

ACAF

FIELD REVIEW

Issue II: Middle East, 2017



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FIELD REVIEW PREFACE

ISSUE II: MIDDLE EAST

Conceived by **Leeza Ahmady**, Director of **Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW)**, **FIELD REVIEW** is a semi-annual online journal designed to provide discursive opportunities for writers, curators, and art historians. Serving as an extension of ACAW's annual art forum, **FIELD MEETING**, it fosters critical dialogue on contemporary art practices and cultural production across Asia and its diasporas. The inaugural issue, **FIELD REVIEW: South Asia**, focused on "Abstraction" from both historical and localized perspectives, examining the intersections and parallel practices between visual artists and other cultural contributors of the 20th century and contemporary periods.

The second issue, **FIELD REVIEW: Middle East**, developed in collaboration with ACAW Consortium Partner **ArteEast**, commissioned seven case studies to investigate the diverse creative trajectories shaping the MENA region. This issue will examine contemporary cultural formations, including inaugural museum exhibitions, satellite biennials, design fairs, and the rise of emerging artist collectives.

Commissioned and Presented with ArteEast
Co-organized and edited by: Writer and curator
Osman Can Yerebakan

FIELD REVIEW Issue II: Middle East

An Introduction

Osman Can Yerebakan

As part of **ACAW 2017**, curated and edited in its second iteration by Osman Can Yerebakan and in collaboration with ArteEast, **FIELD REVIEW: Middle East** spotlights the Middle East and North Africa with essays on seven case studies about current manifold creative threads woven in the MENA region. Exploration of goings on in the area bears myriad contemporary formations including inaugural museum exhibitions, satellite biennials, design fairs, and emerging collectives. Prevalent subjects encountered en route include malleable, yet inquisitive approaches to fluidity of history; struggle and resistance infuse into each microcosm at times when socio-political tumult affects the region and the globe. Mining the trajectories creative thinkers have pursued and aim to facilitate, one unearths decades long artistic fortitude that helped determine current trends.

Maymanah Farhat focuses on the 13th Sharjah Biennial's final offsite project, *Upon a Shifting Plate*, kicking off in Beirut as a two-day installment on October 14th and the biennial's conclusive iteration Act II. **Chayma Drira's** essay discusses Kader Attia's multipurpose art and community hub *La Colonie* through the lens of Attia's artistic practice and colonial history shared between France and Algeria. **Edwin Nasr** and **Bassem Saad** analyze *Stvdio El Sham*, a Beirut-based photography collective comprised of Tarek Moukaddem and Omarivs Ioseph Filivs Dinæ, through the legacy of studio photography and performance of identity. **Yasaman Alipour's** association with the contemporary art scene in Tehran as a New York-based Iranian artist results in a piece about *Parkingallery* with a focus on its more recent formation, *New Media Society*.

Ruba Katrib introduces the inaugural exhibition, *Jerusalem Lives*, at The Palestinian Museum, which remained open without an exhibition until the opening of this group exhibition in September. **feminist architecture**, a three-woman architectural research enterprise, examines the sociopolitical impact of the second installment of Amman Design Week for the burgeoning capital and the region. **Osman Can Yerebakan** presents a survey of *Who Carries the Water*, a research-oriented artistic project helmed by Istanbul-based artists Iz Öztat and Fatma Belkis and exhibited at the 14th Istanbul Biennial and the 13th Sharjah Biennial.



Ali Cherri, *Still Life*, 2017. Lightbox, Duratrans Photographic print, 150x90cm. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Imane Farès.

About the Author: Osman Can Yerebakan

Osman Can Yerebakan is an art writer and curator based in New York. His writing has appeared on New York Times: T Magazine, Village Voice, Brooklyn Rail, BOMB, Artslant, and elsewhere.

Maymanah Farhat

Shifts and Measures: A Brief Overview of Art Events in West Asia

Decades ago—in the absence of art fairs, commercial galleries, independent arts organizations, private collections, and government initiatives—artists in the Arabic speaking countries of West Asia planned exhibitions, symposiums, workshops, and biennials. In addition to contributing artworks, they formed curatorial committees, acted as jurors for art prizes; worked as fundraisers; and often covered or reviewed these events for local newspapers and publications. Artists not only forged this history, but also recorded and preserved it. Unlike their counterparts in Europe and North America, whose roles as cultural workers diminished after World War II, artists in the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula continued to be active in shaping the foundation of local art scenes well into the second half of the twentieth century. This began to change in the early 1990s with the growing influence of curators and art administrators, in addition to the introduction of several nonprofit art spaces and government-led initiatives.

Between 1993 and 1999, contemporary art organizations like Ashkal Alwan (the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts), Darat al Funun in Jordan, and the Al-Ma'mal Foundation in Palestine restructured the regional art scene by developing extensive programs that freed artists from the burden of producing exhibitions and perennial events while offering much needed support. As creative circles began to form around (or gravitate to) these platforms, nonprofits served as springboards for expanding the reach of local experiments and narratives, connecting artists in the region to international developments.

In the Arabian Peninsula, few government-funded projects have been as successful as the Sharjah Biennial. Although Kuwait was the first Arab Gulf state to offer art scholarships and studio spaces in the late 1950s, the United Arab Emirates has surpassed the modest efforts of its neighbors by building an elaborate art infrastructure that has been significantly expanded in the last ten years. While Dubai has transformed the regional art market with official patronage that caters to collectors, and Abu Dhabi aims to be the museum hub of the Arab world, Sharjah has focused on facilitating and encouraging artistic practices.

The first edition of the Sharjah Biennial was launched by the Sharjah Department of Culture and Information in 1993. Twenty years later, Hoor Al Qasimi—a trained artist and curator who is the daughter of the ruler of Sharjah—revamped the biennial by widening its scope. What was once largely devoted to regional painting and sculpture became a multifaceted program that brings together artists, curators, writers, and scholars from around the world.

The biennial's corresponding events grew in number and size in 2009 when the Sharjah Art Foundation was created and a more comprehensive program was developed as part of a broader government effort to make contemporary art more accessible. So far, the foundation has been able to meet the demands of hosting a popular international event while keeping its stated goal of prioritizing local audiences. This includes a strong emphasis on arts education that is open to the public, particularly school children that are invited to attend workshops, performances, and exhibition tours. Although recent editions of the biennial have reflected the strengths and weaknesses of their respective curators, the foundation has maintained an active role in setting the tone of its overall program.

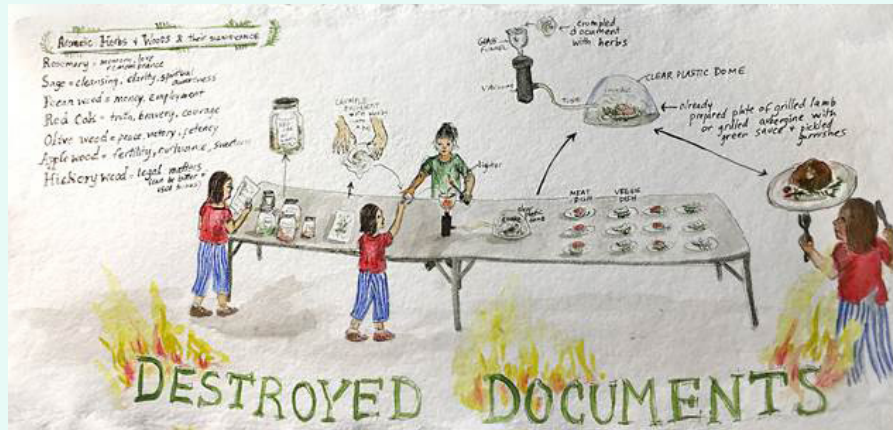


Hiwa K, *Pre-Image (Blind as the Mother Tongue)*, 2017. HD video, color, sound, 17 40 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and KOW, Berlin.

Enlisting Beirut-based curator Christine Tohmé to organize Sharjah Biennial 13 is intended to further its reach across West Asia with an emphasis on some of the urgent issues that are currently affecting the regional art scene, from the building of art infrastructures to the fluctuation of political climates. Tohmé, the founding director of Ashkal Alwan, has a long history of working with other arts organizations and cultural practitioners in North Africa and West Asia (including Hoor Al Qasimi, who serves on Ashkal Alwan's Board of Trustees).

Founded in 1993, Ashkal Alwan formed at a time when Lebanon had not yet recovered from twenty-five years of a brutal civil war, and young artists working in conceptual art, photography, video, and installation were in dire need of backing. Since its inception, Ashkal Alwan has regularly produced events that consider the difficulties of sustaining art scenes in turbulent political contexts, for example, working with artists under siege in Palestine, or more recently with those directly affected by the Syrian war.

Tohmé's edition of the biennial is titled *Tamawuj*, an Arabic word that describes "a rising and falling in waves," offering a metaphor for the region's current period of uncertainty while also invoking the independent organizations, perennial events, and artistic circles that have shaped local art scenes. The biennial's theme is deliberately open-ended, allowing for a range of topics to be addressed across different sites in the United Arab Emirates, and outside the country in Dakar, Istanbul, Beirut, and Ramallah, where lead curators and scholars were asked to respond to key words— water, crops, culinary, and earth—in the form of smaller events. With these offsite programs, the global ecological crisis is explored through the lens of a specific setting whereas reviews of the main exhibition in Sharjah (referred to as Act I) have noted its emphasis on informal networks, artistic interventions, and other types of exchange that offer means of survival in a world that feels like its crumbling. Unfortunately, a common complaint among critics is that the Sharjah presentation was slim on the work of Emirati artists, and therefore missed an important opportunity to comment on local conditions.



Candice Lin, sketch for *Destroyed Documents*, 2017. Watercolour and ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Upon a Shifting Plate, which is the Beirut leg of the Sharjah Biennial, is produced by Ashkal Alwan and will take place on 14th and 15th of October with events that explore how culinary practices are indicative of psychic spaces and cultural norms. Although available descriptions of the weekend's schedule are vague, the biennial's online publication, tamawuj.org, has released a number of related essays and texts ahead of the opening date that hint at possible topics, including how Lebanon's ongoing political instability affects food consumption among different populations.

For Act II, the second and final iteration of the Sharjah Biennial 13, Tohmé has commissioned curators Reem Fadda and Hicham Khalidi to create special exhibitions at the Sursock Museum and Beirut Art Center, both of which open on October 14.

Responding to the biennial broader themes, the exhibitions are billed as its closing presentations. Of the two projects, Khalidi's *An unpredictable expression of human potential* (on view through January 19th, 2018) appears most promising with a roster of artists who rarely show in the region, if at all. Working with associate curator Natasha Hoare, Khalidi offers a glimpse into the experiences of disenfranchised youth in North Africa, West Asia, and Europe, where institutionalized racism and overt class divisions are galvanizing a new generation of political activists, resulting in effective forms of protest culture. The included artists all demonstrate a need to document and participate in this historic groundswell. An unpredictable expression of human potential departs from other projects in the biennial that seem to suggest artists and viewers step back in order to recharge. However, whether swimming against or with this wave of history, the concept of *Tamawuj* could be extended into other fields as a necessary approach to these difficult times.

About the Author: Maymanah Farhat

Maymanah Farhat (she/her) is a writer and curator working between New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area. She has organized exhibitions across the U.S. and abroad, including *Poetry is Not a Luxury*, which originated at the Center for Book Arts in Manhattan in 2019 and traveled to the San Francisco Center for the Book in 2020.

Yasaman Alipour

New Media Society

"Imagine being stuck in the midst of a massive storm taking everything with its way. Then there's me and a handful of other people working here, as if clenching to the last standing tree." This is how in a friendly conversation one of the leading art publishers of Iran described the current state of the country's art institutes. He continued, laughing, "little do we know, the swirling mass uprooted the tree long time ago. We, the tree, and everything else are all just swirling in the air."

The image is both cynical and true. Such poetic—and dire—descriptions of the situation are what young Iranians have inherited from the generation that created the Islamic revolution of 1979. I am a Post-Revolution Iranian which means that I'm part of a generation that was born with a sense of failure stemming from decades of ideology and who came to adulthood traumatized by the downfall of our own civil rights movement—culminating in the 'Green Movement' and 'Arab Spring'. Today we find ourselves scattered around the world and horrified by the global resurgence of populist nationalism. As an emerging artist, I wonder, "what can we do?"

Now, and for around two decades, a new generation of Iranian artists have asked, "How can we act and move beyond the specter of failure and cynicism?" To keep myself going, I think of New Media Society, an art collective at the heart of Tehran. New Media Society comes to mind because it has become important among artists, curators, historians, and enthusiasts engaged with the production of contemporary art in Iran. The function of this Tehran initiative, which was born from an impromptu gathering of young art producers is very straight forward. It can be viewed as a venue of sorts where publications are produced from whatever is available.



Installation Shot, *Mapping Karimkhan*, 2017. Courtesy of New Media Society.



Installation Shot, *Wall Newspaper #1 | 79 Revolution*, 2017. Courtesy of New Media Society.

Or it can be described as an open door for those who want to learn and those who would like to engage, experiment, and create in the context of this city. Here, by using simple means like Skype, lectures, screenings, and workshops take place in which international scholars, and old Iranian colleagues abroad, can return to the conversation. Perhaps New Media Society is a helping hand offered to actualize impossible, daring, urgent, and non-conformist projects. Or it's a room to crash in and a place from which new comers make a start (artists from the country's 'peripheries' coming to this 'capital', or from the foreign art 'centers' of the Globe to this 'exotic' destination). It is a center for artists who are determined to explore the everyday life of this odd metropolis. Or it is four walls dedicated to art works that refuse and are refused by white cube galleries. Infused by the old spirit of Avant-Gardes, New Media Society is an organic and ever changing community of young artists, makers, thinkers, and curators that are determined to "learn by doing."

Out of context New Media Society might not seem particularly unique or new. But New Media Society is based on two simple principles that transform the classical art collective into a unique and urgent base for contemporary art in Tehran: New Media Society refuses to enter and engage with the art market. Their ethos is to dedicate themselves to the immediate reality of their surroundings instead of burning themselves out by trying to navigate and theorize the global art world.

New Media Society grew out of an old effort. It started in 1998 with the foundation of Parkingallery, an independent make-shift project space built by then-recent art graduates who soon became a new wave of exciting independent curators, artists, and researchers. The project began in response to the shortcomings of the country's art institutions.

These young art producers were actively objecting to, and moving beyond, three barriers: the limited opportunities offered by the universities, the dated discourses at the center of the museums, and the unbearable ignorance of the art market. So, out of a parking garage they created a space where projects could easily happen. Experimentation was encouraged, and new genres could be explored with vigor.

In the summer of 2002, the Internet became their platform as they launched their online project parkingallery.com. Here they found a new way to converse beyond borders which surpassed the national political constraint without forfeiting their autonomy to the global art market and the handful of gallery owners who had access to the international scene. But much has changed in the past decade-and-a-half. Tehran is now overpopulated with new galleries, but they are designed to sell naïve art as commodities and entertainment to a new rising bourgeoisie.

The early hopeful era when the Internet was thought to be an equalizing, accessible, and free platform has been replaced by a carefully designed web that runs on market value and political power. The art collective too has changed. Today, it has separated into two entities with different responsibilities, Parkingallery and New Media Society. Parkingalleries has limited energy and attention to international demands. However, in the New Media Society, the members came together to delve into doing, making, criticizing, learning, and creating opportunities specifically in and for Tehran.

Amirali Ghasemi is a founding member of both Parkingallery and New Media Society—and the art director of sorts for both. I first met Amirali two years ago in the height of the Nuclear Deal crisis. Back then we spoke of the impossible pressure that had been placed upon the young curators and artists functioning internationally who were being contextualized through the country's fetishized political controversies.

Today, Amirali's assessment of New Media Society is tied to the social status of a country that is newly encountering a global world—ushering in the vicious politics of the neoliberal economy. I realized that, when confronted with Amirali's realities, my questions centered on ideology and verged on abstraction. I asked him about the limited diversity of their artist residency program and Iran's complicated relationship with the Middle Eastern Art Scene at large. In both examples, Amirali went back to the brutal influence of geopolitics on funding, and hence on what is possible. He opened our conversation with a sobering confession: "our rent has suddenly doubled. This is what matters the most right now." Regardless of my longing for simple utopian answers, New Media Society is not interested in replacing institutes or producing alternative historical narratives.

Dadaist in character, the projects produced by New Media Society vanish with the attempt to describe them. Their focus is no longer limited to "New Media," and the work moves from video to sound, installation, performance, archiving, and workshops, to simple gatherings. At the moment they are now examining the meaning of "Society." In an ongoing project, "Wall newspaper #1 | 79 Revolution", they created an interactive and continuously shifting wall-installation showcasing the oral history of the moment the revolution occurred, a moment that is now nearly forty years old.



Installation Shot, *Mapping Karimkhan*, 2017. Courtesy of New Media Society.

Their playful approach allows space for all the complicated, contrary, and urgent feelings that the subject unearths. In another recent expansive project, they took up their immediate surroundings. "Mapping Karimkhan" borrows its name from the neighborhood that New Media Society currently calls home. It is central to the city, in the heart of Tehran's art scene, and currently faces a rapid and violent process of gentrification. The project aims to observe and understand its habitat. The exploration has taken many forms, from the neighborhood's first open studios initiative, to lectures involving social scientists, to simple invitations for field research conducted on, with, and by local people.

The project is an ode to what was lost between the lines of history, the absurd spirit of hope that is both the cause and effect of action. The only way to understand this is to join in. One must 'act' with New Media Society. In preparing this article, I kept pressing Amirali to give me a rational narrative of the story of the New Media Society, their beginning, their activities, and their goals. Exhausted, he summed it all up as "just a ladder for people to climb. Beyond that, People can go where they want with it." And over the years that is what has happened. Many joined the commercial art world, others listened to the call of other countries. Members, collaborators, and guests alike have followed their own individual paths. "But we can't all just leave the base and go up. Or it will fall apart. Here, we come together to hold the ladder."

New Media Society is modest and perhaps keeps its expectation low purposefully. Yet it is a base that is stubbornly maintained and it exists not in spite of, but because of the uncertain reality that surrounds it. It is crucial to recognize the urgency and importance of what occurs between these four walls.

About the Author: Yasaman Alipour

Yasaman Alipour is an Iranian artist/writer based in New York. She is currently pursuing her MFA at Columbia University. For further information please visit YasamanAlipour.com

Osman Can Yerebakan

Iz Öztat and Fatma Belkıs: Who Carries The Water

"I'll give my life, I won't give up my water!" cries a voice (dubbed "Crone Who Went to the SHP") in the publication that Istanbul-based artists Iz Öztat and Fatma Belkıs penned as part of their collaborative project *Who Carries The Water*. The research-based installation was initially commissioned by the 14th Istanbul Biennial in 2015, having its second iteration in early 2017 for the 13th Sharjah Biennial. The Istanbul based duo adapted the materials they used in the initial installation for the Persian Gulf's natural habitat.

In both versions, the central narrative stems from grassroots struggles that local residents carry out in various Anatolian villages to preserve the wildlife and water resources in their surroundings. Threatening the environment and affecting the continuum of day-to-day life, steady attempts from the government and corporations to build run-of-the-river hydroelectric power plants in different parts of Anatolia urge these communities to take action. *Who Carries The Water* visualizes these noble efforts through a diverse visual pattern that celebrates the rural abundance of color, material, source, and creativity. Using local craft techniques and natural materials—such as hazelnut sticks from the Loç Valley in Northern city of Kastamonu in Turkey and date palm leaves from the Gulf Region in the United Arab Emirates, the duo weaves a tale of resilience and solidarity in conversation with personal histories embedded in residents' everyday lives.



Who Carries The Water (detail) at 14th Istanbul Biennial in 2015. Courtesy of the Artists.

Although Öztat and Belkis have pursued solo careers as artists involved in research oriented multimedia practices, the impact of collective resistance against governmental and corporate attempts to destroy natural and social resources united them. Their dialogue as artists living and working within an akin circle for many years shaped into a collaboration in response to a mutual interest in resonance of water for relentlessness and freedom.

The duo embarked on the project after listening to stories of villagers, among which are mostly women, determined to protect the integrity of water—a substance pertaining to fluidity and fertility. Various trips the artists took to different parts of Anatolia unveiled countless stories that resist waning in the face of oppression and limitations. They collected oral histories from local residents about the urgency of the issue they fight for and how their resistance has still withstood. Construction of hydroelectric plants in valleys where thousands reside and earn a living would spoil the natural and historic habitat in addition to aggravating climate change and decreasing the annual crop, as many emphasized. The artists observed that the impact of such construction projects had already troubled many lives in the region. Personal and collective stories that would otherwise disappear over time guided their subtle, but eloquent project that embodies the enduring legacy of resistance.

Through an ecologically-conscious approach, Öztat and Belkis depended on natural and social diversity of their subject matter in creation of their installations; they used almost no electricity to emphasize the hazards of power plants built irresponsibly.

Hazelnut trees—grown in Turkey's Black Sea region in numbers vast enough to mark the country as the world's biggest hazelnut provider—form the skeleton for the project's Istanbul leg. Dozens of hazelnut sticks hoist a series of colorful hand-printed kerchiefs. In addition to their regional prevalence, the sticks remain the primary defense tool among the local community in cases of police retaliation during protests. The artists utilized them to maintain the integrity of their installation, encapsulating the local reliance on this material, while underlining the inhabitants' fight and dependence on nature.

The sari yazma [yellow kerchief] is worn in everyday life by the women of Loç Valley and has been a symbol of the struggles since 2010. In the installation, kerchiefs, elaborated with different motifs, loosely drape over the hazelnut sticks. Reminiscent of political banners or laundry left to dry, these kerchiefs echo the fluidity of water with their free-hung displays, conveying local opposition through woodcut prints of figurative and abstract patterns such as hawk masks. Comprised of a group of women from Arhavi Doğa Koruma Platformu [Arhavi Nature Protection Platform], Kadın Atmacalar [Woman Hawks] are frontiers in resistance against construction of power plants in the region. The artists pay homage to hawk masks worn by group members during resistance, adorning their kerchiefs with bird of prey mask imagery. The Sharjah version of *Who Carries The Water* benefits from the regional vegetation where date trees grow in abundance. Commonly used for production of utilitarian objects by locals in the Gulf Region, palm fronds from these soaring trees substitute for the hazelnut sticks, expanding the dialogue between Northern Turkey and Sharjah.

Evident in both installations is judicious integration of two isms: social realism and magical realism. In doing so, however, Öztat and Belkis manage to avoid utilizing either to establish a formal structure. These two creative approaches to realism—particularly adopted by twentieth century artists, writers, and filmmakers to render socio-political landscapes in stark reality or eccentricity—accentuate the work’s narrative with doses of civil activism and pastoral surreality.

Although two genres pose distinct at first sight, a closer look reveals their interconnectedness in terms of portraying the everyday type as a socio-political entity—resilient, ardent, and wistful. Kerchiefs with their whimsical patterns embellish hazelnut sticks compiled within a mysterious cohesion. The evident influence of local myths and fables that have been orally transferred over generations emerge in the project’s print component. As a textual culmination of the research the artists conducted en route to their main installation, the conversational text gives voice and accords agency not only to local characters, but also to nonliving “things” around the region. The installation conveys the potency of watching a Vittoria de Sica film, in which social and political catalysts determine the plot, or reading a Gabriel García Márquez novel with its murky distinction between reality and fantasy.

“Instead of treating materials and processes as means to an end, we tried to stand with them, allying with their already established qualities and powers to signify,” the duo stated in an email conversation about their decision to remain distant from imposing conclusions on social matters or stripping their materials from their utilitarian charge in order to romanticize them.

About the Author: Osman Can Yerebakan

Osman Can Yerebakan is an art writer and curator based in New York. His writing has appeared on New York Times: T Magazine, Village Voice, Brooklyn Rail, BOMB, Artslant, and elsewhere.

Chayma Drira

KADER ATTIA AND LA COLONIE: The Art of Reappropriation

A black and white photograph captured in secret. In the foreground, it is impossible to distinguish blurred facial features of a young man who does not dare to reveal his gaze. There is a modesty in the revelation and impression of the subject. This is the image of exile that makes one away from themselves... In the background is the solid concrete of towers and housing projects locating an excluded space. An environment, tinged with a sweet melancholy, stands out immediately. Youth is often photographed in motion, always re-developed, never frozen. **Correspondance** (2003)[1] is an early photographic installation by Kader Attia, reflecting a major thread in his later work: the quest for one's self; the identity separated between Algeria and France. These thirty photographs are from Attia's own family album. Hanging on strings with clothespins, they restore the ruins of time and that of a family separated by two shores of the Mediterranean Sea. **Correspondance** is an intimate work located in-between, on the edge of here and elsewhere, where borders waver.

Kader Attia is a French artist of Algerian origin and descent, born in 1970 in Dugny, a suburban part of Paris. Born into an immigrant family, Attia grew up in Garges-lesGonesses, a popular town known for its diversity of population. It is precisely this interracial mixture that inspires Attia for an aesthetic deeply marked by colonization and its consequent effects. For example, take the model for the fortress of Mzab, a city the artist built using seeds of couscous to represent Ghardaïa. Located in the southern part of Algeria, the architecture of this ancient city later inspired Le Corbusier for the construction of many large Parisian complexes.



Kader Attia, *Correspondance*, 2003. Installation 2 videos, 30 silver prints Courtesy the artist and Musée National de l'Histoire et des Cultures de l'Immigration, Paris
Photo credit- Kader Attia.

Through his multifaceted and metaphorical work, Kader Attia, who studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, continues to question the present and the past often with poetry and humor. Particularly, his photographic installations reflect the re-appropriation of spaces by a resistant aesthetic and repair. He summons the traumatic memory between France and Algeria to suggest transformation of the imaginary.

The lack of national consensus on the Algerian war in the French society is reflected in the persistence of a spirit of revenge—carried out by the rightist ideology— and to anxiety towards Muslim identity. According to the French historian Benjamin Stora, these behaviors reflect the existence of a “white communitarianism” among certain French people who are worried about the emergence of a multicultural society. [3] Furthermore, the expert on the Algerian war also points out the institutionalization of the “mechanisms of forgetting” in France, a perspective that Kader Attia attempts to exhume through an aesthetic of reconstruction and rehabilitation as a form of symbolic compensation for the children of postcolonial immigrants.

Issues related to the diaspora nourish his reflections and often guide him towards a multimedia approach similar to that of the ethnologist, constructing a social tribute to North African immigration. Hence, in 2004, he transformed Kamel Mennour Gallery into a ready-to-wear clothing store with a fashion line for casual wear named Hallal, investigating the identity conflict faced by immigrants of Maghrebi descent in France.[4] Hallal reflects the Muslim displacement and the new way of understanding Islam while facing challenges brought up against pursuing the traditions brought in from the motherland. In his work, Kader Attia constructs a space where differences and imperfections could be expressed and interacted without marginalization.

Thus, Attia, the winner of the Marcel Duchamp prize in 2016, opened *La Colonie*, a center for multidisciplinary programming under a title that particularly evokes the wake of current identity conflicts. Within months, this three-story former nightclub has turned into a key forum for ideas in the heart of Paris. The space has a soaring ceiling with an iron canopy visible from the middle of the ground floor; vintage leather chairs accentuate the atmosphere that recalls the decolonization era. Located in the cosmopolitan Gare du Nord neighborhood, La Colonie displays a minimalist style. Its hybridity reminds coffee shops in Berlin where Kader Attia currently lives. Exhibitions, performances, screenings, concerts, and philosophical discussions regularly occupy the venue.

Inaugurated on October 17th, 2016, *La Colonie* carries the memory of the massacre of Algerian demonstrators by the French police in 1961 when dozens of Algerians, perhaps between 150 and 200, were executed, and some bodies were found in the Seine River. Therefore, the date is symbolic. For decades, the memory of this major episode in the Algerian war has been obscured. How confidently can we speak of a history that does not transfer? The colonial history unfortunately remains a blind spot for a number of French politicians. Kader Attia intends to shed light on a dark page for a new generation of artists and intellectuals of postcolonial energy.

The open space offers incredible varieties of programming. Conference rooms are devoted to Western Sahara and the refugee crisis; French and foreign artists, such as the Egyptian instrumentalist Mohamed Abozekry, play concerts. Recently, Leïla Alaoui, the talented Franco-Moroccan photographer who was killed in Burkina Faso in 2016, was commemorated with a special evening. Activists gather for discussions on police violence.

La Colonie is a unique experimental site in Paris. The intensity of intellectual exchanges reminds us of Café de Flore, a mythical place in the heart of Saint Germain-des-Près where the Parisian intelligentsia gathered in the early 20th century. Boris Vian, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, Georges Bataille, and Pablo Picasso gathered together to remake the world. Today, the French intellectual life has become considerably impoverished with reactionary philosophers such as Alain Finkielkraut and Michel Houellebecq, who are obsessed with the decline of the former colonial power. Flirting with the ideas of the right wing, their publications signal the French decadence and the "big replacement" of whites by African and Arab immigrants.

Against the backdrop of these racist battles, *La Colonie* reflects the changes in an increasingly cosmopolitan country. In a table over the corner, Houria Bouteldja, the spokeswoman for Party of the Indigenous of the Republic, can be seen in discussion with the political scientist Françoise Vergès or sociologist Zahra Ali.

La Colonie understands that postcolonial minorities embody the renewal of thought in a country within its racial tensions. In the aftermath of Charlie Hebdo attack, *La Colonie* offers the suppressed to tell their stories and to convey the forgotten or overlooked. Borrowing the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty in Provincializing Europe, "it is essential to follow the decentralization and rediscover the margins."

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4. Kader Attia, *Hallal*, 2004, Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris

About the Author: Chayma Drira

Chayma Drira is French and has North African descendants. She holds a BA and a Master's degree from Sciences Po Paris. Her research interests include immigration and integration policy, European governance and North African politics. She is also interested in Islam(s) in diasporic contexts and its transnational dynamics. She works as a freelance journalist for french magazine such as Jeune Afrique and Orient XXI. She lived in Copenhagen and Algiers.

Ruba Katrib

Palestinian Museum

The inaugural exhibition of the Palestinian Museum has just opened this August, over a year after its building was first unveiled. While I have not yet seen the building or the exhibition in person, I have witnessed its unfolding through various media outlets, including social media, as well as through conversations with the exhibition's curator, Reem Fadda, who is a friend and colleague.

The significance of the Palestinian Museum is lost on few. Settled on a mountain in the West Bank, the private museum with an international architect, Henenghan Peng from Dublin, is a beacon of Arab (and specifically Palestinian) culture emanating from a place enclosed by extremely restrictive borders. The museum is sparkling new, it looks striking in photos atop a mountain in Ramallah, and it is massive at nearly 40,000 square feet of exhibition space, other public facilities, and sprawling gardens.

While Palestine has been host to many smaller project spaces and alternative spaces over the years, a large-scale building on par with the international mega-museum marks a shift in the landscape. The project cost over \$24 million dollars, as reported by a New York Times article that appeared in anticipation of the building's opening in 2016. The museum was also meant to have an opening exhibition, but it was canceled due to internal issues. As a result, the administration decided to leave the building empty for about 14 months, but still while remaining open to visitors. For her exhibition *Jerusalem Lives* (Tayha al Quds), Fadda has curated a show of contemporary art mixed with other documents and materials.

Notably, the museum hasn't been established as an art museum necessarily, but this first gesture of contemporary art is promising. Its potential as a hub for locals and international visitors is palpable. The museum is a significant move to reveal and generate the richness of Palestinian culture, and importantly, it is located within Palestine.

Fadda's exhibition *Jerusalem Lives* (Tayha al Quds) takes the rallying cry of "Tayha al Quds" from a now almost emptied slogan into a sincere provocation. What is Jerusalem today, what is its future? As is asked in the press release for the exhibition, a sentiment put forth by Fadda, "could Jerusalem be considered the quintessential global city?" In a presentation Fadda recently made in a conference that we both were part of in Kolkata, she emphasized that what is happening in Jerusalem can be seen as a bellwether for what will happen in the rest of the world.

Jerusalem is one of the original global cosmopolitan cities. It is the center of three major world religions, but it is also more than that. It can also be considered a progenitor of mass media images and souvenirs, for instance the producer of crosses and images of the Dome of the Rock. It is also increasingly partitioned off, segregated, and under surveillance. Are these facets of control and social and political fracturing indicative not only of the future of Jerusalem, but all the other major cities in the world? This is part of Fadda's interrogation.

Maneuvering within these confined social and political spaces, the exhibition is a study of Jerusalem, past, present, and future. A central aspect of the exhibition is an area that focuses on the Dome of the Rock as a point of pride as well as a symbolic burden. The iconic structure in many ways defines Jerusalem, but always points to conflicting historicizing narratives.

This rethinking of the images, objects, and terms that have come to define Jerusalem as historically significant are re-contextualized within the current urgency of finding ways forward.

The Dome of the Rock is a UNESCO heritage site, but what about the people it purportedly serves literally and symbolically? How is this monument used to attempt to place its publics in an historical condition, versus a contemporary future? Fadda's show broaches these complex questions within a new cultural institution that unabashedly touts Palestinian pride.

While mega-museums are on the rise, and bring with them all sorts of problematics, they also generate tourism and income. Elsewhere in the Arab world, the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi sits in limbo. Another much more anticipated, as well as disparaged, destination museum geared towards the art elite, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi was meant to be an easily accessible place for the frequent layover stop in the United Arab Emirates for international travelers, with art fairs and biennials nearby.

The more challenging to access Palestinian Museum may have the potential to generate cultural exchange that stimulates the local populations as well. It is also interesting to note that Fadda previously worked on the Abu Dhabi project; is it possible that the new institutional center of Arab art and culture may have made a relatively quiet shift from the Emirates to Palestine? This potential is great, and it is possible for the museum to build a strong program that has an international reach, following the waves already created by its first exhibition. But somehow, the Palestinian Museum has already become significant—even when it stood as an empty building—a seemingly unintentional action that has only emphasized the purpose of the architectural structure that is really meant to be filled with objects and people.

About the Author: Ruba Katrib

Ruba Katrib is a curator and writer based in New York. Before joining MoMA PS1 as Curator, Katrib served as Curator at SculptureCenter, where she produced the group exhibitions *The Eccentrics* (2015), *Puddle, Pothole, Portal* (2014) (co-curated with artist Camille Henrot), *Better Homes* (2013), and *A Disagreeable Object* (2012). Katrib has contributed texts for a number of publications and periodicals including *Art in America*, *Parkett*, and *cura. magazine*.

Feminist Architecture Collaborative

FIELD REVIEW: Amman Design Week

Among a burgeoning wave of design weeks in the MENA region, Amman Design Week is launching its second edition on October 6th, with reflections on Movement. The nine-day series of thematic events will be held at the Hangar exhibition space, Ras Al-Ein Gallery and al-Husseini Cultural Center in Amman's old Downtown, with multiple ancillary events taking place in other parts of Jordan's capital.

When ADW was initiated in 2016, its organizers hoped that it would establish Jordan "as a recognized hub for design, creativity and modern Arab culture." The aim of the debut event was to bring together local and regional art and design and to situate them within an expanding global dialogue. Despite the gradual development of Amman's art scene over the past several years, ADW marks the state's official move to formalize its cultural real estate. Its first city-wide event was made possible with the support of Queen Rania Al Abdullah—which in turn attracted interested sponsors and media—and a strategic partnership formed with the Greater Amman Municipality. Installations, workshops, and events activate various parts of the city where art is displayed within both enclosed and public spaces, often subsidized by the municipality.

In a recent conversation, Rana Beiruti, co-director/founder of Amman Design Week, underscored four main pillars that form the foundation of the project. The first is to feature work which is inherently regional or engages with the local community. The second emphasizes the educational capacity of ADW through workshops and lectures which present craft practices as technical processes of making and manufacture.

The third ambition of the Design Week programming is to establish a network: connecting artists to manufacturers and various opportunities, the local public to a world of design, and linking distributed city spaces to formalize a navigable design scene. The fourth pillar propping up ADW is the need to address design as a tool for problem solving—at the scale of the city and the individual. Rana also pointed out the importance of formulating an overall vision for ADW, especially in a city like Amman that lacks the economic capital of its Gulf neighbors and is limited in material and creative resources: "everything is studied and attached to the environment, community, and the situation we are in."^[1]

Amman Design Week is realized with an awareness of the challenging environs surrounding it as well as the opportunities that arise from those challenges. Artists otherwise hindered by the practical impediments to sharing work (including Amman's own circuitous bureaucratic permitting procedures) are enabled to make and make work public in the context of ADW, but it's Rana's belief that they are most equipped to take on such challenges precisely because of Amman's difficult creative terrain.

If the inaugural ADW forged an introduction between Jordanian publics and a regional design culture, this current iteration is attempting to create "a Movement," and transform the interest generated in the previous year into something collective and consequential. However, Movement as a theme is not unique to ADW. Similar explorations have been taken up by other design weeks in the region: Saudi Design Week, taking place around the same week as ADW, advances the theme of Design in Motion, and the Sharjah Biennial's central theme of Tamawuj literally means flowing or wavy undulations.

While some are translating movement more literally than others, Amman Design Week invites its participants to interpret the theme in expansive ways “whether physical, intellectual, cultural or social.”[2]

It is ADW's essential push towards collective consciousness (if not action) that would wrest Amman's existing art scene from its (bourgeois) urban underground and position design as part of more inclusive national and global conversations. The implicit question leveled by the 2017 program is how can Amman become a site of improvement rather than conflict? But ADW's endeavor toward optimistic vision discourages more critical interrogation of political issues by designers.

Not immune to the effects of regional conflict nor its own internal unrest, Jordan has been struggling with attempts to use neoliberal development as a method to salvage the country's economy, amid a growing desire by local communities to vitalize the economy from within. Rather than look past the conditions directly contributing to the shifts in the country's political, economic and social terrains, Amman Design Week becomes a platform where these issues can only be addressed through a benevolent lens. Here we understand the generic impetus of movement—as opposed to more pointed political connotations of “a movement”—to reveal the relatively apolitical course this iteration of ADW has taken, in which material and technical progress is favored over less obsequious problem-solving. The technological is always imbricated with the political and is constantly in need of modifying and redefining existing politics in order to move forward.

It's difficult to talk about **change** and **raising a collective voice** without also raising that voice towards a more concerted political will. ADW has an opportunity to present technology, design and local crafts not only as cultural innovations but as tools for social action.

While we can anticipate the **Hangar Exhibition** to exhibit work with subtle social messages, it is in more rare instances like ADW's collaboration with Darat al Funun and the design label “**Disarming Design From Palestine**” where advocacy is pursued more explicitly. DDFP is an educational and artistic exchange between the Netherlands and Palestine aimed at disseminating alternative narratives about contemporary Palestine and encouraging political discourse through design and craft. ADW worked with DDFP to feature works by Palestinian communities residing in Gaza Camp in Jerash, a chance for artists and designers to collaborate with communities from the Palestinian diaspora. This initiative is incubated at Darat al Funun's “Lab” space and will showcase design work by a community that is integral to both the Palestinian and Jordanian identities.



Disarming Design From Palestine. Watchtowers and Water Tanks Game as demonstrated by Wisam Hourani. Courtesy of Flanders DC for Design.

During our talk, Rana recalled an instance from last year's event in which they were able to provide access to technology, a kind of work she deems advocacy for artists. In an attempt to bring in some 3D printers into the country for a workshop, they ran into complications getting the imported equipment approved, a process that required a multitude of paperwork and the approval of many bureaucratic entities. After several meetings with various authority figures they were finally able to lift restrictions on smaller 3D printers and greatly simplify the permit process. This instance evidences the capacity ADW has to stage real movement—in this case, the law becomes implicated in the advancement of design technology.

Of course, Amman Design Week's ability to initiate legislative change has a lot to do with their strategic partnership with the Greater Amman Municipality and the support of Queen Rania Al Abdullah. Although this partnership helps to legitimize public art and foster public interest in it, it risks other state influences: those which moderate the power of art and design to act politically. Consider, for example, the access artists have to public space. In Amman, the conventional approach to policing public space is to monitor and censor. How can public and cultural spaces be both occupied and policed when they are transformed under more or less permissive forms of state patronage?

From its pop-up Crafts District at Al Hussein Cultural Center to its mobile Makerspace, ADW is able to inhabit more city spaces while bypassing the ambiguous bureaucratic protocols the government has put in place for doing so, a complicated step that an independent artist could not avoid. ADW's role in mediating between designers/artists and the various arms of the state apparatus provides a legitimate distance, a cover for other public and spatial investigations in a city where many public spaces are either off-limits or too difficult to occupy. While it is difficult to know whether contributions considered too subversive for state approval have been omitted in the curatorial process, ADW claims that they have never felt the need to censor a participating designer or artist.

Amman Design week certainly presents an opportunity for new engagements with and within state sanctioned spaces, but it remains to be seen whether its curators will permit more explicitly political proposals in the upcoming event and as they move forward. An effective exhibition has to be reflexive and sensitive, not just projective. ADW provides necessary accommodations for innovative work, but its best iteration would establish a forum for emerging voices to design critically and towards more deliberate social change.

As ADW grows, they may be provided more opportunities for state support and corporate sponsorship (and with it potentially more strings), but they may also accrue the kind of international respect/recognition that brings autonomy. Hopefully it is an autonomy that can motivate critical design acts and consequential futures for a Jordanian design culture. We'll see what kind of movement arises.

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About the Author: Feminist Architecture Collaborative

feminist architecture collaborative is a three-woman architectural research enterprise aimed at disentangling the contemporary spatial politics and technological appearances of bodies, intimately and globally.

Edwin Nasr and Bassem Saad
ON TAREK MOUKKADEM AND OMARIVS
IOSEPH FILIVS DINÆ'S COLLABORATIVE WORK

"The portrait photograph is a two-sided performance, one having to do with the photographer who manipulates technology, models, props and backgrounds behind the camera, and the other with the model who performs self especially and uniquely for the camera"

José Esteban Muñoz, *Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) Conventional wisdom situates the advent of portrait photography in the Arab world inside a larger historiographic framework during which the disseminators of colonial discourse sought to create visual material capable of presenting the perceived Oriental subject to a Western gaze. These grand narratives, however crucial for a collective understanding of Orientalism as a process of othering, tend to efface some early practices of photographic portraiture by Arab inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire which existed not as reaction to colonialist image production but, according to Stephen Sheehi, simply as "a social practice, a technological act, an ideological enactment, and a condensation of shifts in political economy that express as well as displace the history of the contexts of its production."

It is within this tradition of *indigenous* Arab portrait photography which maintained signifiers of cultural difference such as vernacular dress while allowing its models to exercise some form of self representation that the likes of the Abdullah Freres and Pascal Sebah became widely known and celebrated in the Ottoman Arab world, paving the way for a practice that has persisted throughout a century struck by an enormous profusion of ideologies, tragedies, and technological advancements.



Detail, *Studio El Sham*, Joe © Omarivs Ioseph Filivs Dinæ and Tarek Moukaddem

The collaboration between Lebanese photographer Tarek Moukaddem and Palestinian fashion designer Omarivs Ioseph Filivs Dinæ's seems to have picked photographic portraiture up right where early 20th century Arab practitioners had left off. It consists of artistic studio portrait photography constructed around fashion items that question dress as a tool and marker of power and identity in an Arab context, in addition to re-examining local historical processes of image production. While there is no denying the status of photographic portraiture as a constitutive feature of modernity, the singular portrait, especially in its studio variation, occupies a much less paradigmatic space in the age of the online "hemorrhaging" of the self-portrait, in the words of Dinæ.

Still, lazily assuming that Dinæ and Moukaddem's interest in archaic instances of photographic portraiture is due merely to a fascination with pastiche will overlook both their intention and the medium's more complex offerings. In practice, the work goes beyond the facile romanticization of past epochs and their attendant customs and aesthetics to examine the ever-evolving dynamics between photographer, model, and prop.

The Official Portrait, the final iteration of a broader project titled *The Ceremonial Uniform*, aims to respond, rather cynically, to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA)'s unsuccessful application for full United Nations membership in 2011, and its subsequent accepting of the non-member observer state status for Palestine in the General Assembly, by seeking to ridicule state-based imaginaries. Dinæ and Moukaddem's exercise stems from envisaging portraits of statesmen ruling over a fictional Palestinian nation which has cast aside collective emancipation in favor of normative values of statehood.



Abu Saleh, *Studio El Sham*. *The Official Portrait* © Omarivs Ioseph Filivs Dinæ & Tarek Moukaddem

Indeed, in an effort to subvert the traditional invocation of the figure of the indigenous male worker in state-sanctioned representations, the seated male models, themselves actual manual laborers with no prior modeling experience, are dressed in pieces inspired by Islamic talismanic shirts and inscribed with excerpts of speeches by Palestinian political leader Yasser Arafat. Most striking in the composition is the decision to dress the models in women's shoes.

Omarivis is quick to point out that this is not at all in a bid to "emasculate" the male figure, but rather to critique the persistent and formidable intertwining of masculinity and nationalism. The portrait takes place against a backdrop that is decidedly European in its references, seemingly a bastard hybrid between a Flemish still-life painting and an interior from a royalty portrait. One could argue that the decision to superpose Arab dress on European background is rooted in a will to expose Oriental images of *indigeneity* as always already deriving from Western visual representations, but what could also be felt is a subtler, more radical, commentary on the demand for a Palestinian nation-state which in itself is deeply entrenched in Western political structures.

Studio el Sham, on the other hand, is presented by the duo as an "ongoing experiment" rather than a project. What helps make sense of the playful use of objects, attire, and staging in *Studio el Sham* portraits is situating them as a reflection on practices in early commercial photographic portraiture. If the performance of identity involves the lived repetition of performative acts, then the identity-forming power of portrait photography lies in its recording and making-permanent of those performative acts. In the early days of commercial portraiture, the photographic act took place rarely and did not attempt to record that repetition. It had to compensate by relying heavily on acts, postures, and garments that condensed lifetimes and social positions and relationships efficiently into millimeters of film.

As can be seen in the oeuvre of Hashem el-Madani, a main reference for *Studio el Sham* and a visual corpus that has been widely visited by artists and theorists of the image, friendships and kinship are immortalized as kisses on cheeks or warm hand-holding. In this light, the studio photograph of that period and its contents attain weight as a media of self representation that goes far beyond that of any photo produced currently.

It is precisely this weight that informs the duo's artistic processes throughout different installments of their collaboration. In *Official Portraits*, the targeted photographic practice is one that is employed by the state to represent its figureheads to the general populace. Consequently, the staging of the photographs takes place independently of the models' desires to represent themselves: the photographers have dictated the backdrop, dress, and posture of the photographic subject. In *Studio el Sham*, the complete opposite takes place. As a mirroring of the wide margin for self representation traditionally present in studio portraiture, the photographers merely provided the models with a collection of objects and fashion items, retreating in order to avoid hindering the model's agency. The resulting characters are crafted by the models themselves, who self-curate within a gamut set by the photographer-designer couple.

Whether to ridicule nationalist enterprises of meaning-production or capture how subjectivity may be constituted through embodied performance, Dinæ and Moukaddem have proven that portrait photography, even in its most traditional incarnations, is worthy of study and celebration in an epoch of instantaneity, holding still the faculty to inform, critique, and poeticize.

About the Author: Edwin Nasr and Bassem Saad

Edwin Nasr completed his studies at the Pantheon-Sorbonne University in Paris, France. He has had articles published in Reorient, Muftah Magazine, Raseef22 (English) and Counterpunch. He currently lives in Beirut, Lebanon, where he works for organizations focusing on the production of contemporary art and cinema in the Arab region.

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In 2019, **Asia Contemporary Art Week (ACAW)** updated its name to **Asia Contemporary Art Forum (ACAF)** to reflect nearly two decades of programmatic evolution and growth. In 2014, the “n” was dropped from “Asian” in the organization’s name to emphasize Asia as an expansive and inclusive artistic state of mind, transcending geographical and national boundaries.

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