

A PROLOGUE TO THE PAST AND PRESENT STATE OF THINGS

A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things

Exhibition dates: 2 July to 15 August 2015

11:00 to 18:00 daily (except Sundays)

Delfina Foundation

FREE

Ibraaz is pleased to publish the online catalogue for *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things*, a group exhibition at **Delfina Foundation** featuring the work of [Doa Aly](#), [Marwa Arsanios](#), [Coco Fusco](#), [Emily Jacir](#), [Mona Hatoum](#), [Sharon Hayes](#), [Mohammed Kazem](#), [Xiao Lu](#), [Hassan Sharif](#), [Wael Shawky](#), [Sharif Waked](#), [Lin Yilin](#) and [The Yes Men with Steve Lambert](#) and more. The exhibition, which runs from 2 July to 15 August 2015, launches *Staging Histories*, Delfina Foundation's new research and commissioning platform for performance art.

A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things was preceded by the opening of *Echoes & Reverberations* on 23 June: a group exhibition at the Hayward Gallery Project Space featuring **Jumana Emil Abboud**, **Basma Alsharif**, **Samah Hijawi**, **Anas Al-Shaikh**, **Magdi Mostafa** and **Joe Namy** that runs to 16 August 2015, for which Ibraaz also published an [online catalogue](#).



Marwa Arsanios, *OLGA'S NOTES, all those restless bodies*, 2015. Video, 28 mins..
Courtesy the artist.

Exhibition Overview

In tandem to [Echoes & Reverberations](#) at the Hayward Gallery Project Space, this major group exhibition at Delfina Foundation explores performance as a form of recording and re-writing history. Artists include **Doa Aly, Marwa Arsanios, Coco Fusco, Emily Jacir, Mona Hatoum, Sharon Hayes, Mohammed Kazem, Xiao Lu, Hassan Sharif, Wael Shawky, Sharif Waked, Lin Yilin** and **The Yes Men with Steve Lambert and more**.

A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things launches *Staging Histories*, a new research and commissioning platform for performance art. Through archival research and new commissions, *Staging Histories* traces seminal moments of performance mapping shared histories and contemporary global concerns. The first stage of the project explores performance art from and in relation to the Arab world.

The exhibition presents a constellation of key performative works, photographs, video documentation and archival materials from the last three decades. The thematic connections cross the Arab world but relate to global politics, economics and cultural shifts. The selected artworks can therefore be understood as a preface, consequence or echo of major developments during this period.

Alongside the exhibition, there will be a reference area with publications by influential practitioners and contributions by The ARC.HIVE of Arab contemporary performing arts, a project initiated by Adham Hafez as part of [HaRaKa](#). A partnership between HaRaKa (Cairo), Lincoln Centre's Performing Arts Library (NYC), and the German Dance Archives (Cologne), the project brings rare film footage and material together for future research in the field for active Arab performance makers.

A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things is curated by Aaron Cezar with contributions from Ala' Younis and Barrak Alzaid (*Staging Histories* curatorial fellows) and Jane Scarth (Delfina Foundation).

[Echoes & Reverberations](#), a group exhibition that also emerged from *Staging Histories*, is at the Hayward Gallery Project Space from 23 June to 16 August 2015.

Co-commissioned by Delfina Foundation and [Shubbak – A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture \(11-26 July\)](#).

Echoes & Reverberations: Curator's Essay

Aaron Cezar, Director, Delfina Foundation

A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things is a group exhibition that launches *Staging Histories*, Delfina Foundation's new research and commissioning platform for performance art. *Staging Histories* is part of Delfina Foundation's ongoing initiative to develop residency and public programmes for performance art, one of the least supported art forms today, despite the discipline's growing popularity in recent years. Our programme, like this exhibition, explores performance in wide-ranging contexts – from the stage to the white-cube and in the everyday, from daily routines to religious rituals.

Through archival research and new commissions, *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things* aims to trace seminal moments in performance art from, and in relation to, the Arab region. The exhibition attempts to map different lineages of performance art from across this diverse region to other complex histories around the world. It brings together photographs, video documentation, installations and archival materials of key performative works that span the last three decades by 13 international practitioners: Doa Aly, Marwa Arsanios, Coco Fusco, Mona Hatoum, Sharon Hayes, Emily Jacir, Mohammed Kazem, Xiao Lu, Hassan Sharif, Wael Shawky, Sharif Waked, Lin Yilin and the activist-duo The Yes Men with Steve Lambert. While many of the artistic works emerge from the Arab region, they relate to global politics, economics and cultural shifts, and can therefore be understood as a preface, consequence, or echo of major developments during this period. The intention is to open up lines of enquiry for further research that will feed into future iterations of this long-term curatorial project.

But as a starting point for further research, *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things* is not a comprehensive survey. It is a constellation of reference points across shared histories and contemporary global concerns. Works are complemented by reference materials and books by exhibiting artists and other influential practitioners within the Arab region and beyond, such as Walid Raad, Khalil Rabah, RoseLee Goldberg, Francis Alys, Hassan Khan and Wafaa Bilal, amongst others. The ARC.HIVE of Arab performing arts has also contributed copies of rare publications and curated a short programme of videos that opens up channels of research into the history of performance in the Arab region, concentrating on dance and theatre, offering a rich area of study that is key to tracing the various models and traditions that may have come to define performance art in the Arab region today.

Consider here Doa Aly's video *A Tress of Hair* (2008), a precise choreography with a limited vocabulary of dysfunctional movement. The narrative unfolds slowly and silently with the juxtaposition of text and movement. Various characters populate the work. A woman reclines onto her lover's lap, twisting her body into his. Three female dancers, gently pivot across the screen, carrying with it the textual component of the work. The narrative fuses two stories by the 19th-century French writer Guy de Maupassant to create an 'allegorical cycle of waste: waste of emotions, obsession and of movement.'^[1] With narration taken from the original stories of *Tress of Hair* and *Berthe*, Aly's video manages to transport the viewer into a fragile universe heavy with aspiration and longing centred on the emotive bodies of the dancers.

In Marwa Arsanios's film *OLGA's NOTES, all those restless bodies* (2015) the relationship between individual and collective bodies is exposed in a similar kind of choreography. The film focuses on dancers' bodies as a medium with which to discuss socio-political histories of Egypt. Drawing on a 1963 issue of *Al-Hilal* magazine that describes the establishment of a new dance school in Cairo in terms of modernization, 'the new industry of the body', the use of the dancer as a metaphor for the body politic is invoked.^[2] As the artist states, "After years of training, rehearsing, and performing, the dancer's body has become damaged-a metaphor of the violence of state projects, and nation-state building that accompanies a capitalist ideology and a consumerist approach to the human form."^[3] Focusing on the bodies of six dancers performing different types of movement, from pole-dancing to the re-enactment of a Yvonne Rainer piece – the film is interspersed with narration and images from the magazine on which the work is based.

OLGA's *NOTES, all those restless bodies* highlights the porosity of performance between more rigorously defined art forms such as theatre, dance, film, literature and visual arts. Like Aly, Arsanios opens up further areas for consideration within *Staging Histories*. Namely, how performance art in parts of the world, such as the Arab region, cannot be narrowly defined as in the western world.

Of course, the history of the body in contemporary performance art has been strongly influenced by western art history. From 1981 to 1984, for instance, Hassan Sharif developed his practice at Byam Shaw in London, shortly after Hatoum attended the school (1975–1979).^[4] Influenced by the 1960s Fluxus movement, Sharif's early works were in direct response to his student life in London, with his body as a mediator of these experiences, which he enacted both in the UK and at home in the UAE. 'At the time, he took pages of an Arabic to English Dictionary and took photographs of them in assorted urban settings from various distances. This project evolved more recently in *Dictionary*, 2015: pages of the dictionary clustered together like leaves on cascading cotton rope, which was presented at a recent exhibition at Isabelle van den Eynde alongside these by-now historical images from the eighties.'^[5]

'Sharif's work, in this regard, is one in which performance becomes a work of intimate mediation, translation and, ultimately, transmission.'^[6] In his practice, small, otherwise insignificant actions involving the body become moments of total intimacy. There is a repetitiveness that Sharif brings into his object work, as in the case of *Dictionary*, in which pages and pages are stuck together in what might be called a form of automatic making, that he also brought to his early performance. In *Hair and Milk Bottle* (1984), for instance, which we present in this exhibition, the artist plays a game of throwing his pubic hair into a milk bottle.^[7] While a meaningless task, this is an artistic gesture that is deeply personal. It is an example of how performance is able to address both major events and everyday situations on a human level. 'In the case of *Dictionary*, for instance, we see an entire relation between two different cultures distilled to language and its translation: a history.'^[8]

The notion of performance as a form of recording and re-writing history is thus at the core of this exhibition. It focuses on various strategies employed by artists to articulate different perspectives and conditions that would be otherwise not form part of official accounts. Emily Jacir's *Crossing Surda* (a record of going to and from work) (2002), for instance, documents the difficulties that Palestinians face crossing Israeli checkpoints. In reaction to an incident in which Israeli soldiers detained the artist at gunpoint for filming her feet near a checkpoint, Jacir cut a hole in her bag and covertly filmed her journey to work for eight days. This simple gesture of recording everyday movement is politically significant, especially since the events that took place during the Second Intifada when travel restrictions were heightened in the West Bank.^[9]

While Jacir was realizing *Crossing Surda* (a record of going to and from work), she was also working on the series *We Come From Here* (2001–03), in which the artist offers her services as a proxy to Palestinians unable to travel to Israel. As an American passport holder, Jacir was able to perform duties on behalf others, such as playing football with Palestinian kids or visiting the graves of loved ones. In emphasizing the mobility of her body against the immobility of those who provide her with the tasks, Jacir's performance challenges the boundaries constituted by national barriers by making them visible through the political status of her own body.

Echoing the simplicity of Jacir's use of performance to document the experience of daily activities on a political level is Mohammed Kazem's *Photographs with a Flag* (1997). In this photographic series on exhibit in the show, the artist stands around the circumference of a flag that mysteriously appeared one day in the Al Mamzar area of Sharjah. Such flags were often used to demarcate private property and areas of future development in the United Arab Emirates. Using both the flag and his body as a marker of shifting economic and physical terrains, Kazem looks out into the horizon as a witness with what might be described as a mix of nostalgia for the past and optimism for the future.^[10] Kazem went on to document the realization of such development projects in other works including *Window* (2003–2005), a video and photographic series that charts the rise of the Shangri La Hotel as seen from the artist's window. The series also depicts the labour within these massive projects: the migrant workers on the construction site and the employees of the completed hotel as they go about their work routines.

During the same period that Kazem produced *Photographs with a Flag*, Lin Yilin was producing work that addressed the rapid urbanization in China. Taking the form of public interventions, Yilin's work incorporates common construction materials, particularly concrete bricks and sand, which were easily accessible in the artist's hometown of Guangzhou. In *Safely Maneuvering Across the Road* (1995), the artist disrupts traffic by moving a wall of concrete brick-by-brick across a busy street, maintaining the shape of the wall through the gridlocked traffic. In *Sand Dune* (1997), documented in this exhibition with still images, the artist again attempts to build and move a brick wall, but this time across a sand dune on a construction site in Guangzhou. It is an impossible mission as the bricks sink into the sand and the wall fails to maintain its full shape. Whereas *Safely Maneuvering Across the Road* pointed to the disruption to normal life caused by modernization, *Sand Dune* alludes to the instability of sustaining such developments.

This kind of global intricacy makes it crucial to connect with performance art practices and movements around the world to generate conversations outside of the strict confines of national identity. Xiao Lu's *Dialogue* (1989), an installation that includes a red domestic phone on a table in the middle of two phone booths, which were beginning to appear on city streets as symbols of modernity during the late-eighties, similarly looks at the contradictions of China's modernization. Two mannequins dressed as students, were situated in the booths, presumably calling home, where the phone was left dangling off the hook. The visual metaphor suggests a disconnection between the old and the new, the public and the private. When this installation was restaged at the *China/Avant-Guard* exhibition at the National Art Museum in Beijing in 1989, a complementary performance by Lu, conceived with another artist Tang Song, caused a sensation. Lu fired two shots from a gun directly into her installation; a gesture that she says completed the work as an ultimate act of frustration.

Following the performance, Lu and Song were arrested and the authorities shut *China/Avant-Guard* down. As a direct implication, the performance art scene was driven underground out of fear, in addition to the extensive censorship enforced on artistic production. Four months after this incident, the Tiananmen Square protests erupted in June 1989. While unrelated, the oppression that provoked Xiao Lu to such theatricality and which led to the shut down of the 1989 exhibition, is reflected in the same oppression that the Tiananmen protests rallied against. What notably link this pair of events – Xiao Lu's performance and the 1989 Tiananmen Crackdown – are the consequences that the protests had on culture.

Political events often become the catalyst for performance and this is most readily witnessed in acts of protest, where collective resistance is enacted through a variety of performative actions. In *I March In The Parade of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I'm Not Free* (2007–2008), Sharon Hayes uses the form of political protest speech to deliver a love letter that entangles the language of romance and politics, weaving in political slogans with proclamations of love.^[11] Through a megaphone on the streets of New York, the artist calls out to her lost lover seeking to rekindle their relationship, which flourished during the Iraq war protests. But as the war continues, the optimism for peace and for the relationship itself dwindles. The work delicately blurs the distinction between the personal and political body as this unknown person – often referred to simply as 'my love' or 'you' – is never clearly defined by the artist.

Within this frame, performance has a subversive potential to undermine authoritative narratives. Coco Fusco's film *Operation Atropos* (2006) documents a group of women who voluntarily undergo interrogation and Prisoner of War resistance training by ex-United States Army personnel. The simulation mirrors the training of the actual U.S. military to teach civilians how soldiers are taught to cope with such extreme treatment. The work, however, also viscerally exposes the methods of dehumanization used by the military, highlighting the performance of the soldiers in their ability to restage such horrific acts and rationalize their actions. Fusco explored this further through her lecture-performance *A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America* (2006–2008), which looks at the expanding role of women in the U.S. occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. By adopting the persona of a female soldier, Fusco explores the shifting nature of power in the War on Terror where, for example, sexual innuendo is a tactic for extracting information from Islamic fundamentalists and women become an ambiguous political force.

Sharif Waked's *Chic Point* (2005) also playfully disarms dominant power structures through a fashion show of clothing commissioned especially for Israeli checkpoints. Presented as haute couture, the clothes expose torsos and other parts of the body to give agency to Palestinians who undergo humiliating public strip-searches. The absurdity of Waked's intervention is echoed by Lin Yilin's performance *A Kind of Machine Called 'Liberation'* (2003), which was produced in the same year as the United States invasion of Iraq. Prior to the performance, a circular structure of concrete bricks was constructed around the artist's leg, which remained trapped during the performance. The satirical symbolism of work lies in the collapse of concrete blocks under the relentless yet pathetic weight of a child's bicycle ridden by a fully-grown man. As the brick wall deteriorates, putting both Lin and the cyclist at risk, *A Kind of Machine Called 'Liberation'* critically reflects on the precarious nature of war and the fragility of life. A performance produced for a live audience, the work was completed by the gaze of spectators who watched helplessly as the action unfolded, themselves taking part as performers of their own inaction.

That the audience is also implicated in the performance is something The Yes Men and Steve Lambert considered when interrogating the mechanics and propaganda of war. Realized in 2009, the work undermined the authority of news media through the creation and distribution of fake copies of *The New York Times* with the headline: 'IRAQ WAR ENDS'. This major co-production, delivered with 30 writers, 50 advisors, around 1000 volunteer distributors, and the organizations CODEPINK, May First/People Link, Evil Twin, Improv Everywhere and Not An Alternative, speaks to the possibilities of the collective imagination and the potential of performative interventions when it comes to activating a shared imagination. Inside the newspaper, for example, were 14 pages of 'best case scenario' news pieces, each describing the world as it could be eight months in the future. Hypothetical headlines included 'Maximum Wage Law Passes Congress', 'USA Patriot Act repealed', and 'All Public Universities To Be Free'. Each story provided a fictional history and timeline of how these objectives could actually be met through grass-roots pressure using real-world data.

As a tangible object, this imaginary *New York Times* transported readers to a parallel universe where their hopes and dreams became real news. Later that year, The Yes Men struck again with a 'special edition' of the *New York Post* with the headline 'We're Screwed'. With reports that New York would face deadly heat waves and extreme flooding, the newspaper was released one day before the United Nations Climate Change Conference. The most alarming thing about this fake edition of the *New York Post* was that all the news was true: it was fact-checked by experts and largely drawn from an official City report.

This mixture of myth and fact, spectatorship and performative intervention is something Mona Hatoum's performances, from the early years of her practice between 1980 and 1988, relied on heavily. Hatoum's live actions were aimed directly at spectators, often subverting their gaze by shifting her role between that of perpetrator and victim. Concentrating on her relationship with an audience, none of Hatoum's performances were produced for video, and most photographs were created by chance rather than by design.^[12] Presented in this exhibition, *Variation on Discord and Divisions* (1984) draws together different elements of Hatoum's performances *Them and Us ... and Other Divisions* (1984) and *The Negotiating Table* (1983) with common motifs such as the use of a black mask, red blood-like liquid and innards.^[13]

As a series of vignettes, *Variation on Discord and Divisions* comments on the hostile realities of war and destruction with a perspective that is typical of Hatoum in its refusal to address a particular geographic condition. It instead encompasses universal issues, through which Hatoum forces spectators to look beyond her identity as an artist of Palestinian descent in order to consider the network of intricacies that connect conflicts globally. Notably, *The Negotiating Table* is one of the few examples wherein Hatoum directly refers to specific events in the Arab region, particularly the Lebanese Civil War, which forced her into exile as a student in London. Created in response to the Israeli invasion and massacres in Palestinian refugee camps, Hatoum lays wrapped in plastic and gauze, appearing bruised and bloody with animal entrails. Hatoum is motionless for the three-hour performance, leaving the audience to focus on her breath and the pre-recorded sounds of news reports and speeches by Western leaders.

Hatoum's work underscores one of the themes within the exhibition, which is the symbolic and actual use of the body in performance. The artist's body is as an effective instrument of endurance in the resistance against certain socio-political conditions. In the works discussed so far, we have seen the human body in different states of flux, teetering between action and inaction, the past and future. From China to Palestine to the United States, the politics of the body and the body as the locus for a network of concerns connect all of the works in this exhibition.

In the wider frame of the research project *Staging Histories*, the material gathered here is a starting point from which artists, writers and researchers can now build further discursive networks that further complicate the histories of performance art around the world. Consider the fact that the body – or rather, the performing body – comes in many forms, from the artist to the composition, and the audience to the documents and artifacts that survive the event. In Wael Shawky's *Bent Jbeil* (2008), a performance for video that responds to the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon considers the scripture as a form of transmission. The artist physically inserts himself into the narrative, walking through the war torn city reciting verses from the Qur'an relating to the relationship between Jews, Christians and Muslims. The work bears similarities with Shawky's earlier and well-known work *The Cave* (2004) in which the artist walks through a supermarket reciting verses of the Qur'an that tells the story of men who fall asleep in a cave and are shocked by the world they discover when they awake over 300 years later.^[14]

It is this sense of discovery that unites *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things* to two other platforms that also explore the genealogies of performance art in the Arab world: *Echoes & Reverberations*, a group exhibition at the Hayward Gallery Project space featuring Jumana Emil Abboud, Basma Alsharif, Samah Hijawi, Anas Al-Shaikh, Magdi Mostafa and Joe Namy, and Ibraaz Platform 009, which explores the genealogies of performance art in North Africa and the Middle East. These projects come together with this exhibition in an attempt to draw out the multiple histories from which contemporary performance has emerged.

[1] Quote taken from Doa Aly speaking about her work

[2] Kabra, Fawz, 'Accumulative Processes: Marwa Arsanios in conversation wth Fawz Kabra', *Ibraaz*, [\[http://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/164\]](http://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/164)

[3] Quote taken from Marwa Arsanio's portfolio.

[4] David, Catherine (ed.), *Hassan Sharif: Works 1973-2011*, (Hatje Cantz Verlag: Ostfildern, 2011), pp. 45-48.

[5] Stephanie Bailey on Hassan Sharif, forthcoming.

[6] Bailey, *Op .cit.*

[7] David (ed.), *Hassan Sharif: Works 1973-2011*, p. 48

[8] Bailey, *Op. cit.*

[9] Masters, HG, 'No Occupation Without Representation: Artists in Palestine', *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/Aug 2011, [<http://www.artasiapacific.com/Magazine/74/NoOccupationWithoutRepresentationArtistsInPalestine>]

[10] Kolczynska, Paulina, 'Mohammed Kazem: the Second Generation of Contemporary UAE Artists', *Mohammed Kazem*, (Damiani: Bologna, 2013), p. 33.

[11] Cohen, Kris, 'Our Broken Genres: Sharon Hayes's Love Addresses', *Afterall*, n. 38, Spring 2015, [http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.38/our-broken-genres_sharon-hayes_s-love-addresses]

[12] Heinrich, Christoph (ed.), *Mona Hatoum*, (Hatje Cantz Verlag: Ostfildern, 2004), p. 109

[13] Heinrich (ed.), *Mona Hatoum*, p. 109

[14] Shawky, Wael, *Horsemen Adore Perfumes and Other Stories*, (Sharjah Art Foundation: Sharjah, 2014), p. 44

Further reading:

Fok, Silvia, *LIFE & DEATH – Art and The Body in Contemporary China*, (Intellect: Bristol and Chicago, 2013)

Xing, Danwen, *Xing Danwen: A Personal Diary-China's Avant-Garde in the 1990s*, (Scalo: Zurich, 2011)

Bilal, Wafaa, and Kari Lydersen, *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*, (City Lights: San Francisco, 2008)

Rae, Paul, *Theatre and Human Rights*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2009)

Griffin, Jonathan, 'Hassan Khan: The individual, the communal; theatricality and authenticity', (*Frieze Magazine*: London, 6th Sept 2006)

Rifky, Sarah, *Cairo, Art and the Politics of the Spectacle*, (pages 88-93), (Abraaj Capital Art Prize: Cairo, 2010)

Burkhalter, Thomas, *Local Music Scenes and Globalization: Transnational Platforms in Beirut*, (Routledge: London, 2014)

Wilson-Goldie, Kaelen, 'To The Streets', (*Frieze Magazine*: London, 3rd May 2011).

Fusco, Coco, *Dangerous Moves: Politics and Performance in Cuba*, (Tate Publishing: London 2015)

David, Catherine, *Hassan Sharif: Works 1973-2010*, (Hatje Cantz Verlag: Ostfildern, 2011)

Xiao, Lu, and Archibald McKenzie, *Dialogue*, (Hong Kong University Press: Hong Kong, 2010)

Illes, Chrissie, *Sharon Hayes (Whitney Museum of American Art)*, (Yale University Press: New York, 2012)

Rubin, Don, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre, Volume 4: The Arab World*, (Routledge: London, 1999)

Amine, Khalid, and George F. Roberson, *Performing Transformations* (Collaborative Media Internet: Denver, 2013)

Shafik, Viola, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural identity*, (American University Press in Cairo: Cairo, 2007)

Dean, David, Yana Meerzon, and Kathryn Prince, *History, Memory, Performance (Studies in International Performance)*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London 2014)

Mata, Dina and Zahera Harb, *Narrating Conflict in the Middle East: Discourse, Image and Communications Practices in Lebanon and Palestine*, (I.B. Tauris: London, 2013)

Martin, Carol, *Theatre of the Real*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2012)

Foreword

Anthony Downey, Editor-in-Chief, Ibraaz

Ibraaz is pleased to publish an online guide to accompany *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things*, a group exhibition that form part of the launch of Delfina Foundation's new research and commissioning platform *Staging Histories*.

Focusing on performance art, *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things* presents new commissions and archival work by thirteen international practitioners, including Doa Aly, Marwa Arsanios, Coco Fusco, Mona Hatoum, Sharon Hayes, Emily Jacir, Mohammed Kazem, Xiao Lu, Hassan Sharif, Wael Shawky, Sharif Waked, Lin Yilin and the activist-duo The Yes Men with Steve Lambert. As Delfina Director Aaron Cezar writes:

While many of the artistic works emerge from the Arab region, they relate to global politics, economics and cultural shifts, and can therefore be understood as a preface, consequence, or echo of major developments during this period. The intention is to open up lines of enquiry for further research that will feed into future iterations of this long-term curatorial project.

This antagonistic staging and restaging of history through cultural means, as the curators and organizers observe, involves a detailed history of performance art from and about the so-called Arab world. One of the more productive issues to be explored here therefore involves the extent to which any history of performance art contests the geographic, ideological and theoretical suppositions attending the prescriptive ideal of the 'Arab world'. We are therefore doubly pleased to produce this online guide insofar as it provides a number of productive crossovers with *Ibraaz's* ongoing exploration of the genealogy of performance art. Throughout Platform 009, which we formally launched in May, our ambition has been to document the multiple histories of performance art and their formative role in the development of contemporary art practices across the region and beyond. This ambition is also clearly a key formative element in this current exhibition and the broader context of *Staging Histories*.

Given the increasingly precarious nature of cultural practices and the contested sense of national and community-based heritages, the history of performance art today would appear to speak to a specific historical condition: one in which any sense of homogeneous practices and reductive histories are readily questioned and thereafter rendered hermeneutically suspect in critiques of cultural production. Furthermore, performative gestures and practices - in the context of private, public and civic space - have been subjected to forms of aesthetic, ethical and political critique that, to date, see them in isolation from the evolving global contexts that underwrite international developments in performance art. Again, this represents a key shared element across both *Ibraaz's* and Delfina Foundation's respective platforms.

Over the coming weeks and months, we will be adding to this online guide with a view to publishing a full catalogue of the show and accompanying events for September 2015. Given the extent and range of the subject matter in hand, and the relative lack of critical analysis available online and elsewhere, *Ibraaz's* research platform will move, for the first time, from a six to a twelve month cycle and an extended reader will be published in 2016 to coincide with a series of conferences on the subject. We would like to take this opportunity to invite our readers and community of supporters to produce feedback and input into this process as it happens across its various physical and virtual sites of production.

Looking at Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* Barrak Alzaid

Can performance effect systemic change within society? What tools does performance provide to complicate, disrupt, problematize, revise and interrogate dominant systems and structures of power and control? In 2004 Iraqi artist Wafaa Bilal received news that his brother was killed by an American military drone and channelled this devastating loss into a work titled *Domestic Tension* (2007).^[1] What was initially conceived as an interactive installation became a worldwide phenomenon that centred around the public's complicity with the violence and technologies of war and their accompanying traumatic effects. To fully comprehend the work, individuals were invited to relate to the broader conflict in Iraq within and through Bilal's personal experience of violence.

When visitors entered Chicago's FlatFile gallery in the spring of 2007 to view Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension*, they faced an assault of noisome fumes from viscous yellow paintballs that covered every surface, as a barrage of shots thudded dully against their ears. In this work, the artist lived alone for one month in a prison-cell sized room in the gallery, directly in the line of fire of a remote-controlled paintball gun. A camera mounted to the top of the gun connected the artist to internet viewers around the world who could shoot at him 24 hours a day through an online interface that included a control panel to direct the gun.^[2] As the project went on, a virtual audience grew by the thousands: the online interface became a crucial aspect of the live performance and played host to 80,000 users from 128 countries who fired 60,000 shots over the course of 31 days. A chat area allowed online visitors to speak to other users and the artist. Bilal also produced daily YouTube updates, which can still be streamed today.

Through various layers of enactment, *Domestic Tension* represented a highly political move to interrogate complacency by the United States in the face of the ongoing effects of the Iraq War. The work confronts the spectator's capacity to witness violence and trauma as a staunchly ethical dilemma. In his book on the project, *Shoot an Iraqi*, Bilal recalls that there were distinct divisions among viewers: some were aggressive shooters, others were curious bystanders and some actively engaged in protecting Bilal from the shots. 'I want the project to force each viewer to confront their own motives, their own internal conflict about shooting me,' Bilal wrote.^[3] In this, the viewer became a primary agent in control of the violence perpetrated on the artist, just like the soldiers directing drone planes over Iraq. The dynamics of participation were complex. Shooters were able to direct the gun but also had to compete with others for control. At one point, Bilal recounts, shooters discovered they could fire many shots at once by opening up multiple browser windows. 'They're loving it,' he wrote, 'someone in Milwaukee opens 19 browsers and starts firing away; he tells me he's giving me a 19-gun salute.'^[4] Viewers treated the interface like a video game in which actions have no consequences; such excessive gestures underscored the symbolic power of violence as a vehicle for pleasure, which takes over from all other forms of receptivity as the performer gives up his subjective experience to the viewer-as-participant. This capacity to both view and interact compounds the user's complicity with the violence of *Domestic Tension*, underscoring the user's inability to recognize the suffering they were subjecting upon Bilal. This element of violence constructs a dynamic between the audience and the artist that goes beyond viewer and subject. What this essay argues is that the highly charged content of *Domestic Tension* as a performance and as testimony demands that the viewer also bear witness to the subject matter at hand.

In his YouTube videos, Bilal communicated his daily responses to the piece and updated viewers on his state of mind. As the piece progressed, the emotional and physical strain brought out prior experiences of the first Gulf War and the 2003 US-led intervention in Iraq. We learn from several of these videos that the performance is a direct response to the deaths of his brother and father at the hands of remote artillery fire. Bilal shares these intimate portraits and politicizes them through his testimonies as they have been drawn from his experience of the performance. Narrativizing trauma becomes a form of truth-telling in this respect. For professor and psychoanalyst Dori Laub, whose work focuses on the traumatic legacies associated with mass genocide and the

Holocaust, testimony is something that arises out of an exchange between a speaker and listener: co-participants who, through their dialogic engagement and affective exchanges, constitute the testimony of the traumatic event.^[5] However, Bilal's performance troubles this notion of testimony as a linear exchange and expands the ways in which violence within a traumatic event can be narrated and expressed. The camera stands in for the live witness and directly engages thousands of individuals who track Bilal's experience online. Such viewers are constituted as co-creators of the traumatic narrative by the very act of their witnessing, regardless of whether they point and click the gun at the artist.

There is an aspect of witnessing in *Domestic Tension* that introduces a strategic state of looking that potentially allows for violence to carry on unattended. Users consent to shooting the gun at Bilal, while others gaze on from their comfort zones on the other side of their monitor. Such inaction fulfils the violent mandate of the project as much as the active participants shooting the gun. The dual components of video diary and chat are part of the ethical strategy of the piece. For spectators, the question is not as simple as 'shoot' or 'don't shoot' since they must address their own position in relation to the artist's suffering. They must come to know how they are implicated in the violence through the very technology that constitutes the violence – in other words, the remote user interface. In an interview describing the inspiration for his set up Bilal reflects:

Only when I watched an interview with an American soldier who was sitting in Colorado, directing these drone planes and dropping bombs on people in Iraq, did I realize that she was completely disconnected psychologically and physically from his [sic] targets.^[6]

The technology employed by soldiers reinforced the distance between the aggressor and the targets and calcified an intense form of looking that is in fact 'not looking'. The soldier views schematics, information, coordinates, maps and satellite images but is unable to see the cost to humanity and what is at stake in her own participation.

This form of looking destroys insight and thwarts the spectator's ability to identify with the subjects of violence, as they are simultaneously unable to recognize their role in the scenario and are incapacitated from intervening. In her 2005 book *Disappearing Acts*, scholar Diana Taylor terms this mode of 'not looking' percepticide, to remind us of the way national identity is shaped through the spectacle of violent acts and spectatorship. She does this by analysing the political spectacles that comprised Argentina's 'Dirty War' between 1976 and 1983, particularly the disappearances of innocent civilians. She claims that during this time, in order to qualify as 'good' Argentines, people were forced to ignore the atrocities. Even as people denied what they saw, individuals in public places continued to be picked up by men in military attire and disappeared. People literally turned away from their fellow citizens and for Taylor this 'was the trap that destroyed community cohesion'.^[7] A vital and performative series of protests that attempted to recuperate this loss were the marches by the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo which began in 1977 and continued through to 2006. The Madres paraded photographs of their sons and daughters as a way to resist the silencing by the regime and increase the visibility associated with their disappearance. In a similar fashion *Domestic Tension* draws attention to the effects that an inability to bear witness has on both the viewers and the artist. Bilal achieves this by enacting a visibility campaign of his own, using the reactions of the masses to unveil the dynamics we are really dealing with when it comes to violence and our perception or experience of it.

The context of *Domestic Tension* – the 2003 US invasion in Iraq – reflects two aspects of this passive spectatorship. An unprecedented number of embedded journalists presented direct footage of the war front, which provided an illusion of an 'inside view'. This belied the massive collateral damage to homes and Iraqi civilians created by the 'shock and awe' strategy in Iraq that included 29,200 air strikes beginning in March 2003.^[8] Although people throughout the world watched the live reporting, they were far removed from the extensive

damage that impacted civilians and which continue to shape the lives of people affected by US military aggression. In his project, Bilal uses his own identity as an Iraqi to connect the spectator to violent acts as well as the broader issues of the Iraq war. He foregrounds his identity and becomes the necessary subject of the violence.^[9] In this light, the notion of percepticide and Taylor's recounting of the Madres' resistance to it helps us to understand the other layer of violence in Bilal's performance that occurs by silent spectators viewing the onslaught. There is a tacit acknowledgement that allows the violence to recur in an unmediated fashion, halting only when the server overloads from too much traffic or when the gun runs out of paintballs and cannot be refilled quickly enough. When violence is constituted in this way – in the manner of a passive spectatorship – it becomes systemic: rooted in structures of power.

To account for a reconfigured viewing experience within this context, we must look at how a particular form of empathic witnessing was produced through *Domestic Tension*. In Diana Taylor's methodological approach towards problematizing the empathy of seeing in Argentina's 'Dirty War', she writes: 'I'm attempting to make space for an involved, informed, caring yet critical form of spectatorship which, for lack of a better term, I'll call witnessing'.^[10] This form of witnessing ties together the experiences of the witness and the witnessed event in an active, affective set of relations. Not only does the witness see the violence but, in order to bear witness to it, must engage with it critically and literally *care for* the subject of violence. This form of witnessing consequently operates as a relational and ethical mode of engaging with others that surpasses the limitations set by the regime and society's maintenance of it through percepticide.

Domestic Tension was a scenario constructed as an open invitation for spectators to create a performance in collaboration with an artist to explore violence and the limitations of passive witnessing and remaining silent; both forms of witnessing that merely sustain violence. The spectator is aware of the conditions of violence, as well as their implicated position with respect to it, but does not act – a mode of looking that can be traced back to the first Gulf War in 1991, during which live broadcast via satellite technology transformed war reporting into a daily event of dramatic storytelling.^[11] This legacy persists in the hypermediated world Bilal's work creates, heightening the awareness of our complicity with violence so as to induce empathetic witnessing. In his project, Bilal reveals that only by engaging with people on a 'human level' can they shift their perceptions and alter their actions. In his book recounting the experience he relates an exchange with a woman from the UK:

She kept saying, 'KILL KILL KILL MAIM KILL.' Then, 'Yr a handsome bloke! Don't b coy.' I wanted to cut through the ridiculous banter and talk to her as a normal human being. Finally, when I told her about my brother's and father's deaths I was able to engage her in real conversation. One of them said she was sorry for my losses and years of exile [...] 'Shootin seemed really fun at the time. We all feel really bad now!'^[12]

How is it possible to move so abruptly from a call for violent dismemberment to feeling sympathy for the artist? It is not until Bilal discloses his own pain and suffering beyond the physical experience that viewers can empathize with him. In this affective revelation viewers do not simply identify with the artist but also feel shame for celebrating the artist's suffering. That such a perceptual change can occur in an individual almost instantaneously points directly to the power of performance as a potential model for changing broader human relations.

What is effectively seen in this empathic view of Bilal's project is not merely 'the narrative of extreme human pain,' which Dori Laub describes as the primary form of bearing witness.^[13] Empathic witnessing demands both tactile and visual modes of engagement and marks a way into the ethical relationality of violence. That is to say, bearing witness entails a form of self-reflexivity in which the viewer confronts her own complicity with that violence and, in so doing, effectively bears witness to ultimately tap into the broader politics of the project. In

this, *Domestic Tension* offers a model for empathic witnessing in which seeing, touching and feeling are knitted together in vital relation to the event.

On an individual level, a single woman stopped firing while many others continued shooting. Days later, on Memorial Day weekend, Beverly Wilson, an art student Bilal had never met, discovered that by constantly clicking left, she could ensure that the gun listed away from Bilal as long as her clicks outnumbered the shooters aiming at their target. Wilson drew up a schedule to cover Bilal continuously over the course of several days and formed a 'virtual human shield' with dozens of others around the world.^[14] Bilal also notes that Wilson logged the most hours and even visited his gallery to bring him food and fresh socks. Wilson not only participated in a form of virtual political activism, she extended that work into the real world to produce material changes in Bilal's existence. The collective actions of the group she mobilized on the one hand denounce the efforts of aggressors to shoot at another human being and, on the other, actually prevent any shots from being fired. The viewing experience transforms from one of virtual engagement to an embodied witnessing of the event. This represents the next stage of empathic witnessing which engages the site of violence in a material way. The individual viewing experience, through the camera lens and the multi-user platform of the online performance site, becomes a collective and transformative viewing experience.

Speaking on the potential for virtual communities to engender social change, Leah Lievrouw, Professor of Information Studies at UCLA, offers an understanding of online affiliative networks as 'digital technologies to share information and interact with widely dispersed, like-minded others outside of traditional institutional or organizational structures. As such, these affiliative forms may help foster new spaces for civil society or the encouragement of social capital.'^[15] Tapping into these networks through Bilal's performance site situates violence as a productive force and not merely one rooted in destruction. Change is possible through the use of digital technologies, which become a framework to alter the material conditions that allow violence to occur.

This awareness of our ability to affect and be affected by each other destabilizes the very notion of a stable comfort zone by offering a potentially transformative politics. We may all see the same thing when we turn on the news, flip open a smart phone or log on to the Internet. However, bearing witness through the empathic gaze demands that we do not simply participate as an interpretive community that sees violence but instead negotiate our own relationship to the violence. *Domestic Tension* is not merely about rendering the impact of violence visible but revealing the mechanisms to transform the conditions that produce violence. This politics is one that turns looking into action by complicating the act of bearing witness as one comprised simultaneously of seeing an event, participating in it, feeling its effects and taking action. In order to bear witness to violence, the witness must first locate herself in relation to the violence. This furthermore renders visible the mechanisms of violence and has the potential to mobilize individuals in order to halt it.

[1] Shelley Rice, on Domestic Tension: An Interview with Wafaa Bilal by Shelley Rice,' Jeu de Paume website, <http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org/blogs/shelleyrice/2012/10/01/domestic-tension-an-interview-with-wafaa-bilal-by-shelley-rice/>

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen, *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2008), p.143.

[4] Bilal and Lyderson, *op. cit.*, p.58.

[5] See: Dori Laub, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening' in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., eds. (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[6] Rice, *op. cit.*

[7] *Ibid.*, p.122.

[8] Lt. Gen. T. Michael Moseley, 'Operation IRAQI FREEDOM - By The Numbers,' *Global Security* website, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/uscentaf_oif_report_30apr2003.pdf.

[9] See: Les Roberts et al, 'Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey,' *The Lancet*, 29 October 2004, <http://www.cs.princeton.edu/~chazelle/politics/bib/lancet.pdf>; Gilbert Burnham et al., 'Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey,' *The Lancet*, 12 October 2006, http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-refugee-and-disaster-response/publications_tools/publications/additional_pdfs/Burnham_2006-Iraq2_Lancet.pdf; and Jim Krane, 'US Precision Weapons Not Foolproof,' *Associated Press Archive*, 1 April 2003, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/2003/U-S-Precision-Weapons-Not-Foolproof/id-3530fc41ad349adb3a8dce9e57a23246>.

[10] Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's 'Dirty War'* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p.25.

[11] 'Television – The Persian gulf war,' American Foreign Relations website, <http://www.americanforeignrelations.com/O-W/Television-The-persian-gulf-war.html#b%23ixzz1uKXkqB1l>.

[12] Bilal and Lyderson, *op. cit.*, p.112.

[13] Laub, *op. cit.*, p.57.

[14] Bilal and Lyderson, *op. cit.*, p.142.

[15] Leah Lievrouw, 'When Users Push Back: Oppositional New Media and Community' in *Communities and Technologies: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Communities and Technologies*, M. Huysman and V. Wulf, eds.(Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), p.400.

Between Progress and the Lamentation for Destruction

The State of Performance Art in the Arab World: Sulayman Al Bassam in conversation with Ala Younis

Sulayman Al-Bassam is a writer and director. His vivid performances are dramatic objects that allow for echoes made across vast stretches of time. Heavily based on research, his mapped narratives utilize found and imagined material, borrow geographies and combine cities, and claim other stories to relate to what's happening now. His newest work, *The Lamentation for the Destruction of Ur* (2015), is an experiment that bases a script on a historical tablet that laments the destruction of the world's oldest city, by questioning the unlisted causes of such destruction through fragments of scenarios borrowed from ancient and contemporary times. In *The Speaker's Progress* (2011) he created a work in the past, to bring it later under the hands of a team of renowned researchers of great achievements and high morals to work tirelessly in a laboratory attempting to understand and dissecting that play which was performed in the sixties, at the height of the country's golden age. In this play, that came as the third phase of Arab Shakespeare Trilogy, a Ruler makes a furtive appearance as the embodiment of the 1960s: a unifying symbol that hypnotized the crowds. In this interview, Ala Younis talks to Al Bassam about his productions, and how he views these within the frame of performance.

Ala Younis: What I find interesting about your body of work is that it borrows geographies, combining other cities and claiming other stories. I would like to focus on your newest work, *The Lamentation for the Destruction of Ur* (2015) and also on *The Speaker's Progress* (2011), which are both very curious in terms of how they use research, finding artefacts and facts and relating them to what's happening now. It's like a commentary but also, in some ways, a reaction to current events. *Ur* is related to the destruction of a city – it is a lamentation of this destruction to be more precise. You decided to have this work or story take place in Failaka, an island of the coast of Kuwait, which has its own prehistoric history from the times that relate to Ur but also the very recent history such as the war in 1990. In your discussions of *Ur* you also so you draw parallels with ISIS and the fall of Mosul. It seems to me like a very deeply researched project, as if you've been working on this for many years, but then the destruction of Mosul happened not even a year since ago. So perhaps you can tell me how these different events came together; what came first and why?

Sulayman Al Bassam: The lamentation tablet itself that was brought to my attention by my partner and the dramaturge of the project, Georgina Van Welie, about five or six years ago. The tablet is, firstly, a beautiful piece of writing and, secondly, a very moving artefact in that it is a lamentation around Ur as the world's first city. So *The Lamentation for the Destruction of Ur* focuses around the destruction of the first city construction – the city and all that that contains from the idea of social space, legal space and space for beliefs. It is an icon of something that I feel is very much under threat – cities in the Arab world today are threatened spaces. The movement of militarization in the middle of the twentieth century was actually also a movement to undo the modernist concept of the city through the importing of rural communities into the city and the empowering of a new rural elite, which was the case in parts of Syria and Iraq. Beyond that, the city today is the locus of desertification of public space, private space and human space. It's all taking place through the emptying of the sense of meaning of the 'contemporary Arab' in the same way that the Arab national project was emptied of its meaning – they seem to be symbols of so many things that are not going right or the way we want them. So all of it is hugely contemporary in metaphoric potential.

For a long time, I didn't really know how to approach the text or what to do with it. I thought it was clearly a liturgical text, perhaps something that was linked to ceremony in temples. It's a text with a massive emotional charge in which there is an individual female voice, the voice of the goddess, and a choric voice or the voice of the group – these speakers who are unidentified but act like a chorus. So it wasn't until very recently, many years after I had initially started working or thought about using this text in some way, that I was able to clearly identify this chorus and protagonist structure. I was re-reading Greek tragedy at the same time and the links

started to make sense in my head. The geographic element of Failaka was really quite coincidental because I had retreated there to this very strange, mysterious island off the coast of Kuwait. Beyond having been a cradle of civilization throughout history, it lies between Shatt al-Arab, the Persian shores to the east, and the Kuwaiti shores to the west. It's a stopping point on the road to what they think was the civilization of Dilmun, which included Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the eastern coastal regions of Saudi Arabia. So Failaka has a very charged civilizational history but it is also a very odd place today because since the Iraqi invasion in 1990 Failaka has been depopulated. It's a place with a lot of buildings that look like they should be inhabited – a fire station and a bank and all of these facilities – but it's actually completely empty and has been for 30 years. The whole atmosphere of the place is very out of sync with time and it hasn't been developed – it hasn't undergone the Dubai transformation, the post-modern glitz. It is as it was, as if time stopped in 1990, which in itself is also a very powerful metaphor for Kuwait on a more local level. I had gone on this retreat in Failaka so as not be disturbed by the noise of the city and then these ideas began to come together. It was a magical moment. This is why I was then very keen to start thinking about it as a part of a new cycle of work, which is *The Icarus Cycle*, Icarus being the Hellenistic name for Failaka.

We did part of the research and development phase in Failaka with the artists, musicians and actor. As I said, I had established that there was a chorus element and a protagonist's voice but there was no causality and no narrative. So I thought up a story that became the protagonist's narrative and she became the central character in this tragic narrative. She, as a character, interested me. The name of the goddess in the tablet is Ningal and, to me, she seems to be an interesting character not only because she's a woman but also because she's a woman who's in confrontation with her society, her fellow gods. They punish her by destroying her city, not once but twice – first by a natural cataclysm that scientists, archaeologists and anthropologists are confused by the nature of. It could have been anything from a tsunami to a series of earthquakes and the thinking is that it was the same natural cataclysm that brought down the Sumerian civilization and ended it almost overnight. After the natural cataclysm came the invasion of the Elamite army; a foreign army that came to invade the city and destroy everything that was left. And so in the middle of all of this is a really magnetic and curious figure and I wanted to give voice to that character and to give voice to her own sense of revolt and aspiration. So the play became a play about this woman.

When and the idea of eliminating the history of pre-Islamic civilizations began to play itself out over the artefacts in Nineveh and Mosul and all of these places it struck me that the piece I was making everything had an even more urgent significance. For me the significance was already very urgent because the idea of the deserted, empty, dead city in the Middle East region already has high frequency - Homs, Baghdad, Benghazi, Sana'a – it's already present.

AY: That's sadly true. I think its interesting that you were informed of this artefact a few years before you managed to develop it. And you have called this 'stage one' – the first stage of experimentation?

SAB: Yes, I want to also trying to find new ways of making work that rely less on a calculated production logic and move more toward a fluid way of developing work that allows for more exploration through different geographies and different versions of work. I have had the opportunity to make this phase one and now there will be a second phase that will be a reading of the play in Paris on the 26 September at the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. It is a very modest production step in a way but I am trying to think of how best to use that to feed the second phase of the work. We will see how the work develops. But one of the aims from the very beginning with this piece was to play it in non-conventional spaces, in theatres that have been left by civilizations that have ended – Greek theatres, Roman theatres, theatres across the Middle East – but most of them are inaccessible. There are also spaces such as the Arènes de Lutèce in Paris – all of these places that carry vestiges of civilizations that are no longer.

AY: I think it's somewhat haunting to find the story of the lamentation for Ur and then find that its echo is still valid for many Arab cities today and this idea to play all of this in theatres left by civilizations that have ceased to exist. It's very scary.

SAB: We try to make it less scary. The music is very nice and we have uploaded some of it on the SABAB theatre website.^[1] I would like it to be part of the new body of work maybe. As I kept saying these last few months with all of the people that I am involved with here or elsewhere, creating a cycle of work is what I need. I think that this is the case for many people – what artists need is strategic partnerships particularly in this region. It's not necessarily going to work to just have production partnerships so that you do individual pieces on commission and on an individual event-to-event basis. It's difficult to create momentum in a place where there is so little infrastructure and so it's the strategic partnerships that are so much more important. In a way I have chosen this dead island, Failaka, as my strategic partner.

AY: In your first production for *The Lamentation for the Destruction of Ur* the audience sit on both sides of the stage?

SAB: Yes, that was a nice idea that was proposed by the French scenographer who collaborated with us on the project, Eric Soyer. I wanted it to be outside and I wasn't sure on the position for the audience but to have them on either side of this very plain, 1980s school courtyard space was very nice. It made the diametric aspect of playing and them looking at each other. It was beautiful, in fact.

AY: When people sit on both sides of the platform, everything about the actors is seen. This must not only be difficult for actors and their self-consciousness but there is also the element of the spectator watching the spectator as well. You have mentioned your scenographer and your partner Georgina Van Welie and, in fact, there are a lot of partners in your project. There's also Alia Farid who created the costumes.

SAB: Everyone involved, including Alia and the musicians, really entered into the spirit of the research and development of the project. Of course, it was only the momentum of our enthusiasm that led to what was in the end a quite epic event – a fully fledged performance when really all we'd set out to do was to make a research and development period. Theatre has that ability to push for the show – it wants to show. So, of course, any opportunity you give to a theatre maker to perform they're going to make some kind of performance. There are many different elements in the whole thing – the Sumerian aspect, the contemporary aspect, science fiction elements, the abandoned US humanoid targets. I don't think all of them work, necessarily, and they need filtering, rethinking and moving around. That process is a very difficult process to defend, to find patience for and to find support for. There's always an escalation – not just with the theatre maker's point of view, as I just described, but the production point of view – there's always that escalation of wanting the result. If you want the result go and look at Mosul. Go and see downtown Cairo. That's the result.

AY: Can we speak a little bit about *The Speaker's Progress*? This was the first piece of work of yours that I came across and I found it fascinating that it's about bringing back to memory again a work from the past, yet for it to be fictive anyways, and trying to give it a presence today. But at the same time it's about rulers and people changing positions of favour. There are so many elements.

SAB: Yes, there's a Borgesian aspect to *The Speaker's Progress* in that it takes its inspiration from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. It presents itself as a reconstruction of a play from 1963, performed in Kuwait. The play itself is a total artifice that we made up. And so we set about making a fake play that we filmed as a fake; used archive footage of as a fake; that we created audience response for; and even recorded the actors' 'memories' of it later in life. The fake event was symbolic or iconic of the kind of style of theatre – the type of social satire and the type of freedom of expression – that characterized Kuwait and other Arab countries at that time. And so it was like an artefact of the 'Golden Era' of Kuwait in the 60s and 70s. From that departure point, the play explores the boundaries of expression and freedom in what has effectively become a theocratic police state and it uses those two extremities to render its tale. It is a story whose pattern is familiar to many people in the region. It's not a new story – that particular narrative of the 'Golden Age' in the middle of the twentieth century, its loss and then the subsequent search for the centre of ideological direction and its final re-centring around religious discourse is a familiar tale of woe.

The other thing that was formally invented in that piece, at least for me, was the way in which it was so clearly deconstructed but at the same time intent on articulating its dramaturgy and its entertainment in a very accelerated way. I have a great fondness for that piece. It was the last piece in a trilogy that was inspired by Shakespeare texts, which dealt with questions that concerned me around freedom, individuality, gender, religion, politics and those issues that I find important in the region but that also provide an interface between the Arab world and the west. That was a long-time and overriding concern that runs throughout that trilogy. I thought I was done with Shakespeare, but as it happens I am going to be based in London next year on a residency programme at the Queen Mary College in the East End. They have invited me to consider a fourth Shakespeare play that engages with elements of the population in the East End and Bethnal Green, which is the capital of the Bangladeshi community in the UK. So I guess I am going to revisit some of that in a different way next year.

AY: I am looking forward to that. These plays demonstrate how you mix geographies, backgrounds, cultural performances and languages in your work – by bringing Shakespeare to the Arab world and setting *Ur* in Kuwait. You also select your cast from different Arab cities.

SAB: It's because for me, the Arab world represents an abundance of riches in a very simple, naïve, almost orientalist way, which I don't find available to me in any parochial, nationalist, ethnically segregated or sectarian prisms that are increasingly powerful and dominant forms of practice, behaviour, control and education. In my artistic practice, I intentionally choose to position myself outside of that very destructive, closed and programmatic death that is prescribed by these ideologies of nationalism or ideological intolerance. So, of course, it makes sense for me that a fictive artefact created from the palette of a progressive, forward-looking, small, quirky Arab state in the 60s be played out by committed actors from Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia – wherever, I don't mind. Their nationality is secondary, I am not the border police. I am not the Schengen trying to keep people out of my territory. That's not my job.

AY: I am not just interested in nationality but in these scores of performances each country and each region has its own way of performance – their own writers, history and references – and you bring all of these references together.

SAB: Acting traditions in the Arab world are mixed even within the same territory. In the 80s in Baghdad, for example, directors who had been sent to study in Bulgaria, East Germany, St Petersburg or Moscow all came back with certain notions of what it was to act, write, or read a text. It was very different from the influence of the Egyptian school that also has its proponents and defenders. There's no unifying performance style in any one city – in Damascus you could see a piece of what would be called commercial theatre, which would be

performed in a very different way than in the workshops of Samer Omran, for example. The difference in performance styles is rich and important. I've worked with companies and actors from these different places where one of them was a graduate from the conservatoire in Moscow, one was working with Commedia dell'Arte in Milan. The first one was Iraqi and the second Lebanese and from different generations. The list could go on. At different times in the company there have been Sunnis, Shias, Alawites, Christians and atheists. I think that that's something beautiful.

AY: Do you like that there are so many references that are drawn from each city? Do you think we already have particular styles of performing or are we missing that?

SAB: I think generally the level of acting art as a performance art, as opposed to live performance or dancers or video artists and so on, across large swathes of the Arab world is lamentable. It's bad.

AY: In your opinion has it always been bad?

SAB: I think it's got much worse since the power of television, driven by Ramadan-style episodes of tele-dramas, which have been one of the most lucrative and essential forms of performing for many actors. That type of performance style has become a standard of reference and I think that that has done untold damage to the ability of actors and performers to explore their skills. That's one element, but the other is, of course, linked to the way in which acting is taught and the kind of references that are used in the teaching of drama.

AY: That is to speak about the most popular acts of performance, not other areas?

SAB: No, that's just to say that, generally speaking, that in the graduates that I've seen and the actors I've been exposed to in the last few years there's increasingly that tele-drama tendency in Arab schools of acting. Of course, there are individuals who work differently and there are performance styles that are quite distinct – for example, the Tunisian style is very distinct and it is more physically oriented with more focus on what they call *expression gestuelle*. That's without going into some of the more ethnographic forms such as Rawi and Shadow Theatre and so on. However, there are a handful of individuals who do work differently, for example, Rabih Mroué and Lina Saneh, Roger Assaf, Oussama Ghanam, Jawad al-Assadi.

AY: Many artists avoid speaking or producing works that relate to current events and who prefer to wait rather than comment straight away but you have done this and continue to do so. Are you interested in being an immediate commentator and do you ever change your mind on your comments afterwards?

SAB: The process of making the work is a lot less controlled and a lot less opportunistic than that. It would be difficult for me to make work to order like that, as was often the case for artists with the Arab Spring. With *The Speaker's Progress* it just so happened that we were making a piece at the time that in its themes, content and scope was about revolution and failed revolution. So, of course, if you are making a piece like that and the Arab world erupts you have two options: either you ignore it and say, 'I have a plan for the piece and that is the most sincere form of my expression at this time' or else you can't ignore it and it becomes an element in your thinking. More often than not for me, that's been the case because we are dealing with themes that are not domestic but are already oriented to having an inflection somehow with current themes. They are around issues of power, struggle and overpower so inevitably those kinds of events feed into the practice and the shape of the piece. But then the piece will always carry its own distinctive subjectivity. The pieces are not dramatic versions of twitter

feeds from the location of the event. I think such feeds are brilliant but these are not pieces that take them and then present them in a documentary style; verbatim production of news from the front; anonymous voices at the location of an event; or witnesses of an element of a crime. That's not the point. Such pieces continue to be very scripted and they are not porous. My works are written in the reflection of artefacts and a poetic imperative that is open to those events but not the vehicle for a relaying of those events. I feel the function of the piece needs to be more than a testimony of blank fact. The process of the making and presenting of a drama is the call to go beyond blank facts. So the pieces are made in order to provoke subjectivity. They are issued out of subjectivity; they don't aim to enlighten.

AY: I think that's very important for people when they are in the middle of a mega event. These are the moments that people are puzzled or lost or looking for guidance, but not necessarily the kind that will take over or control them. An inspiration.

Sulayman Al Bassam (b. Kuwait, 1972) founded Zaoum Theatre in London in 1996 and the Arabic arm, SABAB Theatre, was established in 2002. His plays have been published in various languages and study of his work forms part of higher education curriculae at universities in the USA and the Middle East. He produces work in both English and Arabic languages and lives between Paris and Kuwait.

[1] www.sabab.org

Adham Hafez

ARC.HIVE, 2006-present

Video installation

Duration: 2 mins 52 secs

Courtesy the artist

ARC.HIVE is a project initiated by Adham Hafez as part of HaRaKa; Egypt's performance and dance research leading project that was established in 2006. The ARC.HIVE of Arab contemporary performing arts is a partnership between HaRaKa (Cairo), Lincoln Centre's Performing Arts Library (NYC), and the German Dance Archives (Cologne), and is a two unit project: an 'ARC' that collects, digitizes and contextualizes material, and a 'HIVE' that commissions live and published work in the fields of performance, dance, theatre and music. Bringing rare film footage and material together for future research, ARC.HIVE offers visibility and preservation of this material through its sites on three continents.

Adham Hafez, based in Cairo, is engaged in practice and theory around rituals, site-specificity, new choreographic systems, physical dramaturgy, cultural policy and new artistic hybrid forms. Adham creates dance performances, concerts, lectures, installations, and workshops.

He has produced a large body of work through Adham Hafez Company, which has been presented in Egypt, the Middle East and Europe. He is the founder and programme director of HaRaKa, the first movement and performance research project in Egypt, as well as the artistic director for the „TransDance" festival series and the founder of "Cairography", the first publication in Egypt dedicated to critical writing on choreography and performance. Adham Hafez holds MA in Choreography from Amsterdam Theatre School (Amsterdam), and MA in Political Science from SciencePo (Paris), and is a PhD Candidate in Performance Studies at Tisch School for the Arts at New York University (NY).

Coco Fusco

Operation Atropos, 2006



Operation Atropos

2006

Video, 59 mins.

Operation Atropos is a documentary about military interrogation and Prisoner of War resistance training. Fusco and a group of women enrolled in a Prisoner of War resistance-training course offered by U.S. Army interrogators, in which they were subjected immersive simulations of POW experiences. Modeled on actual training given to elite forces of the US military, the course was designed to prepare soldier for hostile interrogations so they can resist them. The tactics used violate international conventions regarding the treatment of prisoners of war, are ones that have come under scrutiny in the aftermath of the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib.

The course was offered by Team Delta and was designed to introduce civilians to the extreme conditions of war. The documentary includes interviews with the interrogators that shed light on how they read personalities, evaluate an interrogatee's reliability, and use the imposition of physical and mental stress strategically. More fundamentally, however, the film shows how interrogators rationalize what they do and how they imagine both themselves and their enemies.

Coco Fusco (b.1960, New York, lives and works in New York), is an interdisciplinary artist and writer and MIT's MLK Visiting Scholar for 2014–15. She has performed, lectured, exhibited, and curated around the world since 1988. Her work explores the politics of gender, race, war, and identity.

Fusco's performances and videos have been presented in two Whitney Biennials (2008 and 1993), BAM's Next Wave Festival, the Sydney Biennale, The Johannesburg Biennial, The Kwangju Biennale, The Shanghai Biennale, InSite O5, Mercosul, Transmediale, The London International Theatre Festival, VideoBrasil and Performa05.

She is represented by Alexander Gray Associates in New York.

Doa Aly

***A Tress of Hair*, 2008**



A Tress of Hair

2008

Video, 11 mins, 48 sec.

Tress of Hair is based on two short stories written by the nineteenth-century French writer Guy de Maupassant. *La Chevelure* (A Tress of Hair) tells the story of a madman who finds a tress of hair hidden in an old cabinet and falls in love with it. *Berthe* (Bertha) is the story of a girl with learning difficulties, who is trained by her doctor to recognise mealtimes by the clock. When fused together, these two stories become an allegorical cycle of waste; waste of emotions, of obsession, and as Aly attempts to tell it through a precise choreography (using 4 performers and herself), it also translates into a poetic waste of movement. Through this limited vocabulary of dysfunctional movement, and narration taken from the original stories, Aly's video transports the viewer into a fragile universe heavy with aspiration and longing.

Doa Aly (b. 1976, Cairo, lives and works in Cairo). Doa Aly's practice is informed by the notion of disturbance. Trained as an academic painter, her drawings, paintings, videos and text collages evolve from an acute concern with aberrations of the human form.

Doa Aly attended the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo and earned her BFA in painting in 2001. Her recent group exhibitions include: The 11th Istanbul Biennial in 2009; The 7th Busan Biennale in 2010, Meeting Points 6: *Locus Agonistes* in 2011; Eva International 2014: *AGITATIONISM, Lest the Two Seas Meet* at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, and *Dancing Light* at Huis Marseille in Amsterdam in 2014. Aly's most recent one-person exhibitions in Cairo are *The House of Sleep* at Gypsum Gallery and *Desire, Deceit, and Difficult Deliveries*, at the Townhouse Gallery, both in 2013. Aly is represented by Gypsum Gallery.

Emily Jacir

Crossing Surda (a record of going to and from work), 2002

Video, 30 mins

On December 9, 2002, I decided to record my daily walk to work across the Surda checkpoint to Birzeit University. When the Israeli Occupation Army saw me filming my feet with my video camera, they stopped me and asked for my I.D. I gave them my American passport, and they threw it in the mud. They told me that this was "Israel," that it was a military zone, and that no filming was allowed. They detained me at gunpoint in the winter rain next to their tank. After three hours, they confiscated my videotape and then released me. I watched the soldier slip my videotape into the pocket of his army pants. That night when I returned home, I cut a hole in my bag and put my video camera in the bag. I recorded my daily walk across Surda checkpoint, to and from work, for eight days.

Emily Jacir (b. 1970, lives and works around the Mediterranean). Emily Jacir's work spans a diverse range of media and strategies including film, photography, social interventions, installation, performance, video, writing and sound.

Solo exhibitions include Whitechapel Gallery, London (2015), Darat al Funun, Amman (2014-15), Beirut Art Center (2010), Guggenheim Museum, New York (2009), and Kunstmuseum, St. Gallen (2008). Jacir participated in dOCUMENTA (13) (2012); the 51st (2005), 52nd (2007), and 53rd (2009) Biennale di Venezia; 15th Biennale of Sydney (2006); Sharjah Biennial 7 (2005); and the 8th Istanbul Biennial (2003).

Hassan Sharif

Hair and Milk Bottle, 1984



Hair and Milk Bottle, 1984
HSS

Hair and Milk Bottle
1984

Collage, photographs, ink and pencil on mounting board

In this work, Sharif pulls pubic hairs out of his trousers and attempts to throw them into a milk bottle placed on the floor at a distance. The performance ends when the artist is successful in landing one hair inside the bottle. On completion, the bottle is sealed and the work is finished.

Hair and Milk Bottle is an example of Sharif's early performance works that he began developing while at Byam Shaw School of Art in London. During this period, Sharif would perform mundane and often meaningless tasks, which were carefully documented through photography. Building up a series of works using the body, Sharif enacted small, gestural performance works both in Dubai and London.

Hassan Sharif (b. 1951, Dubai, lives and works Dubai). Hassan Sharif has made a vital contribution to conceptual art and experimental practice in the Middle East through 40 years of performances, installations, drawing, painting, and assemblage.

Sharif has exhibited widely in solo and group exhibitions, recently including *All the World's Futures*, UAE National Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia, 56th International Art Exhibition, Venice, Italy (2015); *Here and Elsewhere*, New Museum, New York, USA (2014).

Lin Yilin

Performance documentation



Sand Dune

1997

Photographic documentation of performance, 5 prints

A Kind of Machine Called "Liberation"

2003

Video documentation of performance, 10 min

Performed on a construction site in Guangzhou, the artist moves a brick wall from one side of the site to another over a sand dune. Brick by brick, the whole wall is eventually transferred to the other end but as the bricks sink into the sand, the futility of the process is revealed with the wall unable to maintain its shape. This small and somewhat insignificant gesture comments on the rapid urbanization of Guangzhou, highlighted by the use of concrete bricks and sand, materials that are readily to hand in the city.

While *Sand Dune* looks at a cities development, *A Kind of Machine Called "Liberation"* also uses concrete bricks, comments on urban destruction. Responding to the US invasion of Iraq, this work operates as a visual metaphor for the disaster that the war would provoke. Yilin lies with his leg trapped beneath a circular wall of concrete blocks, as a grown man on a child's bicycle wheels over the surface. This leads to the collapse of the wall, yet the performer continues to ride through the rubble. The image left by this scene at the end is the most

pertinent, echoing that of war-torn urban areas. The viewers also become implicated as they have stood by and watched the relentless trampling that has led to this outcome. As an artist from China living in New York, Yilin is positioned partially as an outsider looking in, thus his commentary relates to the global impact of an otherwise geographically specific conflict.

Lin Yilin (b.1964, Guangzhou, lives and works in New York and Beijing). Lin Yilin is a founding member of the Big Tail Elephant Group, an artist collective founded in 1990 by Lin Yilin, Chen Shaoxiong, and Liang Juhui and later joined by Xu Tan.

Select exhibitions include *Another Long March: Cities on the Move* (1997) at Vereinigung bildender Künstler Wiener Secession, Vienna, Austria; Second Johannesburg Biennale (1997) in South Africa; *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998) at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, USA; 50th Venice Biennale (2003), Venice, Italy; Documenta 12 (2007), Kassel, Germany; and *Le Mouvement: Performing the City* (2014), the 12th Swiss Sculpture Exhibition, Biel/Bienne, Switzerland.

Marwa Arsanios

OLGA'S NOTES, all those restless bodies, 2015



OLGA's NOTES, all those restless bodies
2015

Video, 28 min

Olga's Notes, All those Restless Bodies is a video that takes as its starting point an article that appeared in *Al Hilal* magazine in January 1963 on the establishment of a ballet school in Cairo. The article describes the school, which was founded as part of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's larger plans for modernization and reform at that time, as a "factory of the bodies." Supported by major figures including the Russian choreographer and director Leonid Lavrovsky, the school was to become an important institution in Nasser's nation-state building project.

The film script juggles between different dances and small stories linked to this history. It looks at dance from historical and political perspectives, and also at the body from the perspectives of dance, labor and exploitation, thus dance becomes an excuse to think about labor, and labor an excuse to think about dance and movement. The effect of political ideologies on the identity of the individual is here reflected in the body of the dancer. After years of training, rehearsing, and performing, the dancer's body has become damaged—a metaphor of the violence of state projects, and nation-state building that accompanies a capitalist ideology and a consumerist approach to the human form.

Marwa Arsanios (b. 1978, Washington DC, lives and works in Beirut). Marwa Arsanios obtained her MFA from University of the Arts, London (2007) and was a researcher in the Fine Art department at the Jan Van Eyck Academie (2011–2012).

Her work has been shown at Art Dubai in the Bidoun Lounge (Art Park 2009), at the Forum expanded of the Berlinale (2010), at the Homeworks V and VI forum in Beirut, Tokyo Wonder Site in Tokyo (2011), the 12th Istanbul Biennale (2011), the Cornerhouse in Manchester (2012), and Art in General (2014).

Arsanios is a founding member of the artistic organization and project space 98weeks Research Project that focuses its research on a new topic every 98 weeks. She is one of the organizers of the travelling project Pla!orm Translation. She received Sharjah Art Foundation's Production Programme Grant in 2014, and a special prize as part of the Pinchuk Future Generation Art Prize in 2012.

Mohammed Kazem

Photographs with a Flag, 1997



Photographs With A Flag
1997

12 C-prints

This work marks Kazem's transition from early autobiographical performance pieces to an interest in meticulously documenting his location within his surroundings, particularly when faced by the rapid changes that have taken place across the United Arab Emirates over the last 20 years. In this work, Kazem moves around the circumference of a flag that mysteriously appeared one day in the Al Mamzar area of Sharjah, close to the art atelier that he worked in alongside Hassan Sharif. Kazem did not know the meaning of the flag – did it indicate a forthcoming building project, sand dredging or the demarcation of private land? In response to these somewhat anxious questions, Kazem intervenes in this atmosphere of transience by recording his own momentary presence in the landscape with his body.

Mohammed Kazem (b. 1969, Dubai, lives and works in Dubai). Kazem's work touches on current global transformations in the social, political, and natural environments, and explores abstract ideas about the body, movement, space, and the natural elements.

He has featured prominently at venues around the world, including representing the United Arab Emirates 2013 Venice Biennale, several Sharjah Biennials, the Singapore Biennial (2006), the Havana Biennial (2000), the Dhaka Biennial (2002), and most recently at the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, in the major survey, *Arab Express*.

Mona Hatoum

Variation on Discord and Divisions, 1984



Variation on Discord and Divisions

Video documentation of a performance on December 14, 1984, (The Western Front, Vancouver)

27 min 45 sec

Variation on Discord and Divisions is a disturbing performance where the artist, wearing an opaque mask and all dressed in black, crawls between the rows of spectators to reach the performance space. She then performs a number of actions that culminate with her removing raw kidneys from under her clothes, cutting them up, putting them on plates, and serving them one by one to the audience.

Without referencing any specific conflict, Hatoum addresses notions of exile, war and oppression. Dressed in black with a covered face, the artist presents herself to the audience as an anonymous body, and as such takes various forms through the different actions of the performance.

Mona Hatoum (b. 1952, Beirut, lives and works in London and Berlin). Hatoum started her career making visceral video and performance work in the 1980s that focused with great intensity on the body. Since the beginning of the 1990s, her work moved increasingly towards large-scale installations that aim to engage the viewer in conflicting emotions of desire and revulsion, fear and fascination.

Hatoum has had numerous solo exhibitions including Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015), Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Sao Paulo (2014), MATHAF: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha (2014) and Joan Miro Foundation, Barcelona (2012) and has participated in several international exhibitions including the Venice Biennale (1995 and 2005), Documenta XI, Kassel, 2002, the Istanbul Biennial (1995 and 2011), among many others.

Sharif Waked

Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints, 2003



Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints
2003

5:28 mins

Body parts peek through holes, gaps, and splits woven into ready-made garments. The clothes are designed to preempt the daily imperatives of the soldiers, who order Palestinians to lift clothes and expose their flesh as they cross the checkpoints.

Chic Point juxtaposes the fashion show with a series of documentary stills from checkpoints, placing the spectator in a position that paraphrases the soldier's gaze. The haute fashion line transfers the marking from the body to the apparel, and to the ensuing playful possibilities inherent in the relationship between the clothes and those who are wearing and removing them.

Sharif Waked (b. 1964, Nazareth, lives and works in Israel-Palestine and the US). Waked has exhibited at various museums, biennials, and art venues, recently including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2015); Warsaw Museum of Modern Art, Poland (2015); KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2015); Qalandiya International, Palestine (2014); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark (2014). Singapore Art

Museum (2013); Jeu de Paume Museum, Paris (2013); Musée Granet in Aix-en-Provence, France (2013); Eslite Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan (2013), among many others.

Sharon Hayes

I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I'm Not Free, 2008



I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I'm Not Free
2008

Audio installation, work on paper

I March In The Parade of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I'm Not Free, was a eight-part performance that took place between December 2007 and January 2008, where Hayes walked from the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York to sites of public speech such as Union Square, Tompkins Square, Confucius Square in Chinatown, and Christopher Street Park. Describing the work, Hayes writes:

In this work, I stood on the street with a bullhorn in New York City and spoke a love letter to an anonymous 'you'. I look like I'm doing 'public speech' but I'm speaking to a lover who I've been separated from for some reason that the texts don't quite explain. While I'm talking about love and desire, I am also bringing up the war and the way in which the war interrupts and doesn't interrupt our daily lives, our activities, our desires, our love. For me, this work attempts to speak about certain intersections between love and politics that aren't so often talked about. (Hayes)

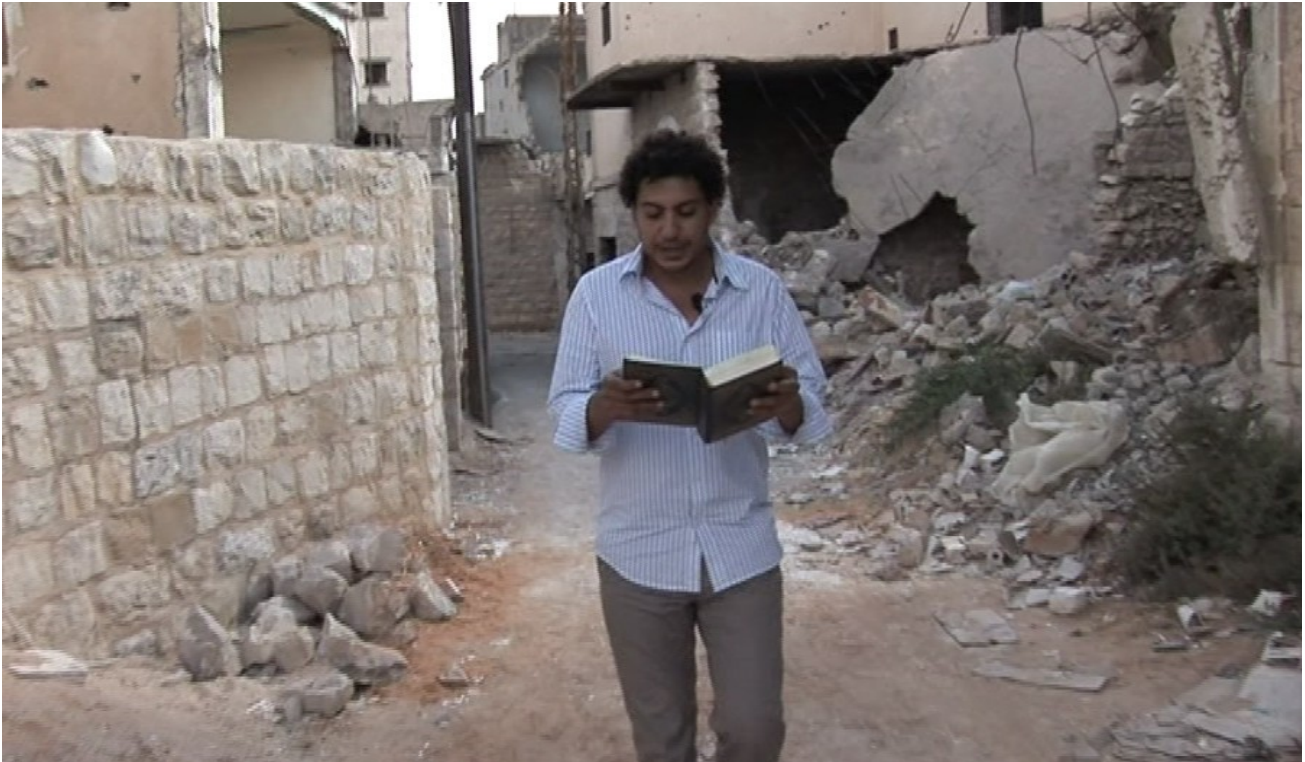
Sharon Hayes (b. 1970, Baltimore, lives and works in New York). Sharon Hayes's work is concerned with developing new representational strategies that examine and interrogate the present political moment, not as

a moment without historical foundation but as one that is always allegorical, a moment that reaches simultaneously backwards and forwards.

Hayes most recent exhibitions have included the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; Whitney Museum of American Art, USA; the 4th Auckland Triennial, New Zealand; and the Reina Sofia, Spain.

Wael Shawky

Bent Jbeil, 2008



Bent Jbeil
2008

Video, 15 mins

As the artist meanders through Bent Jbeil's old center, amidst rubble and destruction from the Israeli assault on Lebanon in the summer of 2006, he recites verse from surat Al-Baqara in the Quran (verses 40 to 123), that refer specifically to the relationship between Jews, Christians and Muslims, and relays the story of Moses and the people of Israel. Here the artist inserts himself into the scenes of destruction, with a simple gesture of reading, to draw attention to the histories and ideologies that feed into contemporary conflict. The work bears strong similarities with Shawky's earlier work titled *The Cave* (2003), where the artist walks through a supermarket also reciting verses from the Quran.

Wael Shawky (b. 1971, Alexandria, lives and works in Alexandria). Based on extensive periods of research and enquiry, Wael Shawky's work tackles notions of national, religious and artistic identity through film, performance and storytelling. Whether instructing Bedouin children to act out the construction of an airport runway in the desert or organizing a heavy metal concert in a remote Egyptian village, Shawky frames contemporary culture through the lens of historical tradition and vice versa.

Recent solo exhibitions include MoMA PS1, New York (2015), MACBA, Barcelona (2015), Serpentine Galleries, London (2013-14); KW Contemporary Art Institute, Berlin (2012); Nottingham Contemporary (2011); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2011); Delfina Foundation, London (2011) and Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella (2010).

Xiao Lu

Two Gunshots Fired at the Installation 'Dialogue', 1989



Two Gunshots Fired at the Installation 'Dialogue'
1989

Photograph

At the opening event of the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Beijing, Xiao Lu raised a gun and fired two shots directly at her installation *Dialogue*. This incident directly resulted in the closing of the exhibition by the authorities, which was then re-opened five days later only to be shut down again. Shortly after this incident the Tiananmen Square protests erupted. While unrelated, the oppression that provoked Xiao Lu to such theatricality is the same oppression that the protests rallied against.

The installation itself included a red domestic phone on a table in the middle of two modern phone booths, which were beginning to appear on city streets as symbols of modernity. Two figures dressed as students, were situated in the booths, presumably calling home, where a domestic phone was left dangling off the hook. The visual metaphor suggests a disconnection between the old and the new, the public and the private. As a result, the work and the performance are poignant comments on the contradictions of China's modernization.

Xiao Lu (b. 1962, Hangzhou), lives and works in Beijing). Xiao Lu has exhibited internationally with a varied practice that includes painting, sculpture and writing.

Selected exhibitions include: *On the way home – 2102 the 9th Shanghai Biennale Special Project*, Pudong Airport, Shanghai. (2013); *Back to the essence*, Da Xing Art space, Taiwan, (2010); *The White Rabbit First Collection Show*, White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney, Australia (2009); *China/Avant-Garde*, National Art Museum, Beijing, China (1989).

The Yes Men and Steve Lambert

End of War in Iraq, 2008

Printed publication publicly distributed, 2008

The Yes Men and Steve Lambert (USA)

with 30 writers, 50 advisors, around 1000 volunteer distributors, CODEPINK, May First/People Link, Evil Twin, Improv Everywhere and Not An Alternative.

One week after Barack Obama was elected *The New York Times* hit the streets with the surprising headline: 'IRAQ WAR ENDS'. Over 80,000 copies of this 'Special Edition' of *The New York Times* were placed directly in commuters' hands, free of charge, in several cities around the United States. The paper closely matched the design, look, and feel of *The New York Times* in every way but for a few small details. Inside were 14 pages of 'best case scenario' news that describing the world as it could be eight months in the future.

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The Yes Men describe themselves as '*a group who use any means necessary to agree their way into the fortified compounds of commerce, and then smuggle out the stories of their undercover escapades to provide a public glimpse at the behind-the-scenes world of big business. The Yes Men have impersonated World Trade Organization, Dow Chemical Corporation, and Bush administration spokesmen on TV and at business conferences around the world.*'

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***A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things* launches *Staging Histories*, Delfina Foundation's research and commissioning platform for performance art. Through archival research and new commissions, *Staging Histories* traces seminal moments in performance, mapping shared histories and contemporary global concerns. This first stage of the project explores performance art from, and in relation to, the Arab region.**

Curated by Aaron Cezar, Director, Delfina Foundation with contributions from Ala' Younis and Barrak Alzaid (curatorial fellows, *Staging Histories*) and Jane Scarth, Residency and Projects Manager, Delfina Foundation.

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