IBRAAZ

ECHOES & REVERBERATIONS

Echoes & Reverberations **explores sound as a medium of culture and history through the work of six contemporary artists, largely based in the Arab region. Using a variety of media, the artists explore the performative nature of different sounds – such as field recordings, hymns and oral story-telling – as well as their ability to both conjure and challenge cultural memory.**

The exhibition is a collaboration between Hayward Gallery, Delfina Foundation, the Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah and Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture. 11–26 July 2015.

Magdi Mostafa, *Planting Sound*, 2014, sound sculpture.
Courtesy the artist.

Exhibition Overview

Echoes & Reverberations

Hayward Gallery Project Space

23 June–16 August 2015

Echoes & Reverberations explores sound as a medium of culture and history through the work of six contemporary artists, largely based in the Arab region. Using a variety of media, the artists explore the performative nature of different sounds – such as field recordings, hymns and oral story-telling – as well as their ability to both conjure and challenge cultural memory.

Echoes and reverberations are present versions of a sound from the past, modified or imperfectly recalled. Recollection, and the act of re -telling, is examined in Jumana Emil Abboud's *A Happy Ending part II: Two Skins* (2015), which draws on motifs from Palestinian folk-tales and ceremonies and considers objects as vessels for personal stories. Basma Alsharif's film explores the relationship between subjective experience and political history, while the effect of trauma and dislocation on the way that a place is recalled – and represented in visual and oral culture – is the subject of Samah Hijawi's *Paradise Series* (2013).

In several works in the exhibition, sound is used to recall specific cultures and practices. Anas Al-Shaikh's film *My land, 2* (2009) features a hymn of preparation sung during the Gulf region's pearl-diving era, while Magdi Mostafa's sound-sculpture is made up of sounds from his neighbourhood in Cairo, including the Friday call to prayer. Finally, Joe Namy's installation – a poetic deconstruction of a harmonium – forms just part of the artist's investigation into the instrument's complex geopolitical history.

The experience of listening is central to *Echoes & Reverberations* and a number of new performances relating to the gallery-based artworks will take place on 18 July. See the website or freesheet for further details.

An online catalogue produced in collaboration with *Ibraaz* Platform 009 is available at www.ibraaz.org

Echoes & Reverberations is co-curated by Aaron Cezar, Director, Delfina Foundation and Cliff Lauson, Curator, Hayward Gallery with Jane Scarth, Residency and Projects Manager, Delfina Foundation and Eimear Martin, Dominik Czechowski, Assistant Curators, Hayward Gallery.

The exhibition is a collaboration between Hayward Gallery, Delfina Foundation, the Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah and Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture, 11–26 July 2015.

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Echoes & Reverberations: Curator's Introduction

Aaron Cezar, Director, Delfina Foundation, and Cliff Lauson, Curator, Hayward Gallery

Echoes & Reverberations is an exhibition that launches *Staging Histories*: Delfina Foundation's long-term project to document the history of performance art from and in relation to the Arab region through archival research and new commissions. Specifically, *Echoes & Reverberations* explores sound as a medium for performing history and listening as a performative act. Through the work of six artists, Jumana Emil Abboud, Basma Alsharif, Samah Hijawi, Anas Al-Shaikh, Magdi Mostafa and Joe Namy, this group exhibition considers the role of sound in the recording and rewriting of history through oral storytelling, music and field recordings. Yet, none of the artworks in the exhibition fit within the medium-specific definition of sound art. [1] Instead, sound plays a complementary role in these works, making reference to places, cultures or traditions in combination with, or acting as a foil to, the visual. Sound generates the meaning of the works, somewhere between foreground (as specific as words, accents or intonations) and background (as environmental or unresolvable noise).

In this frame, aural culture enacts shared histories and individual narratives, something this exhibition conjures and challenges through the invocation of cultural memory through oral traditions. After all, the oral tradition is by nature also aural, as sounds transmit stories from the performer to the listener. An echo is an aural representation of the past that repeats back to us, bringing with it a host of potential inaccuracies. A reverberation, on the other hand, is an immediate experience of the present. Oral histories sit between the two, in a push and pull of time. In the western world, however, the act of looking has dominated the discourse of how we experience and describe the world, through both imagery and the written word. Engaging with the role played by other senses opens up a host of new narratives and perspectives. As such, this exhibition elevates the status of the aural to that of the visual as a significant narrative form of exchange: one that is embodied for both performer and listener.

In *My land, 2* (2009), for instance, Anas Al-Shaikh uses a Bahraini song, traditionally sung by pearl divers before they embark on precarious trips out to sea, to highlight how sound constructs collective memories and social cohesion. In his two-channel video, the artist isolates the rhythm of the song with sharp slaps to his face, making the beat a tactile bodily experience, while generating a nostalgia for the more unified communities of the past in the light of contemporary sectarianism. Jumana Emil Abboud also engages in tracing and re-enacting aural histories and identity politics through Palestinian folk and fairy tales. In *A Happy Ending part II: Two Skins* (2015), commissioned especially for *Echoes & Reverberations*, Abboud creates drawings and handcrafted objects inspired by the iconography present within these imaginary tales. The objects stem from *Glossary for a happy ending: bodies and beings from magical Palestine* (2015), a publication produced previously by the artist. The idea of performance, in particular traditional ceremony, is integral to the installation. On 18 July, Abboud will animate the objects through a vocal performance at the Southbank Centre. After the event, she will distribute smaller versions of the talismans that have been ceremoniously wrapped, the objects becoming vessels for personal narratives. As these items are passed from hand to hand the stories travel with them.

Oral traditions are also explored in Samah Hijawi's *Paradise Series* (2013), which critique stereotypical descriptions of Palestine as paradise. Appropriating imagery from paintings by Palestinian artists, she composes landscapes of family photos and magazine cut-outs that juxtapose a utopian ideal with the reality of trauma and dislocation. In the newly commissioned audio accompaniment to the collages, the artist narrates the images and ruminates on the subject of time and memory. Similarly, Hijawi's lecture -performance extends her examination of the narrative form through a story told by a fictive character, a singer called Layla, with fragments of photography and painting.

Basma Alsharif's film work provides insight into how sound operates in relationship to text and image. *We Began by Measuring Distance* (2009) is a tightly composed montage combining these three elements. The hollow sound of wind reverberates throughout the work, as the narrator describes different forms of measurement that can be undertaken. These begin as mundane and become increasingly politicized as the film progresses, questioning the open borders between the personal and the political. The final section of the film uses images of people running and screaming juxtaposed with the sound of popular music, emphasizing their voicelessness. Slowly, as the cacophony of collective panic become audible, sound plays a key role in

articulating tragedy.

Yet, though the body is the locus of the experience of sound, the relationship between sound and the body is not solitary. There is an inherent collectivity embedded into the act of listening. Sound cannot be isolated easily. It is messy, it leaks; it has scant regard for personal space.[2] As a result, it can be utilized as a force to bring people together. Joe Namy's newly commissioned performance *space, breath, time* (2015) does this in both its form and context. His interest in droning, environmental sounds is focused here on the harmonium – a bellows-operated reed instrument that is fundamental to many genres of South Asian music. Introduced to India by European powers, the instrument has an extremely charged history in relation to colonialism and migration. For the performance that forms a part of Namy's work, a group of harmonium players collectively play an interpretation of a text-based score written by the artist. Namy's soundscape will spread across the large atrium of the Queen Elizabeth Hall in a bid to draw audience members towards the harmonium players so that they might encounter the individual sonic resonances that exist within the unified whole.

At this point, it is crucial that we acknowledge the potential of sound as an embodied experience, which is closely related to the performativity of politics. As this exhibition proposes, we do not need to produce sound to be a part of this collective experience. This is echoed in the installation by Magdi Mostafa, whose work *Wisdom Tower* (2009–2012, from his series *Sound Cells*) presents a blend of the *adhan*, the Muslim call to prayer, with a Friday sermon. Recorded in the Ardellewa neighbourhood in Cairo, such sounds permeate both public and private space, drawing people together. The sculptural aspect of Mostafa's pair of freestanding screens recalls the partitions inside a mosque, creating the feeling of intimate space that is countered by an array of 84 speakers that reference the broadcast nature of communal worship. On the second screen, Mostafa displays a translation of the sermon, which – unusually for an Islamic sermon in the context of this conservative neighbourhood – focuses on gender, biology and reproduction. In Mostafa's work, sound is at once intimately personal and politically voluminous.

In coming back to the broader project of *Staging Histories*, *Echoes & Reverberations* represents a starting point from which to consider a framework for exploring performance beyond the confines of medium-specificity. It is an approach to listening as a performative act in its own right, in which the aural is used to configure physical and psychic space in different but equally compelling ways. Each of the works in *Echoes & Reverberations* speaks in some way to notions of the body politic. An individual who creates and hears sound and communicates in both verbal and aural capacities is not only a single body, but also part of a collective unit. This perspective allows for the required expansion of definitions around performance from, and related to, the complex geo-political spectra of societies, beliefs and cultures that constitute the so-called 'Arab region'.

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[1] The genre of sound art is generally understood to have emerged from the experimental music scenes in America in the 1960s and Europe through the 1970s.

[2] M. Bull and L. Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Berg: Oxford and New York, 2003), p. 6.

Foreword

Anthony Downey, Editor-in-Chief, Ibraaz

Ibraaz is pleased to publish an online guide to accompany *Echoes & Reverberations* , the exhibition that launches the Delfina Foundation's international project *Staging Histories.* Focusing on how history is performed through sound, alongside the performative act of listening and interacting with its ephemeral contexts, this exhibition evokes a contested sense of individual and collective histories. In each of the works presented here, from artists as diverse as Jumana Emil Abboud, Basma Alsharif, Samah Hijawi, Anas Al-Shaikh, Magdi Mostafa and Joe Namy, these multiple, often fugitive, means of recording history are also concerned with how the experience of sound, a gradual informal process of aggregation, becomes in turn historical. This double perception – sound as imminent experience and the future historization of sounds – likewise speaks to the double movement of history as an agonistic form of corroborative, archival accumulation periodically challenged by interrogative forms of oppositional doubt and disputation.

This antagonistic staging and restaging of history through cultural means, as the curators and organizers observe here, involves a detailed history of performance art from and about the so-called Arab world. We were 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. 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'. 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 the 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 6 to a 12 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.

Soundscapes: Taking Apart the Arab City

Dr. Alexandra MacGilp

I don't decide to represent anything except myself. But this self is full of collective memory.

– Mahmoud Darwish

I like the notion that we are all repositories of collective memory. Empty us out and you would find pictures of the places we have lived and, before that, the places our parents and grandparents called home. You might press an imaginary play button and hear audio recordings of all the songs we ever listened to and the sounds of all the streets we had walked and the apartment blocks we had inhabited. We might hear the songs our mothers used to sing us to sleep with; the tunes our best friends at school introduced us to excitedly; the tracks played on repeat in the nextdoor café; the news headlines repeated endlessly in the background at meals. We could compare our 'most played' tracks with those of others or create complex ambient soundscapes, as some of the artists in *Echoes and Reverberations* have done.

Reverberation, (noun): a sound that lasts for a long time, and makes things seem to shake.

Reverberations, (noun plural): effects that spread and affect a lot of people.

This exhibition considers listening as a performative act and the role of sound in the documentation of history through oral traditions, music and ambient noise.

In his installation *Sound Cells (Fridays)* (2010), Magdi Mostafa creates a sound installation evoking powerful, consuming memories of Friday mornings in a Cairo neighbourhood. He captures this particular moment in time and space by considering the washing machines that always vibrate and hum whilst the Friday sermon is broadcast through scratchy speakers to the thousands of people who live within a one-kilometre radius of the mosque in this densely packed city. Mostafa carefully selected the archaic-looking models for his installation: an orchestra whose rumblings are captured by microphones as a wall of speakers play the archive of field recordings of sermons Mostafa has collected, turned to the wall to mimic the poor sound quality of the originals. The work carries a tapestry of resonances. It tells of the economy of the area: the cheap technology of the speakers and machines. It probes strictly enforced gender roles in Egypt, and beyond. While the men go to the mosque for Friday prayers on their day off from work, women continue to labour, unremunerated, at home. In one sermon, women are described as vessels for procreation, like the spinning machines; just a background hum in society, expected to fill a limited biological function. Here, women's bodies become a battleground for forces of conservatism and 'progress'. Globalization means consumer goods are available worldwide and capitalism is predicated on planned obsolescence: the need to replace and update appliances regularly. Another irony is this: as women are freed from backbreaking domestic chores by technology, they are still expected to labour both inside and outside the home.

Yet, *Sound Cells* also speaks of the safety of a shared space of solidarity: a unifying experience shared by a whole neighbourhood. Mostafa is fascinated by the phenomenological experience of the individual in the city and how sounds trigger personal and cultural memories. His work forces background noise into the foreground, insisting on his viewer's attention by capitalizing on the way rumbling machines and microphone sounds vibrate through our body with intense low frequencies.

Like Mostafa, Joe Namy listens to the streets and examines the acoustic fingerprint of a site, likewise investigating the relationship between technology and gender in the process. A 'sonic landmark', he has noted in Beirut, are car sound systems, which he considers in *Automobile* (2012–2014). In this work car owners bring their customized vehicles to a location and play processed field recordings of synth tunes from their super-modified stereos and the audience dances. The works were inspired by evening walks along the corniche where cars with souped- up stereos pass by frequently. They belong to a particular kind of young man. They are 'hacked' or appropriated and become tools of expression and escape; a way to assert the power that lacks in other areas of life, especially if you are single in Beirut, live with your parents, have a dead end job and no hope

for the future under the current government. But if you invest time and resources in your stereo you can feel in control. But this is not a localized phenomenon: it is a tendency worldwide for young men in urban settings, and Namy has taken his performance to Abu Dhabi and Manheim. In doing so, he explores how global consumerism has spread the same technologies, such as cars and giant speaker systems, around the world but they always become uniquely integrated into a culture. This is further explored in another evolving performance and installation, *Half Step* (2013–2014), presented at Art Dubai and Maraya Art Park. In this work, Namy brings together two seemingly opposed dance forms: traditional Emirati folk dance and breakdance. The breakdancers perform on a specially -designed dance floor to the accompaniment of the folk musicians playing traditional rhythms from the Gulf. He juxtaposes the static nature of folkdance, which preserves the memory of what has happened over hundreds of years with breakdance, which is concerned with innovation and improvization. Unexpectedly, however, both share a basic step pattern known as a two-step shuffle.

Anas Al-Shaikh also works with folk culture from the Gulf and reinterprets it in response to the contemporary condition. He takes the traditional 'Al-Efjiri' sea songs of the pearl divers of the Gulf to stand for the common history and cultural heritage of his native Bahrain. In his video work *My land, 2* (2009), the artist films his own naked torso from behind as he slaps his face to the rhythm of a diving song; his country's flag flying on his right hand side. This work harnesses a collective folk memory in a plea for unity and resistance to sectarian division and political violence. Pearl-diving songs express shared sorrow, pain and suffering but also love and endurance, to encourage divers to work as one and overcome hardships together.

Consider here *Concrete Sampling (Arrangement for derbekah and jackhammer)* (2014), a performance work by Joe Namy and Ilaria Lupo produced with a crew of Syrian builders in their work place. This was a construction site in Downtown Beirut, where the team also lived. The work was conceived as an interference in the urban soundscape, as a set up of a new rhythm within the existing one. The proliferation of construction sites in Beirut has become another ubiquitous 'sound -landmark'. The artists spent two months working with the crew, rehearsing new ways of creating sounds using their daily working tools. The sounds and rhythms of the site, collected over several months, served as a base material for the actual performance, which explores the acoustic potential of space. The final performance was a sound composition with processed samples culled from the research database, infused with live improvization using tools and musical instruments by the workers.

The title of the work positions relationship between two seemingly distant instruments, the 'derbekah' and the 'jackhammer', but there is a great deal of similarity between these sounds machines. Sounds from labour have always influenced contemporary music. We can trace it back to early forms of folk music in Lebanon and the Levant that are still popular today, *debkah* or *shaabi* music came out of farming rituals using natural instruments, but today has become completely synthesized. In work songs, the repetition of a rhythm, with a hammer or a foot stomp, is as much a way of both marking time and disguising it. It frees the workers from the clock by making their own internal beat, which operates on a different time scale. For these Syrian workers music is a passion, a channel to reconnect with their war-torn homeland and a communal activity. Their musical knowledge is rooted in their cultural belonging, where informal participatory musical training occurs on a daily basis, such as understanding popular rhythms, clapping patterns and call and response.

Indeed, in the contemporary 'Middle East' where several conflicts are ongoing and there are many dislocated people who have left their homelands, such as Syria, Palesine and Iraq, there is a sadness and nostalgia for the past, which can manifest musically and politically. For older generations, nostalgia can take the form of a yearning for the golden era of the dream of pan-Arab unity and culture – the 1960s. Samah Hijawi's work explores this longing through the iconic Egyptians Umm Kulthum and Nasser. Nasser, president of Egypt from 1956–70, remains a celebrated but controversial figure and a symbol of Arab dignity to the present day. Internationally, he was president of the non-aligned movement, fought against imperialism and promoted pan-Arab unity. At home, he introduced socialist and modernizing reforms and presided over a cultural boom.

Nasser is still a hero for the generation of Hijawi's parents', even if her contemporaries are more sceptical. She wants to reconsider this moment of optimism in the 1960s, which resonated so intensely for her elders despite its brevity. Hijawi wanted to know how Nasser's ideas stand up in today's world. In *Where Are the Arabs?* (2009) she performed edited extracts from his speeches in three public spaces in Amman, a vegetable market, a sweet shop and the street, and also in Ramallah. She also invited eight individuals with a variety of backgrounds to

read the text for the video work *Arab Unity Chorale* (2009). The speeches she used were widely known in the Arab world and included calls for will power, independence, unity, equality and solidarity; resistance to sectarianism, colonialization oppression, tyranny and occupation; defence of freedom and justice. These aims are still laudable today. The work also highlights the battle political leaders face to appear credible today when addressing the public, which is fought entirely in the 24-hour cycle of the media spotlight.

Seemingly obeying assigned gender roles, while Nasser was an agent of political change, Kulthum safeguarded culture and tradition. Kulthum, an apparently conservative figure, in fact started her career disguised as a male and was a pioneer as a high- profile female vocalist. The durations of her songs were not fixed in performance but varied based on the level of emotive response between the singer and her audience and her own mood for creativity. This improvisary technique, typical of classical Arabic singing, repeats a line over and over again, subtly altering the emotive emphasis and intensity. This spontaneity and her intense personal relationship with the audience, whom she would bring into a euphoric state of *tarab,* ensured Kulthum's immense popularity. It was also bound up in media technology developments: in 1934 she sung for the first broadcast of Radio Cairo. Her concerts were broadcast live on the first Thursday of each month during the season and were famed for clearing the streets as people rushed home to listen. Such collective experiences are rare now except in times of crisis. The memory of Kulthum is so strong that you could walk from shop to coffee house to street to car and hear the same song from every radio, tuned into the same station, which promoted a feeling of togetherness and unity like listening to Friday prayers. The radio took on the role of transmitting and preserving culture.

Hijawi's new project *The Wandering Singer of Tales* is an exploration of the aesthetics of loss and the images that are built of a place and a time that is remembered primarily via fragile narratives, utopic images and nostalgic songs. A folk singer is a repository for memories of the homeland. Located in political and artistic histories around Palestine, this work questions the temporality of images reproduced of lost places and how these function in the present following a century of a ruptured historical trajectory of dislocation, trauma and exile. Hijawi's work centres on the fictional singer Layla for whose biography Hijawi draws on the singing stars Kulthum and the Syrian Asmahan, a skilled and prolific orator whose speeches were broadcast throughout the Arab world on the radio, often after Kulthum's concerts. Radio was very important with a population with low literacy rates and also an intimate way of communicating one's ideas.

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Echo, (noun): a sound that is heard after it has been reflected off a surface such as a wall or a cliff.

Echo, (noun): a detail that is similar to and makes you remember something else.

In the 'West', the act of looking has dominated the discourse of how we experience the world. An inherent distrust of visual images is found in the works of Hijawi, Basma Alsharif and Jumana Emil Abboud who wrestle with the Palestinian condition. They deconstruct the means by which it is represented and use archival source material to create their own idiosyncratic visual languages, in a post-documentary imaginary.

Hiajwi's collage series *Paradise Series* (2013) is a meditation on the aesthetics of image-making and oral descriptions of the homeland following trauma and displacement. She subverts oral descriptions of Palestine as 'paradise' with friezes of black and white family photographs juxtaposed with lurid flowers cut from magazines. She seeks to replace the overused images of olive trees and keys used to keep memory alive by those displaced.

Basma Alsharif's poetic video *We Began By Measuring Distance* (2009) opens with the heart -rending sound of a little girl's screams. It is the audio footage of Huda Ghalia just after her family were killed in front of her by an explosion on a beach in Gaza in 2006. Sharif does not show the accompanying image, much circulated at the time, which makes the video the more chilling. The work starts with this absence as the visual fails to truly represent the tragic. An elliptical narrative unfolds. Unnamed characters decide on a game of measuring distance to alleviate their boredom but the distances between cities, appearing on a white sheet held in a green landscape, which doubles for the screen, morph into the dates of critical events in the Arab-Israeli conflict. We

are shown a virgin forest and told newly dead trees can retain the impression of life for a period of time. A platitude appears: Rome was not built in a day. Images become more abstract and we are inside an aquarium. The fish become stuck in time, as does the record playing; significantly it is 'Fortune Teller' by Abdel Halim Hafez. The work ends with ambiguous footage of women running in slow motion towards the camera and the thought 'after some time we began to have the distinct feeling we had been lied to'.

Palestinian folktales play a powerful role in the politics of identity. Abboud uses them to trace and re-envision cultural oral histories and collective memories. She draws on Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana's important book *Speak Bird, Speak Again: Palestinian Arab Folktales* (1989) for which the authors transcribed and translated stories told to them by Palestinian women over many years. Inspired by the iconography impregnated in these tales, Abboud's current project reintroduces the mystical world where magical beings and bodies exist among us. Her work for Art Dubai *A Happy Ending: Eyes Trapped in Jars, Dwellers in the Well: Glossary for a Happy Ending: bodies and beings from magical Palestine* , (2015) consisted of an installation, performance and an artist's book of poems and drawings of a glossary of magical objects and beings. For the performance, Abboud worked with theatre students to tell the stories she has collected, combined with contemporary stories from their own lives to the fair visitors. Investigations of family and marital relationships are at the core of the tales.

Before radio these stories served as entertainment but also offered warnings, advice, therapy and opportunities for bonding, fantasy and rebellion. Tales could incorporate improvization, melding the individual with the collective. Crucially these cultural texts were not written down but learned by heart, passed on via an intimate process of repetition learning with an elder. Abboud, alongside the other artists in *Echoes and Reverberations,* provides a rich examination of the ways personal and collective history is told and retold through cultural ritual or practice and how it imposes on contemporary life.

Poetry is central to Arab cultural life and was primarily an oral tradition during the nomadic days of the Bedouins, a form of preservation of history, traditions and social values. People would gather around a story teller who would tell tales of love, bravery and war. There is an intimacy and immediacy to oral culture, it is harder to keep our guard up when speaking than when writing. Our evolving methods of recording speech, music and movement speak of the eternal desire to communicate cultural heritage to future generations. The artists in the exhibition are interested in the passage of time and the formation of identity and memory; the crossroads where the present meets history and mythology. They also want to disrupt and flip the mundane and create new ways of listening. With the spread of every new technology comes fears of how it will change us for the worse, dating back to Socrates who thought that the use of writing would damage our memory ability. But the 'virtual' world is as tangible as the 'real' world. Migration, globalization and digitization are to be dealt with, not judged.

Music and rituals remake and strengthen social bonds and reinforce a connection with 'home'. Throughout history musical influences have permeated national borders, allowing cultures to seep into each other and this has accelerated with the advent of YouTube. Sound can become a space of nostalgia and belonging, where private meets public and city-dwellers can weave their character into the urban fabric. Present and past meet aurally; a snatch of a tune or a once familiar sound can trigger a memory. Singers have long occupied a high status in society in many cultures but they are also often the first to be attacked by totalitarian regimes, due to the dangerous influence they wield. Singers can be impossibly idealized or highjacked for political purposes ranging from the therapeutic to the retrogressive. Although the oral can seem more 'honest' than the visual and textual, it can also manipulate the emotions. Oral culture can offer reassurance; the shared experience of religion, music and ritual make us feel we are not alone and helps us endure through times of hardship and celebrate in times of joy. But it can be restrictive when used by nationalists, for example, and folk traditions of so-called 'honour' have hugely negative impacts on women's lives.

In the exhibition and performance programme, the artists take apart the sounds of the Arab city – be they washing machines, Friday sermons, music on the radio, fairy stories, political speech or car stereos – they think about what the sounds evoke and communicate. They make us conscious of what we might overlook, or rather 'over-listen', and bring the background hum of the past and the present into the foreground. Today, the collective aural experience is more fragmented, overridden by digital TV and iPods that cocoon us from the city.

The artists in this exhibition play with sound's powerful ability to reconstruct past experiences and personal or shared memory. They use it as a tool to navigate the rapid transformations of their urban surroundings and map the affects of globalization on local traditions and the experience of the individual in the city.

Dr. Alexandra MacGilp is the Curator of the Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, UAE. She studied curating at the Royal College of Art and undertook her Ph.D. at the University of Reading in collaboration with Tate Britain, writing on the development of Tate's Collection. She is interested in film, video, performance and installation practices and archive materials.

Visitations: When aurality loses site*

Rayya Badran

How did the century end? Haunted, and haunted by its song.

– Ian Penman

Composer Halim El-Dabh's first Cairo performance of 'It Is Dark and Damp on the Front' was a seminal moment in the Egyptian composer's life. As El-Dabh noted himself, this was 'something … that was going to haunt people for years and years and years.'[1] Through this dark and ominous piano composition, which was inspired by the Nakba of 1948, El-Dabh imagined and translated the horror that permeated the entire Arab world, and the resonance of the composition was felt first in that Cairo performance and in later recordings of the piece that were disseminated beyond Egypt: as writer Michael Khoury states 'It Is Dark and Damp on the Front', 'bore a timely appeal to those in Egypt who may have closely identified the avant-garde elements of the piece with the stunned and unthinkable plight of the Palestinian people.'[2]

El-Dabh, who had already been taught music as a child, worked for years as an agricultural engineer. It was this work experience that influenced him when he began experimenting with sound, using his expertise as a compositional technique when he travelled the agricultural lands of Egypt, experiencing different rituals and 'musical customs'. These encounters deeply influenced El-Dabh's musical compositions. As Khoury posits, it was El-Dabh's agricultural engineering background that allowed the composer a marked understanding of 'the correlation between the cultural, agricultural, and musical differences as they shift according to locality.' [3] This understanding of the land and its people is important when considering 'It Is Dark and Damp on the Front', insofar as the work is part of a compositional practice that aims at evoking history through a relation to memory and place.

On 'It Is Dark and Damp on the Front', El-Dabh always rejected the term 'dissonance' to explain this piece. While the use of the term was widely employed to describe the works of western electronic music composers belonging to the Second Viennese School, El-Dabh preferred to think of it as a composition of 'clashes that produce vibrations' and coined the term heteroharmony, which combines 'heterophony and chordal harmony in an interaction of chords and clusters with the focus of unison'.[4] Likewise, Khoury has argued that El-Dabh's use of terminology – of thinking about clashes and vibrations rather than pure dissonance – 'both identifies and broadens the geographic and cultural locus of the avant-garde by relocating the source of new sounds.' [5] By introducing local, Arabic sounds into his work, El-Dabh expanded on the range of sounds used in his compositional process while departing from traditional structures. This is significant because what the music evokes is not merely an incorporation of traditional or folkloric sounds into an experimental composition, but an articulation of land or site through composition. In reference to an early piece by El-Dabh entitled 'Ta'bir al-Zar', or 'Wire Recorder Piece' (which is now recognized as the earliest recording of *musique concrète* in the world, produced in 1944), Khoury notes how El-Dabh's 'Egyptian material' refuses ornamentation, approximation, or ethnic styling that adds tinge or colour.'[6] Through his compositional process, El-Dabh attempts at reimagining site and memory through sound.

The evocation of dread and the horrors of the Nakba in 1948 in 'It Is Dark and Damp on the Front' was not merely a figurative exercise. The 'clusters of tone' were not meant to translate the trauma of conflict or of the event but manifest the vibrations of its resonance. There is an intentional haunting that emanates from El-Dabh's composition, in which sound relates to past events not only through affect but through an acknowledgement of historical remnants and political shifts. This recalls British cultural theorist and writer Mark Fisher's extensive writing on the relationship between music and hauntology, a term first coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida in his 1993 *Specters of Marx*. The general notion in hauntology is that all forms of representation are ghostly, and art works are haunted.[7]

This notion is illustrated in two audio-essays Fisher co-produced, which unpack the multifarious qualities and eeriness of landscape and of place through sound. One of these is *On Vanishing Land* (2013), which Fisher produced with British philosopher and writer Justin Barton. For the work, the pair embarked on a long walk

along the Suffolk coastline and produced a sonic fiction impregnated by 'themes of incursion – by unnamable forces, geological sentience or temporal anomaly.'[8] *On Vanishing Land* is a piece in which Fisher and Barton explore the essayistic terrain with sound in order to deploy readings of a fictional text inspired by the eerie landscape of the Suffolk coastline. The piece also merges commissioned music by electronic British musicians such as Burial and John Foxx, field recordings as well as interviews conducted with people who inhabit the area. The result produces an engaging audio-sphere that talks about place as a specific thing and an abstract concept simultaneously. The relationship to land is paramount in the work.

When asked in an interview with philosopher Robin Mackay about how the three elements of sound, place and the eerie are connected in *On Vanishing Land*, Barton responded: 'There's a whole process of abstracting out space in order to get to space.'[9] This is interesting to think about when considering both *On Vanishing Land* and 'It is Dark and Damp on the Front'. British music writer and critic Ian Penman once wrote in his essay entitled *On the Mic: How Amplification Changed the Voice for Good* that 'after the microphone, [there are] no self-contained lineages. Only ghost minglings, unprecedented grafts, insane translations.'[10] Once recorded, once channeled by electricity, by the microphone, voices or sounds now belonged to the realm of the haunting, 'waiting for the dead to speak'. The advent of the microphone in the last century demanded more and more from the voice and, to some extent and for our purpose here, from a place. What powers does it possess? The usage of the microphone is perilous as it transforms sounds and voices into ghostly hauntings. It can never be truly faithful to the real sounds of its environment. Fisher, Barton and El-Dabh listen through the microphone. They listen to land and the voices that traverse them and yet the output is not quite the same, not quite what they heard but what the experience itself was of hearing those sounds.

Both pieces present us with an attachment to place and inscribe within them attempts at a sonic formulation of the eerie, of the haunting, one evoked by land itself. Yet, while Barton and Fisher responded to the eeriness of place with sonic fiction, El-Dabh sought to punctuate his piece with the protracted dread felt well after 1948. In this sense, the staging of history in the context of El-Dabh demands a different mode of attention from us: an auditory articulation closely tied to a dismembered narrative that incorporates questions of lineage, memory, site and geography.

In his interview with Mark Fisher and Justin Barton regarding *On Vanishing Land*, Robin Mackay points out that one of the singularities of the audio-essay is its indirectness in its 'indexical relation to the place'. It is neither a soundscape nor a field recording but an interweaving of both voice and recordings as well as works by other musicians, readings and texts by other authors. The proposition made by practices that attempt to go beyond 'empirical recording' of places is momentous insofar as it allows us to explore and think in ways in which sound as a practice can transcend the representational nature of visuality. It allows us to consider how sound alone is able to carry the weight, the eeriness, and the terror of a place without necessarily having to directly address it, but also calls us to understand aurality outside of the paradigm of the site-specific whilst grasping the recall of locality.

**(The subtitle of this piece takes inspiration from the title of a conference and subsequent publication entitled When Site Lost the Plot organized at Goldmsiths College in London, published by Urbanomic and edited by Robin Mackay.)*

Rayya Badran is a writer based in Beirut. Her work focuses on the performative nature of the voice as well as on characteristics of aurality in film and music.

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[1] As quoted from Denise Seachrist's *The Musical World of Halim El-Dabh* in Michael Khoury, 'A Look At Lightning: The Life and Compositions of Halim El-Dabh' in *The Arab Avant-Garde: Music, Politics, Modernity,* eds. Thomas Burkhalter, Kay Dickinson and Benjamin J. Harbert (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), p. 174.

[2] Michael Khoury, *op cit.*, p. 174-75.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 167.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 176.

[5] Ibid.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[7] Andrew Gallix, 'Hauntology: A not-so-new critical manifestation,' *The Guardian* website, 17 June 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2011/jun/17/hauntology-critical.

[8] Kodwo Eshun, press release from TheShowroom.org.

[9] Justin Barton and Mark Fisher, 'Outsights (Interview)' in *When Site Lost the Plot*, ed. Robin Mackay (Urbanomic, 2015), p. 281.

[10] Ian Penman, 'On the Mic: How Amplification Changed the Voice for Good' in *Undercurrents: The Hidden Writing of Modern Music*, ed. Rob Young (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 32.

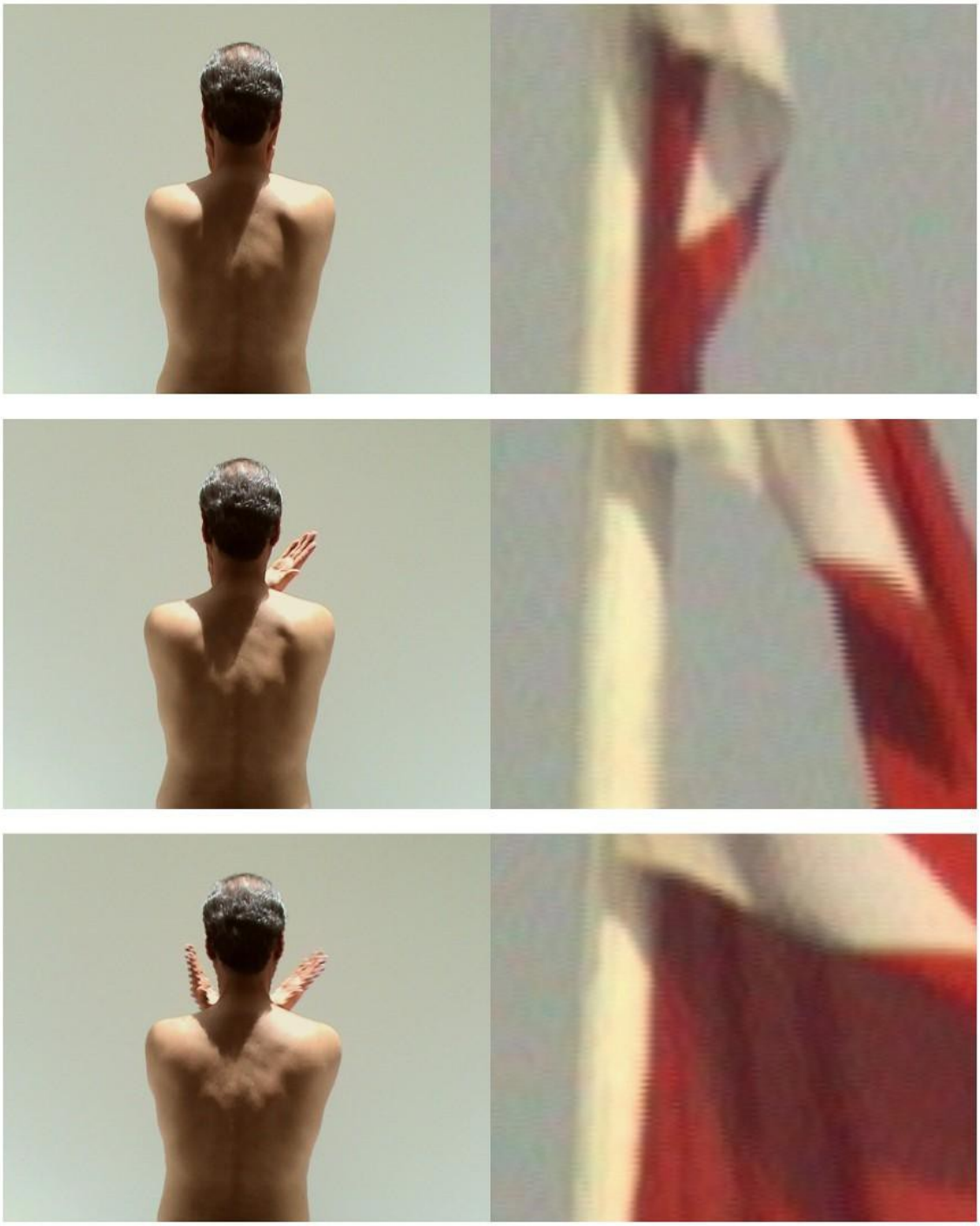
Anas Al-Shaikh

***My land, 2*, 2009**

Video installation

Duration: 2 mins 52 secs

Courtesy the artist



Anas Al-Shaikh's two-channel work *My land, 2* consists of a close-up video of Bahrain's red-and-white flag and another presenting the artist's naked torso with his back to the viewer. As the flag begins to fly and music starts to play, the artist beats time on his face with a series of rhythmic, sharp slaps.

The song 'Al-Efjiri' hails from the time of pearl-diving in the Gulf region. It expresses shared sorrow, pain and suffering but also love and endurance – encouraging divers to work as one and overcome hardships together.

To Al-Shaikh, 'Al-Efjiri' recalls the shared heritage, culture and history of the people of Bahrain at a time when sectarian divisions run deep, and dominate public discourse. This work harnesses collective folk memory in an appeal for unity and resistance to political violence.

Anas Al-Shaikh (b. 1968) lives and works in Bahrain. He studied architecture in Jordan and works as a photographer, video and installation artist, graphic designer and freelance curator.

Recent exhibitions include MinD/Body, Body art and performance in the Gulf area, DUCTAC, Gallery of Light, Dubai, UAE (2013); The Changing Room: Arab Reflections on Praxis and Times, Metroquadro Arte Gallery, Torino, Italy (2011). Mapping Worlds…Understanding Worlds, The 8th International Photo-Triennial Esslingen, Germany (2010); Still life: Art, Ecology & the Politics of Change, Sharjah Biennial 8, Sharjah, UAE (2007); Zones of Contact, Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia (2006).

Jumana Emil Abboud

A Happy Ending, Part II

***A Happy Ending part II: Two Skins,* 2015**
Pencil, gouache and pastel on paper

***A Happy Ending part II: Two Skins,* 2015**

Olivewood, paper and mixed materials

***A Happy Ending part II: Two Skins, a Hundred Hearts,* 2015**

Clay

Courtesy the artist

Encompassing drawing, performance and sculpture, Jumana Emil Abboud's *A Happy Ending part II: Two Skins* draws on motifs, characters and objects found in Palestinian folk-tales. The objects and figures in both her olive wood carvings and her drawings are depicted in the midst of metamorphosis. Caught between two states, these creatures are 'neither plant nor stone, animal nor human, good nor evil.'

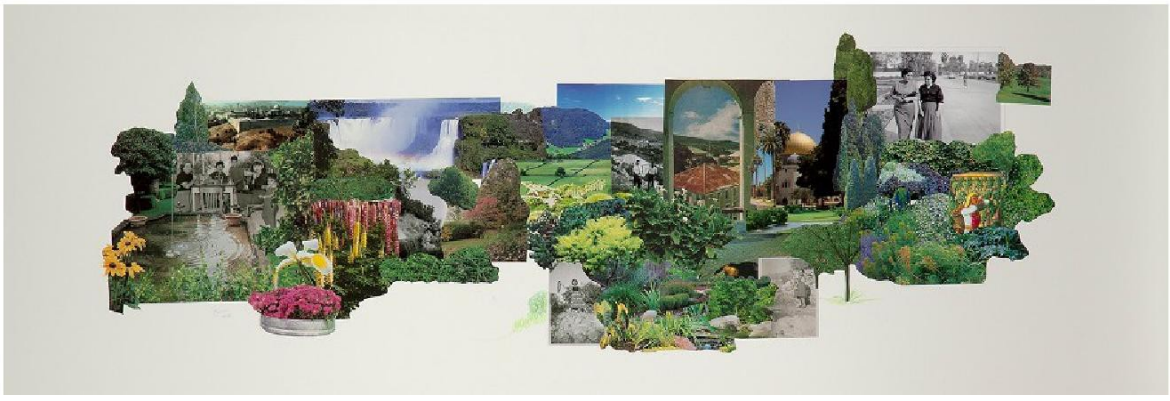
Abboud's practice involves acts of 'veiling and uncovering.' The talismanic clay hearts that form part of *A Happy Ending part II: Two Skins* are given new fabric wrappings during an event held at the Delfina Foundation, where participants share personal stories. In an act that echoes the practice of gift-giving during Palestinian ceremonies, these small talismanic objects will then be passed on to audience members during Abboud's vocal performance at Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall on 18 July.

Jumana Emil Abboud (b. 1971) lives and works in Jerusalem. She uses drawing, video, performance, objects and text to navigate themes of memory, loss and resilience. Through her work she poses questions related to memory as read through the body, through folklores and folktales, through home and homeland, and through cultural ritual or practice.

She has participated in numerous international group exhibitions over the last decade. From 2009, this included the Venice Biennial, the Istanbul Biennial, the Bahrain National Museum, Manama, and the Institute du Monde Arabe, Paris.

Samah Hijawi

***Paradise Series*, 2013**



Collage using magazines and digital reproductions on board with sound on headphones

Audio duration: 14 mins 57 secs

Courtesy the artist

Samah Hijawi's *Paradise Series* forms part of the artist's ongoing research project – entitled *Chicken Scribbles*

and the Dove that Looks like a Frog – that looks at the relationship between aesthetics, art-making, trauma and loss in the Arab world.

As part of this project, Hijawi explores the ways in which Palestine has been represented, recorded and remembered in both visual and oral culture. The collages in *Paradise Series* borrow from oral narratives, magazines, family photographs, as well as paintings by Palestinian artists from the 1950s. Together, these disparate elements produce an image of a lost, paradisiacal land. The narrative voiced in the accompanying audio further complicates the line between fiction and reality.

On 18 July the artist will present a performance-lecture *The Wandering Singer of Tales*, on the life of a famous singer called Layla.

Samah Hijawi (b. 1976) lives and works between Jordan and Belgium and is a multi media artist, writer and curator. Since 2005 she has collectively managed *Makan Art Space* in Jordan with Ola El Khalidi and Diala Khasawnih, and co-curates the on-going platform *The River has Two Banks* with Toleen Touq and Shuruq Harb.

Her artistic projects have been presented in Darat Al Funun; the Khalid Shoman Foundation, Jordan; MoMA, USA; Beirut Art Center, Lebanon; and Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, Germany among others.

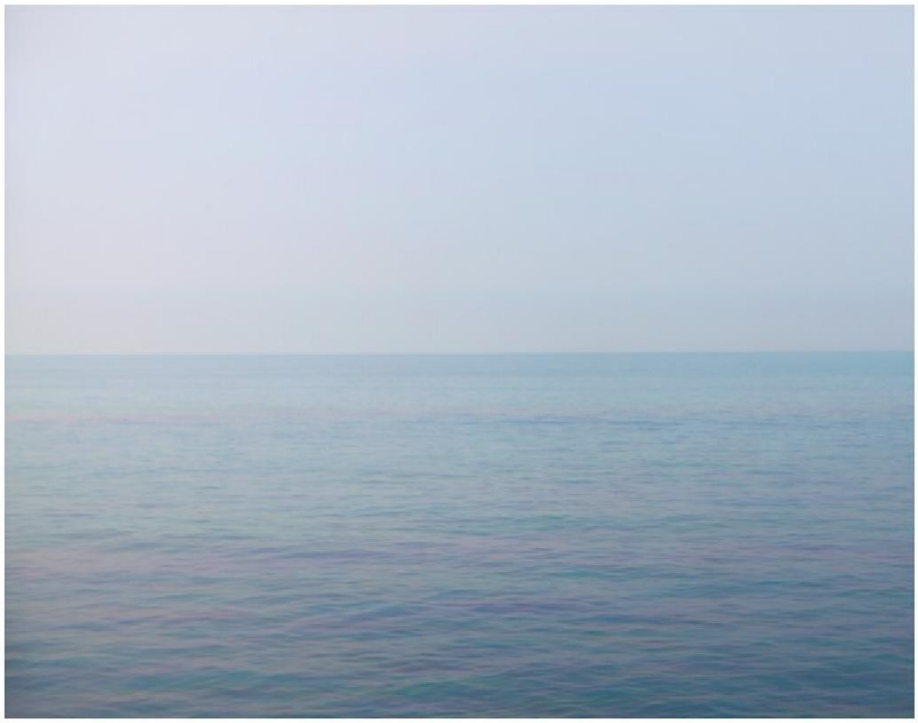
Joe Namy

***space, breath, time*, 2015**

10.

as if to converse with ...

the breath of someone dear
[softly]



8.

as if to converse with ...

a difficult migration,
tumbling upward
[low to high glissando]

Deconstructed portable harmonium, photographs, plastic bottle, rock, light bulb, tuning fork, velvet, headphones, audio

Courtesy the artist

Joe Namy is a Beirut-based artist and composer whose previous compositions have been written for unconventional instruments such as the tools of construction workers based in downtown Beirut.

In the performance that accompanies his installation for *Echoes & Reverberations*, Namy brings together an assembly of harmonium players to perform an interpretation of his text-based score, *space, breath, time*. The audience will be invited to move within the sound – walking amongst and interacting with the performers – in order to explore the sonic characteristics of the area.

Namy's installation for *Echoes & Reverberations* – a poetic deconstruction of the harmonium – reveals the process and references that influenced the score, not least the complex history and politics of the instrument.

Joe Namy (b. 1978) lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon and is an artist/composer. His projects often address aspects of identity, memory, power and currents encoded in music/organized sound.

His work has been exhibited, screened, amplified at the Brooklyn Museum, Beirut Art Center, Detroit Science Center, Queens Museum, and less prominent international dance floors. Some of his projects fall under the sound art platform titled Electric Kahraba, which operates as an experimental radio programme on clocktower.org.

Basma Alsharif

***We Began by Measuring Distance*, 2009**

Single channel SD video

Duration: 19 mins

Production the Sharjah Biennial 9 Production Programme

Edition of 5 + 1 AP

Courtesy the artist and Imane Farès

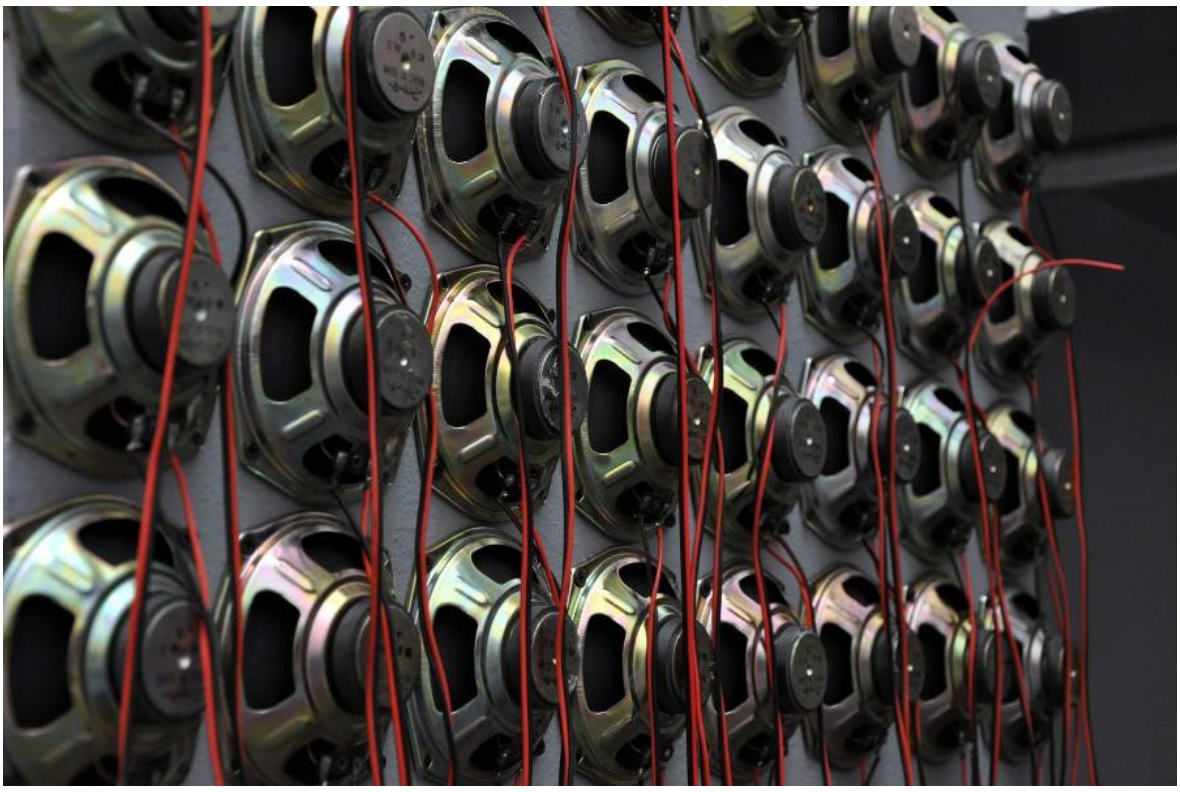
We Began by Measuring Distance considers the relationship of an individual's memories and subjective experience to political history, and how image and sound can communicate the past. Through a combination of long still frames, text and sound, Basma Alsharif weaves together a loose narrative about an anonymous group who fill their time by measuring distance. Innocent measurements voiced by the film's narrator give way to increasingly absurd or political measurements, as Alsharif examines the inability of facts, statistics or the visual to meaningfully record events or 'communicate the tragic'.

Basma Alsharif (b. 1983) lives and works nomadically. Her work considers the transmission of the history of Palestine, between fiction and reality. Sequences which have been filmed or recorded, collected in the media or on social networks are collated into montages with a highly developed plasticity.

Recent exhibitions include Les modules – Fondation Pierre Bergé – Yves Saint Laurent, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2015); Here and Elsewhere, New Museum, New York (2014); and Colony of Light / Greater NY, MoMA PS1, New York (2013).

Magdi Mostafa

***Wisdom Tower: from the series Sound Cells (Fridays)* 2009–2012**



84 x 5 watt speakers, cables, audio amp, and monitor

Duration: 20 mins

Courtesy the artist

Magdi Mostafa is a Cairo-based artist who works primarily with site-specific, research-driven sound projects and multimedia installations.

Played from 84 voice-range speakers set into a standing panel, *Wisdom Tower* features the sound of the *azan*, the Muslim call to prayer, and a Friday sermon, both recorded in the *Ardellewa* neighbourhood in Cairo. The subject of this sermon is – unusually for an Islamic sermon of this context – gender, biology and reproduction.

Wisdom Tower's standing panel is inspired by the vertical partitions used to divide male and female prayers in many mosques. A central concern in Mostafa's work is the conceptual relationship between sound and architecture. In Egypt, the *azan* reaches into all corners of public and domestic architecture, bringing people together in a communal act of worship.

Magdi Mostafa (b. 1982) lives and works in Cairo, Egypt. Primarily exploring the conceptual relationships between sound and space, Mostafa's work often draws on his interests in the phenomenological experience of the individual in the city, and recalling unexpected-outmoded technologies.

Recent exhibitions include the Sharjah Biennale 11, Jogjakarta Biennale XII, Surface of spectral scattering solo at Townhouse Gallery Cairo, Egypt; Sound Element at Mathaf, Qatar; and Elements of the unexpected at Art Dubai, UAE.

Acknowledgements

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