ground with uncanny precision, bundling and curling around each other, producing the exact impression of a small yellow bird, which then begins chirping and flies away.
A thousand doves, used by stage magicians in their acts, fly around the city at night. They visit all the sleeping conjurors and, without waking them, gently lift them out of their beds, raising them a few inches above the mattress for 10 minutes or so, before laying them back down. They do this every night, and are never caught in the act.
In the magic acts of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the doves released on stage were in fact small white dogs, usually the magician’s own pets. But because audiences didn’t expect to see dogs, it seems that in their minds’ eye they saw slender white doves.

Whenever spectators would begin peering too suspiciously at the creatures, the magician would simply cry out ‘Dove!’, to which spectators reacted with reassured delight.
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in which every piece remains suspended in mid-air, never falling to the ground.
From inside an empty cardboard box, the magician takes out a bottle of water.

Then, from within the bottle of water, he takes out an empty cardboard box.

Then, from inside the empty cardboard box, he takes out a bottle of water.

This keeps on happening, on a loop.

Regardless of how many bottles of water and cardboard boxes appear, there is only ever one bottle, and one box.
Objects float mysteriously around the room: a coin, a playing card, a matchstick.

‘The trick is invisible thread’, announces the magician.

Indeed, you can see a very fine thread glinting in the light, supporting the objects in mid-air.

But when the magician takes out a pair of scissors and cuts the thread, the objects continue to float mysteriously around the room: a coin, a playing card, a matchstick, levitating without any visible support.
Before the magician has even appeared on the stage, you pay close attention to all the objects arranged on the table: you notice a pack of red-backed playing cards, a handful of silver coins, a wooden magic wand, and a white handkerchief.

The magician then walks on, bows, and sits at the table. Without the magician having touched any of the props, you already notice that: the playing cards have turned from red to blue, the silver coins have changed into copper, the magic wand is now a white candle and the handkerchief is tied gently around your wrist.
A small red box, suspended from the ceiling of the theatre, is never referred to by the magician. Nothing happens to it throughout the show: it is never touched, it doesn’t disappear or change colour. It merely stays there the whole time, hanging from the ceiling.

It is only when you return home and lay your head on the pillow that you suddenly realise what the purpose of the red box is.
At the theatre watching a magic show, you try your hardest to detect the secret methods. The more you scrutinise the actions of the stage magician, the more you realise that you have seen this all before... in a film perhaps.

Then you realise you’re not in a theatre watching a magic show, but rather in your own living room, watching a film.

Or perhaps you’re on a train, half napping. You can’t really be sure.
No matter how many times it is flipped, the coin always lands on heads. If you slowly turn it over, you notice that the coin features heads on both sides. And yet when held in front of a mirror, it clearly displays tails.
Every time you remove your wallet from your pocket, you notice it has grown slightly smaller in size. By the end of the day, it is virtually invisible to the naked eye.
You walk through the metal detector without any problems, but as you go to retrieve your belongings from the tray, you notice that the security guard is wearing your watch, your ring, your glasses, and is holding your wallet.

You approach the guard, ‘excuse me, what…’ You’re unable to finish your sentence. The guard is already far away, walking through a door that reads “staff only”. You stand there wondering what to do. You look down at the tray, only to find that everything is exactly where you put it: your watch, your ring, your glasses, and your wallet.
When you gaze into the mirror, the eyes looking back at you are no longer yours: they are the eyes of whoever you are thinking of, as you gaze into the mirror.
Every time you wave your hand over your face, a new memory from your childhood suddenly becomes available to you.

There is a danger of spending the rest of your life lying down, with one hand aloft, reliving your early years.
You’re sitting by a café window, and suddenly find yourself thinking of a childhood friend. You close your eyes to try to better remember their face, their hair, their gait. But because your eyes are closed, you do not see that same old friend walking right past you, just on the other side of the café window.
When you snap your fingers, 
a loved one thinks of you.
You stare at the palm of your hand, and begin counting backwards from 100.

When you get to 60, you notice that your hand seems flatter than usual.

When you get to 30, you realise that your hand is in fact made of paper and ink, that it is a mere drawing of a hand.

When you reach the end of the countdown – 3, 2, 1 – your hand reverts to its usual form.
You accidentally swallow a knife from the dinner table, but you feel absolutely fine.
The magician holds a single playing card between his palms, and says to you:

‘Think of a card, any card…’

You think of the Queen of Hearts.

The magician then quickly adds: ‘But don’t think of the Queen of Hearts.’

You are astonished, but you decide to throw the magician a challenge, so you say: ‘Actually, I was thinking of the Queen of Diamonds.’

The magician opens his hands to reveal a single playing card: half of it is the Queen of Diamonds, half is the Queen of Hearts.
A card that is, in reality, two cards.
A coin that is, in reality, two coins.
A matchstick that is, in reality, two matchsticks.
A person that is, in reality, two people.
An audience that is, in reality, two audiences.
A theatre that is, in reality, two theatres.
A world that is, in fact, two worlds.
A dream that is, in fact, two dreams.
The stage magician disappears without a trace, followed by the assistants. Then the audience disappears without a trace, followed by the theatre technicians and stage hands, the box office and theatre staff.

Everyone is gone, except for a lone rabbit and two doves.
Inside the box: nothing.

Outside the box: everything (the theatre, the magician, the audience, the city, the world).

A snap of the fingers…

Inside the box: everything (the theatre, the magician, the audience, the city, the world).

Outside the box: nothing.
There is no magic.

Because there is no show.

Because there is nobody here.

Just an empty theatre: air currents, dust swirling, sounds coming in from outside.

Occasionally a floorboard creaks a little, and a fly darts about the space.
A last magical feat.