

**Sarah Beck**

**Precariousness, Performance and Ethical Exchanges**

*If you had the opportunity to share your fantasies in a letter with a supreme being when no one was watching what would you write? How would you respond if she were to summon you?*

This presentation considers the ethical potential of Rima Charhour's work *Letters to Houriyat Al Janna* in which the spectator is invited to share one's innermost desires and fantasies with Al Janna, a houri who waits in paradise to give pleasure to those who achieve greatness. In response to Rima's work, I offer my own personal experience as a spectator, reconciling my own relation to that of the imagined houri to consider how Rima's work is interventionist in its approach, fostering a displacing experience for spectators that calls into question their own responsibility creating an ethical encounter through an exchange with the that of the imaginary houri Al Janna. Throughout the post-/911 period American media fetishized the representation of the houri as a symbol of pleasure and violence, promoting a skewed version of Islam. In Judith Butler's contemporary writings on war, Butler offers that in the wake of violence comes the potential to recognize one's own precariousness and vulnerability evoked through face-to-face encounters with the Other, giving rise to alternatives to violence and opportunity for collective understanding. Considering contemporary representations of the houri in relation to Butler's concept of grievable lives, this presentation explores how interactive spaces might offer reflection where mutual precariousness can be recognized and raises what new ethical possibilities might emerge from these spaces in which imaginary exchanges manifest?