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The New York Times

Ready When You Are, Terminal C Is Now an Art Destination

By Hilarie M. Sheets | June 1 2022

With the opening of Delta Air Lines's new terminal at La Guardia Airport, New York gets a distinctive new collection of public artworks.



Mariam Ghani, "The Worlds We Speak," 2022. The artist's tile mosaic is located in Terminal C's baggage claim area. Credit: Justin Kaneps for The New York Times

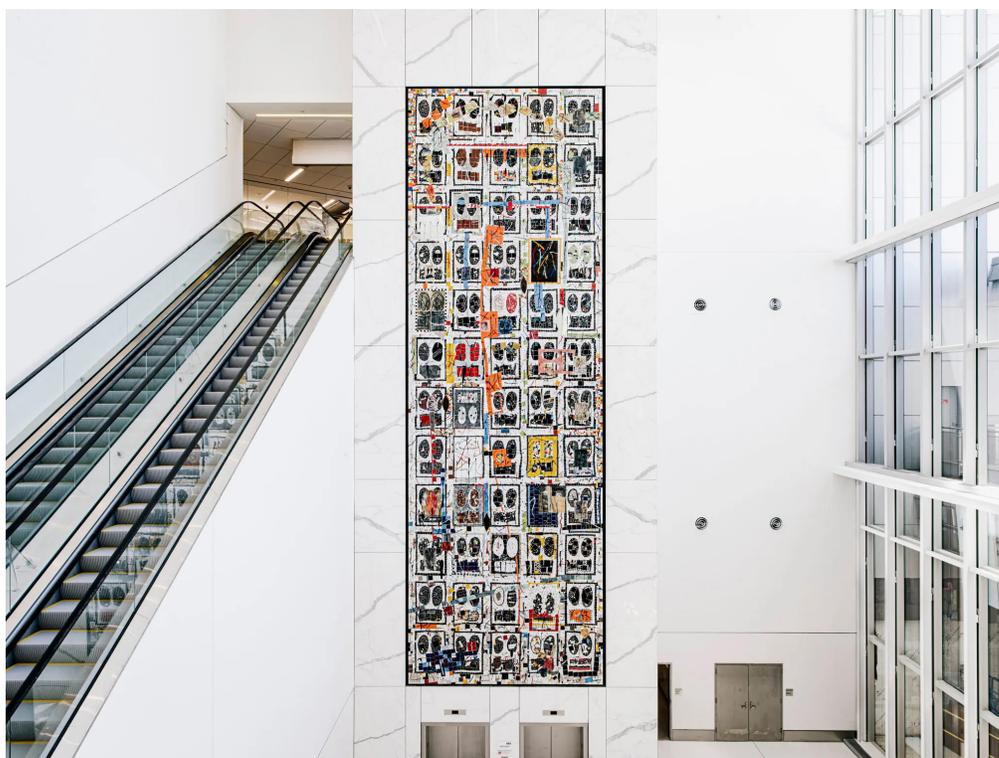
When Delta Air Lines' Terminal C at La Guardia Airport opens to the public on Saturday, New York will get not only a gleaming new transportation hub but also a significant art destination.

"Airports are gateways to a region — travelers should know where they are," said Rick Cotton, the executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates La Guardia. "Public art is at the core of that aspect of building a new civic structure." Large-scale permanent installations by

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Mariam Ghani, Rashid Johnson, Aliza Nisenbaum, Virginia Overton, Ronny Quevedo and Fred Wilson — all artists living and working in New York — are poised to become new city landmarks throughout the terminal.



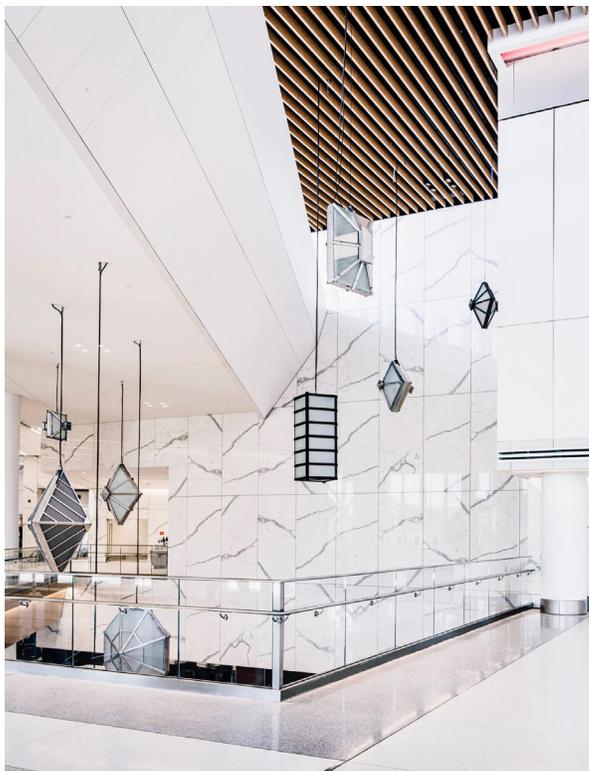
The new works were commissioned by Delta in partnership with the neighboring Queens Museum and are part of a \$12 million art program throughout Terminal C. Credit: Justin Kaneps for The New York Times

The new works, commissioned by Delta Air Lines in partnership with the neighboring Queens Museum and part of a \$12 million art program in Terminal C, join a constellation of other projects at La Guardia.

In Terminal B, four site-specific pieces by Jeppe Hein, Sabine Hornig, Laura Owens and Sarah Sze were commissioned by La Guardia Gateway Partners with the Public Art Fund in a \$10 million investment unveiled in 2020. A restored 1942 mural by James Brooks in Terminal A nods to the heyday of Works Progress Administration artists employed in the service of grand infrastructure projects. And a soaring 40-foot-high Richard Lippold sculpture, which hung at Lincoln Center for decades, will become the centerpiece of an atrium to be completed this year.

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Virginia Overton's "Skylight Gems." The artist has installed a dozen large and glowing gem shapes crafted from New York City skylights. Credit: Justin Kaneps for The New York Times

For each of the six artists chosen by the Delta team from dozens initially presented by the Queens Museum, it's been an opportunity to push their practices in terms of scale and experimentation, according to the museum's president and executive director, Sally Tallant. "All these works are very rooted in what it means to live in New York," she said.

Mariam Ghani

With her first tile mosaic, mounted in Terminal C's baggage claim area, the multimedia artist Mariam Ghani has created a portrait of New York based on a data visualization of the more than 700 languages and dialects spoken in the area.

"The Worlds We Speak" presents six planetary clusters standing in for the city's five boroughs plus the tristate area. These spheres contain a multitude of smaller circles in a spectrum of vivid colors, each representing a linguistic community and engraved with the name of that language in its own script.

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*“The Worlds We Speak” by the artist Mariam Ghani presents six planetary clusters standing in for the city’s five boroughs plus the greater tristate area. Each circle represents a linguistic community.
Credit: Justin Kaneps for The New York Times*

“New York is the most linguistically diverse city in the world and every language is a whole way of seeing the world,” said Ghani, an Afghan American born in New York. She used data collected in the last census as well as the Endangered Language Alliance. “The airport is a point through which all this traffic proceeds and that brings us all this wealth of knowledge,” she said.

For Ghani, the most challenging part of the project was spelling each of the languages correctly. “It was the most massive copy-editing job you can possibly imagine,” Ghani said, hoping people will enjoy finding their native language while waiting for their baggage to arrive. “Ceramics are permanent. You can’t go back and fix it later.”

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ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS: MARIAM GHANI

By Perwana Nazif | September 22, 2021

Mariam Ghani on Afghanistan's unfinished histories.



Mariam Ghani, *What We Left Unfinished*, 2019, DCP, color and black-and-white, sound, 71 minutes.

*Our conversation began as a requiem for Afghanistan—its violent unwinding corresponds horrifically with the name of Mariam Ghani's film. *What We Left Unfinished* (2019) is a feature-length documentary on five unedited Afghan films made during the country's Communist era of state-funded cinema (1978–991), a time deluged with coups, conflict, and censorship. Ghani's film attests firstly and mostly to the significance and precarity of cultural workers in Afghanistan—their voices were recently gathered in an *Open Letter from Arts for Afghanistan*—and the Afghan histories and imaginaries that depend on them. In Mariam's film about films, I see the white uniform stockings I heard my mother wore to school. I see coups re-performed as popular revolutions, guns pointing with the camera. Between scenes, Afghans dream. Below, Mariam speaks about archival anxieties and the ongoingness of Afghanistan's past and future.*

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THE TITLE OF THE FILM in Dari is *Gozashtah-e Ma Na Tamam Shud*, which is more like: “Our past is not finished.” For me, the film has always been about the very unsettled history of the Communist period and how it haunts the present. In the edit, we were really looking for uncanny resonances and productive dissonances between images and sound—gaps, contradictions, echoes, ghosts. All of the complicated ways in which the past informs current conditions—which does not unfold as a straightforward, linear progression. In many ways, it’s a film not only about unfinished artistic projects, but also about unresolved political projects from that era. As a director, I came into the film understanding the political context, the constraints that people are under, in terms of what they can and will say, and also specifically what they can and will say to me, considering who I am and was.

In *Afghanistan: A Lexicon* [with Ashraf Ghani], I wrote about the history of twentieth-century Afghanistan being circular and looping back on itself. And it does feel like that’s happened again. But I think that *even if the politics reverse*, Afghans continue to move forward and change and become different kinds of people. And the culture that they’re producing has also changed over this century—there have been some incredible things produced in Afghanistan over this period: There’s been a real explosion of making that was extraordinary to witness, especially in the younger generation. And it’s been equally heartbreaking to see this generation go through the same flight into the unknown that the directors I interviewed experienced in the 1990s, leaving behind their life’s work. Among those who went into exile, only the directors who returned to Afghanistan were still active in film when I interviewed them in 2017—like Latif Ahmadi, Afghanistan’s most prolific and beloved filmmaker; the late Faqir Nabi, still a well-known actor; and the late Juwansher Haidary, at the time head of the Afghan Filmmakers Union.

I think the deployment of spectacularized violence by insurgent groups today is very different than it was in the ’90s. Then, you had Massoud [Ahmad Massoud, leader of the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan] and his group—his film unit—shooting their campaigns and disseminating that footage to foreign media. That’s one way to deploy spectacularized violence. But now you have a very different regime of visual violence being used in insurgencies, which is much more performative and deliberate and thinks about the camera in a different way, and which evolved in tandem with cameras as they became inseparable from phones. So the eye of the camera and the mechanism

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of transmission are now one. During the period the film documents, there were far fewer cameras available, and it was much easier for the state to exert near-total control over them.

What We Left Unfinished began with the digitization of the Afghan Film Archive—a project that is now in limbo. For this reason, the film is hard to watch right now for those of us who really love Afghanistan. We don't know what will happen or what has happened to those archives, and all of the work that was done over the past ten years to recuperate that cultural heritage.

Something unfinished can be picked back up again. Reclaiming some of the intentions that went awry, that were never realized, from these historical moments—it is a reserve that we can hang onto, as Afghans, in these darker moments of our history. We can try to recuperate some wild, lost dream from this reserve, hold it close, and try to revive it later. *But we need that.* We need that reserve to keep our hope going.

— As told to Perwana Nazif

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The New York Times

‘What We Left Unfinished’ Review: Spectres of History

By Devika Girish | August 5, 2021

For her first feature documentary, Mariam Ghani dug up five unfinished movies from the Communist era in Afghanistan.



A still from the documentary “What We Left Unfinished.”

In “What We Left Unfinished,” five movies started and then abandoned during Afghanistan’s Communist era, between 1978 and 1992, form a dazzling time capsule of the nation’s political and cultural history. The director Mariam Ghani — the daughter of Afghanistan’s current president, Ashraf Ghani — digs into the archives of Afghan Film, a state-run company that endured the whims and demands of various regimes before the Taliban destroyed most of its holdings in the 1990s.

Culled from the remnants of the company’s collections, the films Ghani remixes in “What We Left Unfinished” bear the traces of successive political upheavals. “The April Revolution” (1978), for instance, was commissioned by Hafizullah Amin, who became Afghanistan’s president in a 1979 coup. When the Soviets assassinated him months later in a takeover, the film had to be shut down.

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In interviews, the filmmakers and actors involved in these movies recall their struggles with strict ideological dictates and censorship, but also the generous resources that propaganda-hungry governments lavished on them. The snippets we see are beautifully lit and produced — some feature big explosions and shootouts involving real soldiers wielding real Kalashnikovs.

“What We Left Unfinished” doesn’t dwell too much on the nuts and bolts of the making of these films, which is a pity, because they offer tantalizing glimpses into a cinematic culture whose formal ambitions seem to have been unstinted — and perhaps even encouraged — by political pressures. But Ghani’s mode is less interrogative than associative. Her montage of film fragments illustrates and sometimes poetically belies the interviewees’ recollections, evoking the ambiguous and unresolved contours of collective memory.

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HOUSTON CHRONICLE

'What We Left Unfinished' exposes Afghan film culture

By Jef Rouner | January 22, 2020



Scene from the Afghan film 'Kaj Rah' in the documentary 'What We Left Unfinished'
Photo: Indexicla Films/Afghan Films

America dominates so much of the cinema landscape that it is easy to forget that not only do other places make movies, but the way they go about it is fundamentally rooted in a culture very different from Hollywood. Nothing highlights that grand difference — and what it means to a region's cultural history, in this case Afghanistan — like Mariam Ghani's documentary "What We Left Unfinished."

It's a very unique film in and of itself. The majority of it is footage pulled from five Afghan films shot from 1978 to 1991 that, for various reason, were never completed or released. As the opening titles make clear, they are glimpses of an ideal communist Afghanistan that existed only in the minds of the filmmakers. That makes them startling time capsules.

After the communist coup of Afghanistan, the film industry there was nationalized and headed by Afghan Films. The government, fully aware of the power of art and the reach

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of film, threw gobs of money at aspiring filmmakers in hopes of projecting a cultured, modern nation. This practice continued under the Soviet regime that lasted until the '90s, when the Taliban took over. By the time Ghani was able to access the Afghan Film archives, the films had suffered decades of shifting power, official suppression, public burnings and various forms of government censorship. It's amazing that enough of these five films survived to serve as the backdrop of this time in the country, not to mention how much of the close-knit world of their film industry was still alive to tell the tales.

And what tales they are! Even the outlandish high jinks of a John Waters set can't hold a candle to the rough-and-tumble world of Afghan cinema. One film shot in the desert featured a massive gun fight. Blanks were in short supply, so real bullets were used for battle scenes. The safety of the actors was entirely in the hands of the shooters, who, luckily, were crack shots.

Yet sometimes, not so lucky. At least one actor botched his cue and wound up dead from a head shot.

At one point in a battle scene, the actors stopped firing only to realize that the sound of gunfire continued. A mujahedeen group had found the set and assumed a real fight was taking place, so they promptly joined the fray. Luckily, that one ended without casualties.

Some of the filmmakers say that film was tightly controlled, and that to even imply an official's hair was crooked was enough to get a filmmaker hauled off and never seen or heard from again. Others say that while the Soviets controlled scripts, once the film was being shot, the director still had absolute power.

Funded by an eager regime, the artists were able to do things with impunity that even Americans might not get away with, thanks to our reliance on private funding and the need to make money. These were movies made purely because Afghanistan wanted them to exist and spread information about who they were. There is something so pure and beautiful in that, and if nothing else, "What We Left Unfinished" is a soaring testament to what movies can mean to a people.

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**BROOKLYN RAIL**
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Il Cinema Ritrovato: Forward into the Past

July - August, 2019

by Celluloid Liberation Front

Considering Venice's dwindling reputation, Bologna's Il Cinema Ritrovato may well soon become Italy's flagship film festival, if it hasn't yet already. Every year the festival attracts more and more people from every corner of the world. Inveterate cinephiles born right after or even before WWII sit side by side with 21st century film students and lovers. If there ever was a festival fit to disprove the cyclical claim that cinema is dead or is on its way to the cemetery, it is definitely Il Cinema Ritrovato. While the programming is always structured around temporal, thematic or authorial criteria the sense of discovery the festival offers is best experienced by randomly jumping from section to section. What follows is the outcome of random sampling dictated by a contradictory pull between libidinal impulses and attempts at philological coherence that inevitably emerges when facing a catalog so rich in its offerings.

Of a completely different order, both political and aesthetic, were the films produced in the Soviet-occupied Afghanistan of the 1980s. *What We Left Unfinished* (2019) by **Mariam Ghani** tells their pretty incredible story, which starts, present day, at Afghan Films (the national film institute of Afghanistan), where the director first visited in 2011, and goes back to 1978, when a military coup put the communists in power and attracted "Russian attention." Ghani's extraordinary documentary stemmed from her efforts to preserve those films from deterioration, some of them having been archived but unfinished. As to why the director thought the story of these unfinished films had to be told:

For me, an unfinished project is like a loose thread in history—and pulling on that thread led me on a five-year journey that extends far past what is contained in this feature film. As I reassembled film fragments and people who had been scattered by war, I realized that the process of making the film was mirroring a larger process still happening in Afghanistan, whereby the fraught, unsettled, and contested histories of the Communist period are gradually surfacing into public discourse.

The fragments of films featured in the documentary make for a truly curious mix of action movie à la Chuck Norris and educational agitprop by Soviet Department for Agitation and Propaganda (at the very end of its political and creative line...). However imperfect and uncertain in its purpose, *What We Left Unfinished* is powerful enough

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to rouse a (fetishistic?) interest in a virtually unknown chapter of world cinema history. One where these two allegedly separate realms, cinema and history, cannot be individually considered.

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HYPERALLERGIC

The Afghan Films Left Unfinished Under Communist Rule

The reels for the aborted film projects had been kept in the archives of Afghan Film, which director Mariam Ghani mined for her new movie *What We Left Unfinished*.

Dan Schindel • April 10, 2019



The Afghan Film archive in *What We Left Unfinished* (courtesy Indexical Films)

History is littered with the ghosts of unfinished films, many of which continue to hold a wistful allure for people. There are all the unmade Orson Welles projects, or Alejandro Jodorowsky's adaptation of *Dune*, or any other number of stories that stalled out at some stage of production, for whatever reason. We are left with concept art, or scripts, or sometimes even partial footage to make us think what could have been. Incomplete art does not easily vanish, but leaves a physical ghost.

But then there are the movies that were never finished because of political forces, rather than budgetary problems or creative differences. Recently, there have been many examples of this in Afghanistan. Director Mariam Ghani's documentary *What We Left Unfinished* examines a few of these films, as well as the people who worked on them and the times in which they were made (or rather, made up to a point). The film premiered at this year's Berlinale and will next be playing at the San Francisco International Film Festival this week.

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A scene from Khalek Halil's unfinished film *The Black Diamond* (courtesy Indexical Films)

The documentary focuses on films made during communist rule in Afghanistan, from 1978 to 1991. This was a period of constantly shifting power, of coups and counter-coups, of Soviet occupation, American meddling, and civil war. Social reforms clashed against a reactionary insurgency. Caught in the middle of all this were filmmakers trying to do their work. Which was difficult, as changing circumstances meant that what was and wasn't allowed to be shown and said in film kept changing. It was for this reason that each of the movies spotlighted in *What We Left Unfinished* were abandoned, even after they had been shot.

For example, the 1978 feature *The April Revolution* was commissioned by Hafizullah Amin, who would seize the presidency in a coup the next year. It was not long after that he was overthrown and killed by the Soviets, whereupon *The April Revolution* was obviously an untouchable property. *What We Left Unfinished* covers not just the making of that film but also of *Downfall* (1987), *The Black Diamond* (1989), *Wrong Way* (1990), and *Agent* (1991). The documentary tells their stories, along with the wider story of Afghanistan during those years, through their footage, long abandoned but not completely forgotten.



Behind the scenes of Juwansher Haidary's unfinished film *Wrong Way* (courtesy Indexical Films)

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The reels for the aborted film projects were kept in the archives of Afghan Film, the state film company. There they remained for many years. When the Taliban came to power, they destroyed much of the company's archives, but staff were able to protect some of its contents. Ghani has been working with Afghan Film to preserve what remains in its library since 2011. *What We Left Unfinished* is the result of her and her collaborators' research into the archive and their rediscovery of the five films it showcases, as well as all the others still in need of preservation.

By combining the surviving crew members' reminiscences with the restored footage, Ghani creates a fascinating quasi-historical document. The films' versions of then-contemporary events, or their expression on societal conditions, often clashes with what the real people recall. (Memories of a brutal battle play out over imagery of a bloodless victory from one of the films, for example.) We sometimes speak of art as a mirror for culture. *What We Left Unfinished* interrogates what reflection we see in the mirror; especially if that mirror was for a long time discarded because its reflection was deemed unsuitable for people to see.



A scene from Khalek Halil's unfinished film *The Black Diamond* (courtesy Indexical Films)

What We Left Unfinished by *Mariam Ghani* will be playing at the *San Francisco International Film Festival* at multiple venues beginning April 11.

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The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

February 7, 2019

Miguel Covarrubias's caricatures; Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly's latest collaboration; Bill Traylor's drawings; Vivian Maier's self-portraits; and Hervé Guibert's photographs of friends and lovers.

Miguel Covarrubias

Through Feb. 23. Throckmorton Fine Art, 145 East 57th Street, Manhattan; 212-223-1059, throckmorton-nyc.com.

Although they will overlap only briefly, “Miguel Covarrubias: A Retrospective” is the perfect side dish to the movable feast of the Frida Kahlo exhibition opening Feb. 8 at the Brooklyn Museum. Born in Mexico City in 1904, Covarrubias was a member of Kahlo's inner circle — a highly sociable workaholic, painter, anthropologist, teacher, writer and sometime curator — who had a chameleonic talent for drawing. He would illustrate his own books on the ethnography of Mesoamerican Mexico, but arriving in New York, at age 19, he established himself with influential celebrity caricatures for magazines like *The New Yorker*, *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. He soon knew everyone who was anyone, figured in the Harlem Renaissance and, briefly in Paris, designed sets for Josephine Baker.

It seems overly optimistic to call this show a retrospective, but its 50 or so works on paper memorably survey several of Covarrubias's graphic gifts. There's a *Vanity Fair* cover featuring Franklin Delano Roosevelt and a delightful watercolor-collage caricature of his friend the photographer Carl Van Vechten. But mostly there are deft, insouciant ink-and-pencil drawings and a few fine-grained lithographs, including “The Lindy Hop,” whose sinuous dancing couple brings to mind the work of Archibald J. Motley Jr. Covarrubias's line could have the assured sparseness of Matisse, and he had a similar affinity for female beauty. But his drawings have more flair than artistic genius. Here he draws Mexican villages, ceremonial rituals in Bali (whose ethnography also occasioned a book) and near-scientific renditions of a sting ray and a lobster.

There are drawings and caricatures of his wife, the dancer and choreographer Rosa Rolanda, who learned to use a camera (from Edward Weston) and took photographs for his books. (Two of Weston's photographs of Rolanda are in the Kahlo show, which also has a film by Covarrubias, “El Sur de México.”) A few of the drawings qualify as racist by today's terms. But mostly a benign if paternalistic joy at the world prevails.

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The show would have been helped by including some of his meticulous renderings of Mesoamerican artifacts and motifs. But such illustrations appear in his books, several of which are here and available for browsing.

Covarrubias died in 1957 at age 53, ending a career worthy of a much longer life. Maybe the Brooklyn Museum will turn to his achievement soon. ROBERTA SMITH

Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly

Through Feb. 16. Ryan Lee, 515 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-397-0742, ryanlee-gallery.com.



Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly's "Off Kilter," from the series "When the Spirits Moved Them, They Moved." via Ryan Lee Gallery

Dance and movement are increasingly infiltrating museum and gallery spaces, and they do so in Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly's "When the Spirits Moved Them, They Moved" at Ryan Lee, which takes its inspiration from the Shakers, a Christian sect founded in 18th-century England. A daylong performance at Shaker Village in Pleasant Hill, Ky., in 2018, is shown here in the form of photographs and a three-channel video that captures the performers moving in ways that conjure or pay homage to the ecstatic worship of the Shakers.

In the 22-minute video, spread over three screens, this movement can be fluid or jerky, collective or solitary, taking place on a wooden floor or under a tree. Together,

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Ms. Ghani, an artist and filmmaker, and Ms. Kelly, who is described in the news release as someone who “constructs ways of moving, ephemeral collages and performance pieces” have shaped a version of the event that functions both as document and artwork. The video skillfully breaks down sequences and focuses on expressions or gestures that might be missed in a live performance.

The photographs, also displayed in multipanel format, depict the performers in rest or motion, sometimes with eyes closed. The Shaker Village itself plays a role, too, with its spare buildings nestled in a verdant site. The Shakers provide a foil, since they believed in gender equality and women were founders and leaders of the sect. Their committed life-experiment (which might be called a cult today) becomes not just a model for art-making, but alternative ways of living or what Ms. Ghani and Ms. Kelly call “being-in-common.” In other precincts, this is also called utopia. MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Bill Traylor

Through March 3. Betty Cuninghams Gallery, 15 Rivington Street, Manhattan; 212-242-2772, bettycuninghamsgallery.com.

If you can't get to the Smithsonian's remarkable Bill Traylor retrospective, you can at least visit Betty Cuninghams Gallery and spend an hour or two in front of a blue gouache mule Traylor painted on cardboard. Born a slave and not known to have made drawings before his mid-80s, Traylor came to posthumous fame through the efforts of Charles Shannon, a younger white artist who met Traylor around the time of World War II. Shannon ultimately collected more than 1,200 of Traylor's drawings, many of them graphic, silhouette-like portraits of animals.

Traylor would sometimes start one of these portraits with a rectangle or flattened oval, as if trying to capture weight and body as general categories before moving on to specifics. But once he's added delicate hind legs, spindly forelegs, and the muscular slopes of rump and neck, Traylor invariably arrives at something with the eerie singularity of a Sumerian logogram.

Part of it is his uncanny balance of simplification and detail. In “Blue Mule,” it's a sticklike tail ending in a delicate puff of hair, or the measured rise and fall of an equine back accomplished with three blunt strokes. Part of it is the monochrome, which lets him picture the mule and its shadow simultaneously. And part of it is the distinctly syncopated composition: By placing the drawing's only element off center, Traylor brings forward the color of the blank cardboard ground, though it can also still read as earth and sky.

But what really makes Traylor's silhouettes so extraordinary is how nakedly they grapple with the basic mystery of representational art: How can a two-dimensional shape,

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which we take in at a glance, encompass a three-dimensional object, which we can never see all of? WILL HEINRICH

Vivian Maier

Through March 2. Howard Greenberg Gallery, 41 East 57th Street, Manhattan; 212-334-0010, howardgreenberg.com.

Vivian Maier's self-portraits are tantalizing. The street photographer liked to shoot her shadow, the outline of a hat and raised arm darkening a patch of sidewalk or grass. Other times she offered glimpses of her body, as in a 1975 photograph taken in Chicago, Ms. Maier's longtime home, in which part of her head is visible in a small mirror that lies atop a bouquet of flowers on the ground. The rectangular mirror looks like a picture within the frame, and she seems to be staring out from it.

Ms. Maier took many thousands of photographs while working full time as a nanny, but she almost never showed them; in later life, she didn't even develop much of her film. She left behind material to fill several storage lockers but no close friends or family. For those who have followed the discovery of her work — including a legal dispute that halted the dissemination of it but was settled confidentially in 2016 — the self-portraits create the illusion of intimacy with a woman who remains unknowable.

The 1975 picture is on view at Howard Greenberg Gallery in the exhibition "The Color Work," devoted to Ms. Maier's color photography, in tandem with a new book. (An album of vintage color prints by Ms. Maier will also be auctioned this month.) The show iterates her talent for infusing the everyday with dramatic tension; her scenes of street life are shot through with uncertainty and possibility. In a photograph from 1977, two boys stare out from behind glass with troubled expressions that belie their ages. In a picture from 1960, someone seems to be disappearing into a hedge. The exhibition is a potent reminder that Ms. Maier's capacity to cultivate mystery extended far beyond herself. JILLIAN STEINHAUER

LAST CHANCE

Hervé Guibert

Through Feb. 10. Callicoon Fine Arts, 49 Delancey Street, Manhattan; 212-219-0326, callicoonfinearts.com.

Before his death in 1991, at age 36, the writer Hervé Guibert forced France to face the horror of AIDS, describing his deteriorating health in prime-time television appearances and in autobiographical books like "To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life." Guibert was also a photographer, and this poignant exhibition features 15 black-and-white pictures of friends and lovers he took from 1976 to 1988, the year he received his diagnosis.

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Most are nudes shot in dappled light, including a fine portrait of his lover Thierry, his torso illuminated by the light passing through aluminum shutters. Some are pretentiously mannered, like a later photo of Thierry shrouded in a gauzy white sheet; a pants-free selfie in a bathroom mirror is barely more artful than the thousands sent daily on Grindr. Yet in the shadow of the epidemic, and in conversation with Guibert's novels and essays, these photographs have become documents of lives and loves hideously abbreviated.

At Callicoon a bench is scattered with more than a dozen of Guibert's books, including French and English editions of "Crazy for Vincent," his 1989 book detailing his doomed, masochistic affair with a teenager. Vincent appears in three photographs here, first as a snub-nosed boy in profile, then asleep in a pillar of light. In Rome in 1988, months before Vincent fell (or jumped) to his death, Guibert shot Vincent naked on an unmade bed, lit by a single table lamp. The youth's hairless, unmuscled legs are spread open, his head and arms are cast back in exhausted pleasure, and his mouth is pulled into a smile so blissful it annihilated me. JASON FARAGO

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ARTNEWS

10 Art Events to Attend in New York City This Week

BY The Editors of ARTnews

January 7, 2019

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8

Opening: Fritz Ascher at Grey Art Gallery

Featuring some 75 paintings and works on paper, “Fritz Ascher: Expressionist” is the first retrospective for the German Jewish artist who survived the Holocaust and continued working in the postwar years. Ascher was part of the Die Brücke group of German Expressionists in Berlin during the early 20th century, and his art was considered “degenerate” by the Nazi regime. While his early work focused on myths and the human condition, his later pieces often depict vibrant landscapes that offered a glimmer of hope in otherwise depressing times.

Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Square East, 6–8 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9

Festival: “New Ear Festival 2019” at Fridman Gallery

The fourth edition of the annual New Ear Festival features a panoply of music, sound art, installations, and video pieces. The first night of the festival will include an audiovisual performance featuring music by bassist Luke Stewart (a member of the jazz band Irreversible Entanglements as well as many other groups) along with dance by Miriam Parker and video by Patrick Cain. Also on the first night are Bob Bellerue’s improvised *Piano Scramble*, an improvised piece that makes use of a piano soundboard, percussion, and electronics, and a two-slide version of Mary Lucier’s Polaroid Image Series, in which slide projections of photographs are matched with audio played via tapes. Other highlights of the festival, which runs through January 13, include performances by Susie Ibarra, Stephen Vitiello, Taylor Deupree, Lary 7, and a screening of Milford Graves Full Mantis.

Fridman Gallery, 169 Bowery, 8 p.m. Tickets \$20

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 10

Opening: Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly at Ryan Lee

This exhibition marks the New York debut of *When the Spirits Moved Them, They Moved*, a three-channel video by Mariam Ghani and Erin Ellen Kelly. Part of *Performed Places*, an ongoing collaboration between the artists, the film shows dancers moving through a Shaker Village in Pleasant Hill, Kentucky, which is home to the one of the largest Shaker communities in the world. The work explores the Shakers' enduring architectural spaces and, conversely, the disintegration of the famously celibate religious group.

Ryan Lee Gallery, 515 West 26th Street, 6–8 p.m.

Opening: Thomas Fougéirol and Carrie Yamaoka at Albertz Benda

This two-person outing, “A Crack in Everything,” takes its name from a Leonard Cohen song and features work probing the relationship between photography and painting. Thomas Fougéirol works using oil on canvas, but he has said that his abstractions offer “a space that exists between radiography, photo negatives, painting, and imprinting.” Carrie Yamaoka’s work aims to reflect back viewers or her studio space, and meditates on representation itself. Alongside the two artists’ work will be a 1912 photograph by Géro Bonnet.

Albertz Benda, 515 West 26th Street, 6–8 p.m.

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 11

Exhibition: Eric N. Mack at Brooklyn Museum

Eric N. Mack continues his project of finding ways to make painting come alive with his first institutional outing, titled “Lemme walk across the room.” In the Brooklyn Museum’s Great Hall, Mack will debut a site-specific installation that makes use of textiles that are draped, hung, and mounted. Fashion is a frequent reference point for Mack, and the new installation refers to clothes and their relationship to the bodies that wear them. Throughout the show, “fashion and musical performances” will activate the installation.

Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, 11 a.m.–6 p.m.

Opening: Mateo López at Casey Kaplan

Mateo López’s latest exhibition takes as its jumping-off point the artist’s move from Bogotá to New York in 2014. Once he took up residence in a new studio, he began pondering the connections between nearby objects and his body. This fundamental connection (and disconnection), as well as the many ways that art and play can merge, is the subject of López’s latest show, which will include new sculptures, works on paper, and a stop-motion film. Among the works is *I am sitting in a Room* (2017), a wooden door that has been anthropomorphized such that it appears to be reclining against a wall.

Casey Kaplan, 121 West 27th Street, 6–8 p.m.

Opening: “Samaritans” at Galerie Eva Presenhuber

The release for this group show, curated by Dan Nadel, features lyrics from the Will Oldham song “I See a Darkness,” which read, in part, “Did you know how much I love you / Is a hope that somehow you / You / Can save me from this darkness?” Nadel’s theme here is friendship and influence, and he has included artworks illustrating these concepts by Huma Bhabha, Takeshi Murata, Laurie Simmons, and more. In a show description, Nadel writes, “Where you sense the connections between the artists, believe me, they are there. And if you don’t, please drop me a line and we can chat: dannadel@icloud.com.”

Galerie Eva Presenhuber, 39 Great Jones Street, 6–8 p.m.

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Opening: Lena Henke at Bortolami

Over the past few years, Lena Henke's work has taken a variety of forms, from photo-based sculptures to ceramics that resemble animal hoofs with empty milk bottles sticking out of them. Her newest show, "Germanic Artifacts," deals with the nature of history and architecture. To create the new sculptures in this show, Henke researched ancient Germanic peoples and the Teutoburg Forest, which is not too far from her childhood home, Warburg. The sculptures here resemble tree trunks and wild pigs, and the show will feature an architectural intervention.

Bortolami, 39 Walker Street, 6–8 p.m.

Performance: "Chicago Overground" at Nublu

Of all the many signs of fertility currently flashing in jazz, an exploratory scene in Chicago is up at the top in terms of energy and charisma. With recordings and activities swirling around the great label International Anthem and connections to scenes in other cities far and wide, the Windy City jazz milieu is timely enough to occasion a two-night "Chicago Overground" program as part of a sprawling NYC Winter Jazzfest that takes over many venues with a schedule packed nice and tight. The double-night bill kicks off on Friday with a set by the genre-hopping polymath Ben LaMar Gay and a late-night jam session led by the electrifying trumpeter Jaimie Branch. Saturday's lineup includes Resavoir, Akenya, the Juju Exchange, and more—with additional late-night jamming led by Marquis Hill. A playlist featuring artists playing can be heard here, and information for the rest of the festival can be found here.

Nublu, 151 Avenue C, 7 p.m. Admission requires a Winter Jazzfest pass, \$50 for one night, \$90 for two

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13

Opening: Raha Raissnia at Miguel Abreu Gallery

Raha Raissnia's last outing in New York, at the Drawing Center in 2017, featured two series of works on paper that drew on photographs and films that she had taken as references. They were largely abstract and brushy-looking, and they alluded to the work of her father, who, during Revolution-era Iran, used to take pictures of protests he witnessed in Tehran. "What reveals itself as a subject matter in all my work," Raissnia once said, "is of human vulnerability." Her latest show, "Galvanization," will continue that project.

Miguel Abreu Gallery, 88 Eldridge Street, 4th Floor, 6–8 p.m.

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HYPERALLERGIC

What Does It Mean to Make Art in the South Asian Diaspora?

This summer exhibition at the Asia Society in New York explores artists of the South Asian diaspora and the ideas and issues that unify their work.

Hrag Vartanian • August 4, 2017



A view of the video corridor with museum visitors watching Naeem Mohaiemen's "Abu Ammar Is Coming" (2016) (photo by the author for Hyperallergic), left: Mariam Ghani, "Kabul 2,3,4", (2002-07) (c) courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE, New York.

In the midst of the *Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions* exhibition at the Asia Society is a small work by Shahzia Sikander titled "Many Faces of Islam" (1993–99). It's a surprisingly prescient piece that grapples with what would become the more pronounced fault-lines of the 21st century: money, war, religion, terrorism, censorship, and more. Sikander's small work suggests a continuity rather than a break with history, even if her work effortlessly blends traditional Mughal miniature technique with the language of graphic novels, history with pop culture, the New York art world's infographic sensibilities of the 1990s with historic struggles, and, of course, the politics of its time.

This work by Sikander is a masterpiece of American art, but in many ways it perfectly encapsulates the complexity of contemporary art being produced by artists of the South Asian diaspora —

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it contains multitudes. Most American curators and art institutions have always had trouble dealing with transnational and complex identities, often relegating them to a supporting role in the narratives surrounding the European colonization of Turtle Island. It seems like a problem that is surmountable but the bigger issue is general art audiences have uneven knowledge about different geographical and cultural contexts. This phenomenon disadvantages art that doesn't adhere to dominant identities, and it leads to the dismissal of some art as "derivative."

The example of Sikander is also notable for the way reviews often emphasize her illumination training in Pakistan (National College of Arts Lahore) but not her art school training in the US (Rhode Island School of Design). Why? That question is one of many that this show raised for me, and the answer is why an exhibition like this is important.

The short summer exhibition at the Asia Society makes the case for a South Asian perspective born from the life experience of a diaspora that spans the globe. Here, all the artists are conversant with many idioms and vocabularies. This is an intergenerational affair and that helps us see the continuity and disruptions at work. There's a strong presence of South Asian Canadians in the mix, specially in the related conference (Queens Museum, June 30–July 2), which makes sense since the divisions in North American diasporas never stop at the border. Art by South Asian Canadian artists is also often supported by government funding in a way it never is in the US because of a larger policy of multiculturalism.

The bigger question for me is why contemporary art by South Asian diaspora is often overlooked in much of contemporary art discourse, even as the conversation has expanded to embrace black, Asian American, and other perspectives more readily (though certainly not completely). From my experience, the conversation around South Asian art in Canada is more developed, and the same is true in the UK, where South Asians were often allied with other minority populations and a larger population often means more representation. In the US, South Asians account for just over 1% of the population, but in New York that number is closer to 4%. Yet those numbers haven't lead to the inclusion of artists of South Asian descent in exhibitions like Greater New York, the Whitney Biennial, and other surveys. Writing earlier this year, Naeem Mohaiemen pointed out that there were "no South Asian American artists in the 2004, 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2014 Whitney Biennials, and only between one and three artists of South Asian origin in the last four PS1 *Greater New York* shows." The lack of inclusion of South Asian artists in the US art world is rather distressing.

Curated by Brooklyn-based artist and curator Jaishri Abichandani, Asia Society Museum Director Boon Hui Tan, and Lawrence-Minh Davis, curator at the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, the exhibition is a little weaker than one would hope for, not because of the quality of the work, but more because the Asia Society always has a strange tendency to manicure their exhibitions so that they have an almost academic feel. That approach may have helped the video works, which are clustered in one corridor to avoid distraction, but it disadvantages other pieces that seem less related to the work nearby.

There are many approaches and the diversity of work might make you think that the label of South Asian may not fit, but like Asian American or Middle Eastern American — concepts that are still in beta because they lump together populations based on Western perceptions rather

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than cultural histories — South Asians share a common history of trauma, displacement, and discrimination, and that makes the label a useful starting point for discussion.

Allan deSouza's *Rumpty-Tumpty* series (1997/2017) is a fascinating project that is more relevant today than ever. Photographing the now defunct Trump Taj Mahal hotel and casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey, deSouza frames his images to highlight the underlying Orientalism, a type of appropriation that renders "exotic" features like ornate onion domes and brightly colored surfaces into pleasure palaces dripping with the inferred fantasies of colonialism and leisure.

He left 20 years of accumulated dust on his photo negatives when he recently printed the images for the show, and this adds a sense of time to them, making them resemble snapshots from the 1970s. In today's United States, one dominated by rising tides of nativism and xenophobia, these images take on a more nefarious meaning, particularly since these structures were created by the same person who is currently the most powerful — and dangerous — man in the world. It's rather appropriate that the furnishings of the Trump Taj Mahal were sold off in a fire sale the same month this exhibition was on display.

DeSouza is an elder statesperson of South Asian art of the diaspora (though Zarina, also on display, is a whole generation older but has only recently been getting the serious mainstream attention her work deserves). Once part of the British black arts movement and later the Godzilla Asian American Arts Network in the US, deSouza has been practicing intersectionality before it was defined and, to his credit, he has been unabashedly presenting his work in many contexts — including South Asian ones — that have had a clear influence on other generations of artists.

Naeem Mohaiemen's video is another must-see at the show. Focusing on the curious facts of liberation struggles, "Abu Ammar Is Coming" (2016) follows some Bangladeshi fighters who took part in the Lebanese Civil War at the end of the 20th century, including some who do so inadvertently, as they arrived as migrant labor and realized their employer was one "Company Fatah" (Arafat's group within the Palestine Liberation Organization, aka PLO). The story is riveting, but the implications of such unconventional coalitions at a time when the fault lines of identity continue to shift are obvious. His use of documentary footage and documents raises questions about the way stories of war and liberation are told. Mohaiemen is also a good example of the new generation of South Asian artists who maintain strong ties to South Asia, while easily circulating in art communities in the US and elsewhere.

Ruby Chishti's "The Present is a Ruin Without the People" (2016) is a fascinating wall sculpture created out of recycled textiles, wire mesh, and other materials. Its cobbled-together architectural forms resemble the hollowed out carcasses of small abandoned homes, but at this scale they look more like bird houses, suggesting their residents have all flown away.

Mariam Ghani's "Kabul 2, 3, 4" (2002–07) is part of her larger interest in archives, and her short video gives you a sense of the economic and cultural development of Afghanistan's capital during a period when the country was the focus of US anti-terrorism rhetoric. I couldn't help but watch the video and think about how little the images from the country have changed as the decades long proxy war between the US and its enemies continues to devastate the nation.

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One of the only works to be allotted its own space in the exhibition is an installation by Anila Quayyum Agha, who is represented by her well-known *Intersections* series that was the first artwork to capture both the public and juried prizes at ArtPrize back in 2014. The series, as represented by “Crossing Boundaries” (2015), addresses the boundaries and limitations of gender in her native Pakistan, where religious conservatism had a profound impact on her early life. The form, which hangs in the center of the room like a beacon of light, is partly derived from her memories of the screens that separated men from women in mosques. My only criticism of the installation is that the artist’s work can easily envelope a much larger gallery and, like the rest of the exhibition, the artwork feels reigned in to accommodate the space.

Context was also an issue for Mequitta Ahuja’s “Performing Painting: A Real Allegory of Her Studio” (2015), which is a stunning painting of a nude artist in her studio, but its placement adjacent to the video corridor didn’t permit more dialogue with many of the other works — even if Jaishri Abichandani’s “We Were Making History 3” (2013), constructed of leather whips, fabric, studs, and wire, does provide a provocative counterpoint to the calm serenity of Ahuja’s R.B. Kitaj-inflected painting.

The bigger issue for this exhibition and many like it — I was also told a few South Asian American contemporary artists refused to be exhibited in the show because of its cultural framework — is whether the category of South Asian art is useful to understand the work. I overwhelmingly say it is. To assert non-nativist contexts for art in North America is not only important today but essential in the face of a political elite that is loudly advocating the assimilation of newly arrived non-European immigrant populations.

In a 2013 interview, Sikander explained that “Miniature painting for me has always been heroic in scope and not limited by its scale — it is a space to unleash one’s imagination.” In the same way, there are those of us who see the specificities of our identity as doors to limitless terrain, and in the face of the mounting forces of white supremacy, to assert the complexity of your identity is a form of resistance — it is a strength on which to build on, not erase or sublimate.

Lucid Dreams and Distant Visions continues at the Asia Society (725 Park Avenue, Upper East Side, Manhattan) until August 6.

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Art in America

MARIAM GHANI

Ryan Lee

When Brooklyn-based artist Mariam Ghani arrived in St. Louis in 2014 to begin a yearlong fellowship at Washington University, the city was deep in mourning over the loss of Michael Brown, the African-American man whose controversial killing by a white police officer in the northern suburb of Ferguson galvanized the Black Lives Matter movement. Attuned, as previous works attest, to the ways in which urban and architectural space both influence and index social experience, Ghani began researching the history of St. Louis and the key sites in the city's social and geographic development. The resultant project, "The City & The City" (2015), consists of works in various mediums. The centerpiece is a twenty-nine-minute video made in collaboration with St. Louis-born choreographer Erin Ellen Kelly and narrated by Missourian Derek Laney, who plays a slain man drifting about a fictional metropolis, trying to piece together the circumstances of his death. The work summons Brown, the October 2014 Ferguson protests, and a number of dark chapters from St. Louis's more distant past.

In a further act of invocation, Ghani has taken the title of her project and the conceptual framework of her video from a 2009

Mariam Ghani:
The City & The
City, 2015, video,
28 minutes,
50 seconds; at
Ryan Lee.



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View of Leslie
Hewitt'sUntitled
Installation, 2012,
sheet metal with
industrial paint, at
SculptureCenter.

book by China Miéville, the British-American sci-fi novelist and social activist. As in Miéville's book, the story in the video is set in a city that has split into two distinct peoples and nations, segregated from each other less by physical barriers than by their conformity to laws commanding them to willfully "unsee" each other. By mapping this fictional bifurcation onto the geography of an American city whose recent racial turmoil stems from generations of inequality, Ghani opens viewers' eyes to an all-too-real contemporary dystopia.

Ghani's two city-states appear to correspond to the predominantly white, relatively affluent southern portion of St. Louis on the one hand, and the primarily black, economically distressed northern section of the city on the other. At various moments these separate worlds bleed into each other through a series of dissolves and visual effects. We are reminded in these instances that prosperity in this country is sustained by its obverse—that beautiful tree-lined streets are products of the same structures that contribute to urban blight.

Laney, as narrator, lays out a story of an abortive revolution waged by a small group of citizens capable of clandestinely slipping from one city to the other. Laney was among several artist-activists who marched a mirrored casket through the streets of Ferguson at the height of the 2014 protests. Ghani pays homage to this event by representing the dead character's body in her video as a shattered mirror lying in an abandoned construction site.

A series of photographs from Ghani's project helped connect the images in the fictional world of the video to the real-life history of the metropolis. One image shows a desolate street in Kinloch, a traditionally black suburb bordering Ferguson whose population plummeted in the 1980s after the City of St. Louis began buying out private homes there as part of a noise-abatement plan for the nearby airport. Another depicts the urban forest that has grown over the former site of Pruitt-Igoe, the notorious housing project whose demolition in the 1970s, after years of neglect, became emblematic of the supposed failures of subsidized housing programs. Like the street in Ferguson where Michael Brown's corpse was left to fester for hours in the afternoon sun, these are spaces haunted by the victims of systemic racial violence and disregard.

—David Markes

LESLIE HEWITT SculptureCenter

On view in Leslie Hewitt's recent exhibition at SculptureCenter, an untitled 2012 installation consists of white metal sheets that have been dog-eared or otherwise folded. The sheet-metal sculptures—some standing upright, some laid on the ground with a single part bent upward—appear to alternate between three and two dimensions as viewers circumnavigate them and look from different angles.

Such ambiguity also appears in the photographic and moving-image works included in the show. The diptych *Where Paths Meet, Turn Away, Then Align Again* (Distilled moment from over 73 hours of viewing the Civil Rights era archive at The Menil Collection in Houston, Texas), 2012, consists of two lithographic



prints of similar images—showing the back of a woman's head amid a crowd, partially blocked by a man's shoulder. To make the images, Hewitt used a micro lens to zoom in to a historical photograph (or perhaps two of them, it's unclear whether the images are from the same shot) from the Menil archive cited in the title, abstracting the source material into constellations of pixels. Whether a parade or a protest, the context is illegible. If not for the title, we might never connect Hewitt's quietly banal depiction with the Civil Rights Movement. Offering a counterpoint to photojournalistic images that privilege spectacular scenes and icon figures over the day-to-day workings of ordinary activists, Hewitt asks us to reconsider histories of 1960s black life and protest.

The Menil archive—which contains photographs by Bruce Davidson, Danay Lyon, and Charles Moore—extends the legacy of the de Menil family's support for civil rights causes, which included donations to a Black Panther chapter in Houston and sponsorship of "The De Luxe Show" (1971), the first of several racially integrated art exhibitions that appeared at the time in response to black artists' protests. Re-presenting fragments of these pictures alongside works like her stark sheet-metal sculptures, Hewitt implies that late modernism, Minimalism, and 1960s political consciousness were not just concurrent but were deeply imbricated.

Lately, Hewitt has been drawn to filmmaking, collaborating with cinematographer Bradford Young. Their three-channel video projection *Settle* (2015), on view in the exhibition, brings together various types of imagery: depictions of grids of glass windows at distant skyscrapers, shots of the infamous "Shirley" cards used to calibrate color and skin tone (favoring white skin), a sequence of introductory film leader displaying a ticking numeric countdown. Some of the material was drawn from the work of director Hailu Gerima, a prominent member of the LA Rebellion, a loose movement of black filmmakers and documentarians that arose in the late 1960s. *Settle* references its own materiality as it oscillates between sharply focused and tactile, flickering footage. Hewitt and Young present perfectly composed still-like shots, only to

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Sci-Fi and Segregation in St. Louis

BY RYAN LEE WONG

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2016 AT 10:30 A.M.



Still from Mariam Ghani's *The City & The City* (2015). Courtesy the artist/Ryan Lee, New York.

Though Mariam Ghani's *The City & The City* doesn't directly address the story of Michael Brown, it offers a lyrical investigation into the larger forces that led to his death. Ghani created the video while completing a fellowship at Washington University. During that time, Brown was killed by a police officer in nearby Ferguson, sparking a new chapter in the Black Lives Matter movement. The film premiered at the Saint Louis Art Museum in 2015, and now Ryan Lee Gallery is showing it with a small selection of accompanying photographs.

The project takes its name from China Miéville's novel of the same name. In the novel, two cities are interwoven in the same physical space, but their economic and political systems are completely separate. It is illegal for citizens to even look at each other's cities; each has to pretend the other doesn't exist. Drawn from the book, the text of Ghani's film powerfully evokes the segregations — physical, mental, and political — that divide cities like St. Louis and Ferguson.

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The film opens with an unsolved murder; the dead man himself is our narrator (actor Derek Laney). He observes, in voiceover, people “carefully not noticing my body,” which was “stripped... of anything that made it safe to see, to know.” The words bear a striking resonance in the wake of Brown’s killing, his body left in the street for hours.

In subsequent scenes, actors pantomime the actions the narrator describes: A detective hunts for clues, children peer from one city into the other. But the actors’ jeans, athletic clothes, and streetwear seem too everyday for the surreal plot; meanwhile the players themselves, silent throughout, feel like puppets for the story.

The strongest actor in the video is St. Louis itself. The video cuts from shots of tree-lined suburbs to abandoned factories and freeway overpasses. Miéville’s text is speculative, but the jarring transitions between these real spaces is totally strange. At times, one scene dissolves into another, and through stitching effects we gaze through trees and homes into the other city. Some spaces are ambiguous: A gothic church might be a part of the wealthier city, but it has been abandoned and then refilled with dusty furniture. A freeway sits next to a river bend, a natural border reinforced by a manmade one. Qasim Naqvi, an electronic composer and drummer, provides the film with an eerie soundtrack — sparse piano notes ring against mournful strings.

Invisibility and disappearance are longstanding concerns for Ghani. Her ongoing, multi-platform Index of the Disappeared, a collaboration with artist Chitra Ganesh, archives and exhibits stories, scholarship, and legal documents on post-9-11 surveillance and detention. Earlier this year, she installed a massive mural at the Queens Museum featuring 59 bright shapes, each representing an endangered language still spoken in the borough. Ghani draws our attention to these other Americas — the unnoticed survivors of displacement, diaspora, war.

The narrator of *The City & The City* reminds us that the two cities “are so densely interwoven that you can step from one into the other by crossing a single square of pavement.” It’s not that the other lives are hidden, but that we refuse to acknowledge them.

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BAZAAR

Harper's
ARABIA

In Review: Sara Raza's Highly Anticipated Exhibition At The Guggenheim New York

A survey of the Guggenheim New York's 'But a Storm is Blowing From Paradise' reflects upon a complicated region, one in a constant state of flux and upheaval. Sarah Hassan reports on the exhibition's aim to dispel of Middle East's imposed geography

Sara Raza's highly anticipated curatorial debut at the Guggenheim in New York, *But a Storm is Blowing From Paradise*, was living up to its name on opening day. Unseasonably cold weather cast a cloud over the city as a stream of reporters, collectors, artists and other fashionably dressed guests pushed through the revolving doors of the iconic rotunda on 5th Avenue to the sound of thumping electronica and Middle Eastern drums. It was an exciting occasion; the British-born Raza was embarking on a two-year residency at the Guggenheim to spear head the third phase of the UBS MAP Global Art Initiative for Middle East and North Africa. With an impressive list of curatorial credits that have allowed her to leave her mark in practically ever corner of the globe, Raza and her keen and sympathetic eye towards the socio-political engagements of contemporary artists from the MENA region, seemed the perfect choice to lead the hallowed institution to more fertile and compelling grounds.

Once an underrepresented area of art, not just in permanent collections of storied museums, but in the homes and portfolios of private collectors, contemporary Middle Eastern art is having a renaissance of sorts thanks to the ever-growing interest in the region and the wealth and quality of work being produced by country nationals. More often than not, these artists tackle the complex, confusing, and at times, sobering topics of place, identity, religious freedom, sexism and geography, that have allowed an impressive array of art to enter the private and public markets for collectors, connoisseurs and museum bystanders. One of the more successful shows in recent memory to bring together a wide array of artists from the region and their work was the New Museum's massive undertaking in 2014, *Here and Elsewhere*, which showcased an astounding array of mediums addressing such concerns and contemporary anxieties. When one is aware of the scope of art being offered by artists of the Middle East, news of a major institution dedicating space in their permanent collection to such an area is worth celebrating.

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Yet this fact alone is what makes *But a Storm is Blowing From Paradise* somewhat tricky and problematic. To the innocent onlooker, entering the museum's 'tower' galleries was no different than entering the space of any other white-walled contemporary art gallery with inconvenient internal architecture and bright lighting. Greeted by perhaps the most impressive piece in the show, a graceful hanging metal structure entitled *Flying Carpets* by Nadia Kaabi-Linke, one is immediately drawn in to the geometric shadows cast on the floor, so much so that a guard seems to chastise visitors for standing directly underneath it every few minutes. Sandwiched in a corner beside Linke are the multi-media works of paper by the Iranian artist, Rokni Haerizadeh, whose hand-painted photographs lend their name to the exhibition's title. The effect of the surrounding works is immediate—the palate of this show is subdued, slightly cold and highly intellectual. Upstairs, the ancient Algerian city of Ghardaïa is composed entirely of couscous by Kader Attia, the effect not unlike a sprawling sandcastle. In two floors alone, the stylised tropes of Orientalism have sneakily made their way into seemingly distant works. Two of the more successful works in the exhibition share the floor with Attia, first the heartbreaking *Study for a Monument* by the Tehran-born Abbas Akhavan, who rendered native flora and fauna to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in cast bronze and positioned them over white sheets, echoing the haunting effect of conflict-riddled areas where funeral displays are as stark and unsympathetic as the disasters endured by the natural world. Second, the beautiful dual video projection of *A Brief History of Collapses* by Mariam Ghani shows the crumbling, bombed-out interior of the Darul Aman Palace in Kabul, first erected in 1929, juxtaposed beside the Neoclassical-inspired Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany. The cool voice of a narrator, reciting a laundry list of facts about each structure, washes over the space to a tantalising degree, allowing the viewer to contemplate the innate beauty of gradual destruction to once lofty structures.

Raza's ambition is clear from her curatorial statement and her intentions are noble; however, the bulk of the exhibition seems to suffer from a majority of blank space and curious choices. The sheer fact that these works will be a part of the museum's collection for future generations to encounter and work with is indeed grand and appropriately timed, yet something falls flat in the final array of art on offer.

Perhaps it is the soothsayer in every artist to anticipate the troubles of their time, yet contemporary Middle Eastern art has always championed understanding in the region amidst turmoil and confusion. Raza wrote from New York,

*"I REALLY HOPE THAT
THERE WILL BE A TURN IN
THE WAY IN WHICH
ARTWORKS THAT DEAL
WITH COMPLEX GLOBAL
ISSUES WILL OPEN A MORE
TRANSNATIONAL DIALOGUE
WITH OTHER NARRATIVES
AROUND CONTEMPORARY
VISUAL DISCOURSE"*

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Raza adds, “Also the fact that there are many artists who have lived, studied and worked in major metropolitan North American and European cities, yet have been overlooked in terms of major museum acquisitions, several have not been actively collected by American institutions before, despite having contributed to the visual cultural discourse and essentially being part of an international dialogue.” With this show, Raza believes she has accomplished an “idea-driven narrative which has helped to dissolve geographically imposed rubrics,” something many Middle Eastern artists can appreciate and support in their own work. Yet one cannot help but be curious over the conversations that will take place in the museum in the years to come, and if those imposed geographies will cease to dictate the quality of understanding over Middle Eastern. Ultimately, this is just a small taste of the artistic breadth that the region offers.

But a Storm is Blowing from Paradise runs until October 5, 2016 at the Guggenheim in New York.

This article originally appears in the Summer 2016 issue of *Harper's Bazaar Art*.

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FAST COMPANY

The Remarkable Diversity Of Queens, As Seen Through Its Disappearing Languages

The borough is home to 59 endangered languages, which artist Mariam Ghani beautifully visualizes for a show at the Queens Museum.

MEG MILLER | 09.01.16 | 11:15 AM



The acrylic mural of a Queens map that greets visitors to the Queens Museum, in New York, is enormous, abstract, and angular, rendering the borough in a colorful array of polygons. Inside the shapes is the word for "tongue" in each of the endangered languages still spoken in Queens, by residents the artist Mariam Ghani refers to as people with "forked tongues." There are 59 such languages in total.

"Migrants and the multilingual are constantly speaking with forked tongues, slipping from one language to another," Ghani writes in her description of her project *The Garden of the Forked Tongues*, which is part of the exhibition *Nonstop Metropolis*, a collaborative show based around the work of author Rebecca Solnit and geographer Josh Jelly-Schapiro. "Moving from living in one language, to living in another; or growing up in environments where tongues are constantly

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in motion, and nominally separate languages share space in the same sentences."

Queens has been called "one of the most diverse places on Earth." The evidence is in the languages. According to the Endangered Language Alliance, whose data Ghani used to create the mural as well as an accompanying interactive graphic, an estimated 500 languages are currently spoken in Queens. The 59 languages depicted in the map are the ones endangered, which means that Queens residents are some of the last people on Earth who know the language that they speak. Given that there are a total of 574 "critically endangered" languages worldwide, according to UNESCO, 59 is a pretty remarkable number to have just in one borough.

Ghani chose the word "tongue" to put inside of the polygons both because of its dual meaning—tongue as both the organ in your mouth and the language that you speak—as well as its near-universal availability across all languages and cultures. In both the mural and the interactive graphic, the locations of the polygons refer to how the languages are distributed across the borough. The colors show the connection between different languages, so that you can see that the language of Yucatec Maya from Northern Belize, for example, is in the same Mayan language family as Tzotzil, spoken in the Mexican state of Chiapas. The size of each polygon is based on a couple different factors: the density of endangered language relative to others in Queens and the natural logarithm of the number of living speakers of that language left in the world. In the digital graphic, clicking on a version of "tongue" will bring up more information about the

Ladino

Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) (Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Spanish; Judeo-Spanish; Hebrew script: לודינו, לודינו, לודינו, לודינו), commonly referred to as Ladino, is a Romance language derived from Old Spanish. During the second half of the fifteenth century and from the seventeenth century, Judeo-Spanish blossomed into a language of journalism and popular literature, resulting in a bibliography of almost three hundred prose and drama titles and a corpus of music, dramatic plays, poems, and other folk genres.

Where it's used:
Judeo-Spanish

Area for Tongue
לודינו

Language Family
Romance

Places of origin
Spain, Balkans,
Turkey, Middle East,
North Africa

ISO 639-3
LAD

Number of speakers
11,627%

Language status
A

ISO 639-1
AD

ISO 639-2
AD

Where it's spoken:
Forest Hills, Queens

La madre: Nai El vaso de la buza
Vaso mato no kaje de la mato.

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disappearing language, including where it is traditional spoken, how many people still speak it, and where it is spoken in Queens.

Ghani conceived of the work for the show, which features site-specific pieces that correspond with Solnit and Jelly-Schapiro's soon-to-be-released book, *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas*. The book follows up two of their previous books—*Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* and *Unfathomable City: A New Orleans Atlas*—with a collection of essays and artworks that creatively map the history of the city. Ghani's infographic was inspired by an essay on the languages of the city by Suketu Mehta entitled *Tower of Scrabble*.

Ghani's title *Garden of the Forked Tongues* is a play on the Borges short story, *Garden of the Forking Paths*, a parable that asserts the future is only one of several futures, or paths, that could have been taken. In the spirit of uncertain futures, Ghani writes, *Garden of the Forked Tongues* is based on the fact that in the present "we still have the ability to preserve languages in danger of disappearing, by documenting the forked tongues of living speakers who can translate the endangered words into more commonly understood ones." Ghani's approach to preservation and documentation is a lovely representation of linguistic data that reveals as much about the story of Queens as it does the diversity of those living there.

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BLOUIN ARTINFO

As Above, So Below: Mariam Ghani Unites Landscape and History

BY MOSTAFA HEDDAYA | FEBRUARY 27, 2015



The countries of Norway and Afghanistan do not typically invite comparison, or even adjacent presentation, but the artist Mariam Ghani does just that in “Like Water from a Stone,” her new solo exhibition at Chelsea’s Ryan Lee Gallery. The show has two components: the first, its titular work, is the result of a joint effort with dancer-choreographer and longtime collaborator Erin Ellen Kelly; the second is “Afghanistan: A Lexicon,” a series of prints updating a project the artist first published as a book in 2011 and later presented at Documenta 13 in 2012.

Encompassing photographic prints and a video, “Like Water from a Stone” is a site-specific work Ghani developed with Kelly during a six-week stint in Norway in 2013. Tracing the country’s varied geography from fjord to valley, the 20-minute film is the exhibition’s centerpiece, a loosely narrative series of landscape-based performances in which dancers interact intimately with the terrain. The dramatic natural backdrop — as Ghani tells it, a “beautiful landscape, but a very difficult one” — allows for a powerful juxtaposition between human form and geography. The video, which opens with a sequence featuring a dancer crawling, slowly, out of a dark tidal pool, concludes against an industrial backdrop in the city of Stavanger, capital of the country’s oil sector. The bodies that populate Ghani’s film appear alone or in groups of two or three (and once by double exposure). The dancers, who improvised their movements in response to the site, lie down, walk, float, and articulate their limbs — at times they are barely perceptible, receding discretely into the landscape. A haunting audio track by Qasim Naqvi complements the footage with a stereo composition that blends choral components with ambient noise recorded during filming in Norway.

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Though decidedly non-linear, the video's palette of scenes and sites touches on key moments in Norway's history, be it the discovery of oil in the frigid North Sea, which dramatically altered the course of the country's history, seaside Nazi bunkers, or a lighthouse abandoned during a 20th-century financial crash in herring, one of the nation's primary economic engines prior to the discovery of oil. From the 14th to 19th centuries, Norway was a part of the Danish empire, and Ghani recently told me that her interest in the country is linked to the energetic emergence of an independent national culture there in the 19th century. Her cinematography explicitly references the landscapes of 19th-century Norwegian romantic nationalist painting, a movement that was a part of a broader revival of national fervor during this early period of independence.

These conceptual cues, so subtle as to be largely unknowable to the casual viewer, are what link "Like Water from a Stone" to the 12 prints displayed from "Afghanistan: A Lexicon." Illustrated by archival images and photographs taken by Ghani in her native Afghanistan, the prints are single-page text entries offering accounts and definitions of key concepts in Afghanistan's history of culture. The original project, as published and displayed in 2011 and 2012, was a collaboration between Ghani and her father, a former academic who was elected president of Afghanistan last year, but the entries on view are entirely her own effort. Yet her family remains close at hand: one page, on the "whispers" strategy of discrediting a "political and military" target by disseminating malicious hearsay, cites the smear campaign carried out by political opponents against Queen Soraya in the late 1920s that questioned her commitment to Islam. Today, Ghani's mother, a Lebanese-born Christian, is subject to similar tactics by Islamist elements in the country.

Though "Afghanistan: A Lexicon" occupies relatively scant real estate in the gallery — the works are hung opposite the wall onto which the Norwegian video is projected (the photographic prints from the latter occupy the front room) — it is fully one half of the conversation in the show, offering clues to the complex narratives that underlie even the most outwardly serene of landscapes.

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DEPARTURES

Artist Mariam Ghani Tackles Afghanistan's History And Identity

FEBRUARY 25, 2015
By Madeline Lagattuta



In a new exhibition in New York, the daughter of Afghan president Ashraf Ghani explores nation-building, memory, and history.

Artist Mariam Ghani creates elegant and deeply-felt pieces focusing on nation-building in the Middle East. In her latest exhibition, "Like Water From a Stone," on view at New York's Ryan Lee Gallery (February 26–April 4; 515 W 26th St.; 212-397-0742), seek out one piece in particular for a crash course in the young artist's oeuvre.

First conceived as a 48-page book and created in collaboration her father—anthropologist Ashraf Ghani, the president of Afghanistan—Afghanistan: A Lexicon showcases the core of her work: The flow of memory, history, and national identity. Family business aside, the work is incredibly timely and resonant. With ISIS raising its caliphate across borders in Syria and Iraq, even extremists are getting into the business of nation building. And for much of the Middle

East, especially Afghanistan as it emerges from a long U.S. occupation, the struggle to locate and define a nation amid violence and destruction, and sectarian, ethnic, and political divides has never been more acute.

Afghanistan: A Lexicon locates the nation in the memories of its people. On individual panels (12 of the total 71 are on display in New York), the nation's foundational figures, places, and events are presented, tracing a cyclical history of the country through a series of destructions and rebirths that are rendered as entries in an encyclopedia, the great arbiter of capital-H History. Ghani herself is the originator, executor, and writer of prose; her father supplies the facts and interpretations, which she renders in her own voice. That transmission, from father to daughter, shows how history is made, in the artist's view: Not by governments, institutions, or texts, but in

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the stories and remembrances of individuals. With themes that speak to and foreshadow current events, the panels bring the past into the present, and push us to consider whether Afghanistan's history can be separated from its present identity—whether the history of any plot of land for that matter can be outrun, overcome, or ignored.

The overarching conclusion of Ghani's work is deceptively simple: Nations are their history, and history endures. Buildings can be knocked down, borders redrawn, but there are no clean breaks, not really. It's a lesson anyone trying to build nations in the region (or dismantle them) would do well to consider.

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The New York Times

Mariam Ghani, a Brooklyn Artist Whose Father Leads Afghanistan

BY LIZ ROBBINS | February 20, 2015



Mariam Ghani's apartment is a map to her layered identity.

Books rise from floor to ceiling, black binders of redacted Guantánamo Bay interrogations sharing shelf space with critical theory and dozens of cookbooks. An embroidered pillow made by a collective in Aleppo, Syria, before the bullets flew, sits on a vivid blue couch that matches the rug her father bought for her in Turkmenistan.

In the kitchen of her Clinton Hill, Brooklyn, loft, she curates her collection of refrigerator magnets with such maxims as: "This is your world. Shape it or someone else will," but is embarrassed by the Mason jars of green tomatoes she pickled herself. "I'm a Brooklyn cliché," Ms. Ghani said with a pained laugh.

Hardly. In her life and her career, Ms. Ghani, 36, lives between the labels. A New York-born visual artist, she is also the daughter of Ashraf Ghani, the president of Afghanistan.

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“There’s plenty of people in the art world who don’t know, which is preferable,” said Ms. Ghani, whose work has appeared in the Museum of Modern Art and in the Tate Modern in London.

“She wants to be defined on her own merits,” said Erin Ellen Kelly, a choreographer and Ms. Ghani’s longtime film collaborator. “She wants people to look at her work and not her relationship to her family.”

Yet that connection is ever-present. Ms. Ghani’s mother, Rula, who is Lebanese, and her father, who was an anthropologist in exile from Afghanistan before turning to politics, helped shape her views of global history and memory.

“I grew up very much in between cultures, and that’s the position I work from as an artist,” she said with measured inflection in English, one of seven languages she speaks.

“Being in the diaspora, but also going back and forth between countries; being in one country, but identifying emotionally with another; growing up with these wars going on in my parents’ country and never feeling completely detached from that.”

She added, “I think the place I identify most with is the border.”

With the opening of her new show on Thursday, “Like Water From a Stone,” at the Ryan Lee Gallery in Chelsea, people will see Ms. Ghani’s overlapping worlds and get a rare glimpse of the family intellectualism.

The title piece is a 20-minute film she shot in Norway that opens with a woman lying on a jagged rock beneath a cerulean sky, the wind rippling through her black dress as it does the pools of water below. The imagery evokes Norse seafaring myths in the age before oil became an industry and the awesome power of nature.

The second piece is a collaboration with her father, “Afghanistan: a Lexicon,” which was first shown at the Documenta art festival in Kassel, Germany, in 2012. The Ghani family wanted to show history in Afghanistan as a cycle of reform, revolt, collapse and recovery. Of the original lexicon’s 72 entries — with text and archival photos — 12 panels will be in the current show.

Father and daughter worked via Skype, agreeing that Ms. Ghani would have the final edits. “The tone would be in my wheelhouse: the speculative, poetic realm,” she said. Her father’s contribution would be his deep and abiding knowledge of Afghanistan.

Mr. Ghani, who met his wife at the American University of Beirut, received his doctorate at Columbia. Ms. Ghani was born in New York in 1978; her brother, Tarek, three years later. They had a serene suburban Maryland childhood while Mr. Ghani taught at Johns Hopkins University. Ms. Ghani earned degrees from New York University and the School of Visual Arts. Her father, after working at the World Bank, returned to Afghanistan in 2002, becoming a finance minister for President Hamid Karzai, running unsuccessfully for president in 2009 and then winning a disputed runoff last year.

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“He is a remarkable person,” Ms. Ghani said, refusing to elaborate, wary of the attention or of saying anything to compromise her father’s position. “And he’s always been a remarkable person.”

Ms. Ghani’s friends and colleagues are more forthcoming about her intellect and accomplishments.

“What’s amazing is that she’s really relaxed and generous about it, in the way that she could also be elitist — but she’s not,” said Chitra Ganesh, a Brooklyn-born artist and one of Ms. Ghani’s longtime collaborators.

Since 2004, Ms. Ganesh and Ms. Ghani have worked on “Index of the Disappeared,” a reaction to the detention of immigrants in the United States post-9/11. Ms. Ghani defined it as “a Quixotic archive of redacted material” — transcripts of interrogations, scraps of lost identities. Some of the “Index” resides in notebooks in her apartment.

“What distinguishes Mariam’s project is her tenacity,” said Ramzi Kassem, an associate professor at the City University of New York, who worked with her while representing prisoners at Guantánamo Bay.

“Mariam, like most of us, is many different things at once,” he said. “This project, by design, is many different things over time: a video installation, archiving dimension, radio component, art installation.”

Ms. Ghani’s advocacy, too, takes many forms. She writes and lectures as a member of the Gulf Labor Working Group, which protests conditions for workers building art museums in Saadiyat Island of Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates. Last fall, she was part of a show of contemporary Arab-American Art in Los Angeles, “Shangri LA: Imagined Cities.”

The project manager of the LA/Islam Arts Initiative, Amitis Motevalli, said she was unaware that Ms. Ghani was the daughter of the Afghan president until after the exhibition.

“Sometimes if you are part of politics, you can have a sheltered perspective, but that’s not what I see when I see her work,” Ms. Motevalli said. “It speaks that she’s not necessarily using it as a way as getting forward in her career.”

As the daughter of a foreign leader, Ms. Ghani insisted that her life in New York has not changed. But in Afghanistan, because of security concerns, she cannot explore as she did when she filmed in the ruins of a Kabul palace for “A Brief History of Collapses” or for “Kabul: a Reconstruction.”

“I’m not really allowed to get out of the car on a public street,” she said. Just as artists and women sense the promise of freedom there, hers has been restricted.

Her father appointed her mother to direct initiatives for women, children and refugees, even as her mother’s Christianity provoked criticism. Ms. Ghani, declining to identify her own religion, said she supported her mother’s work.

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“I think things in Afghanistan have to change for the better for everyone in order for them to change for the better for women,” Ms. Ghani said, explaining, “Women’s rights can’t be detached from human rights and economic justice and structural inequities.”

Ms. Ghani taught classes in Kabul and hired female artists there to work on her sets and as research assistants. She said she planned to continue that when she returned to Afghanistan to work. She received a grant from Creative Capital to digitize and reimagine the unfinished work of Afghan state filmmakers during the Communist period, from 1978 to 1991.

Ms. Ghani is also delving into controversy closer to home. She has a teaching fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis, which happened to coincide with the Ferguson protests in October. She is now producing a short film for the Saint Louis Art Museum based, loosely, on the noir novel “The City & the City,” by China Miéville.

The book is a murder mystery, featuring the citizens of neighboring cities who must, by law, “un-see” the other. Ms. Ghani said she read it as an allegory both for Serbo-Croatia and for Kabul in the 2000s, where there was one city for expatriates and one for Afghans, with different laws and access zones. St. Louis, with its racial geography, felt eerily similar. The film will open in April.

“I don’t think that works of art produce concrete change,” Ms. Ghani said. “If anything, they are thin ends of a wedge where they just create a small opening in someone’s mind where something more direct and more concrete can enter in.”

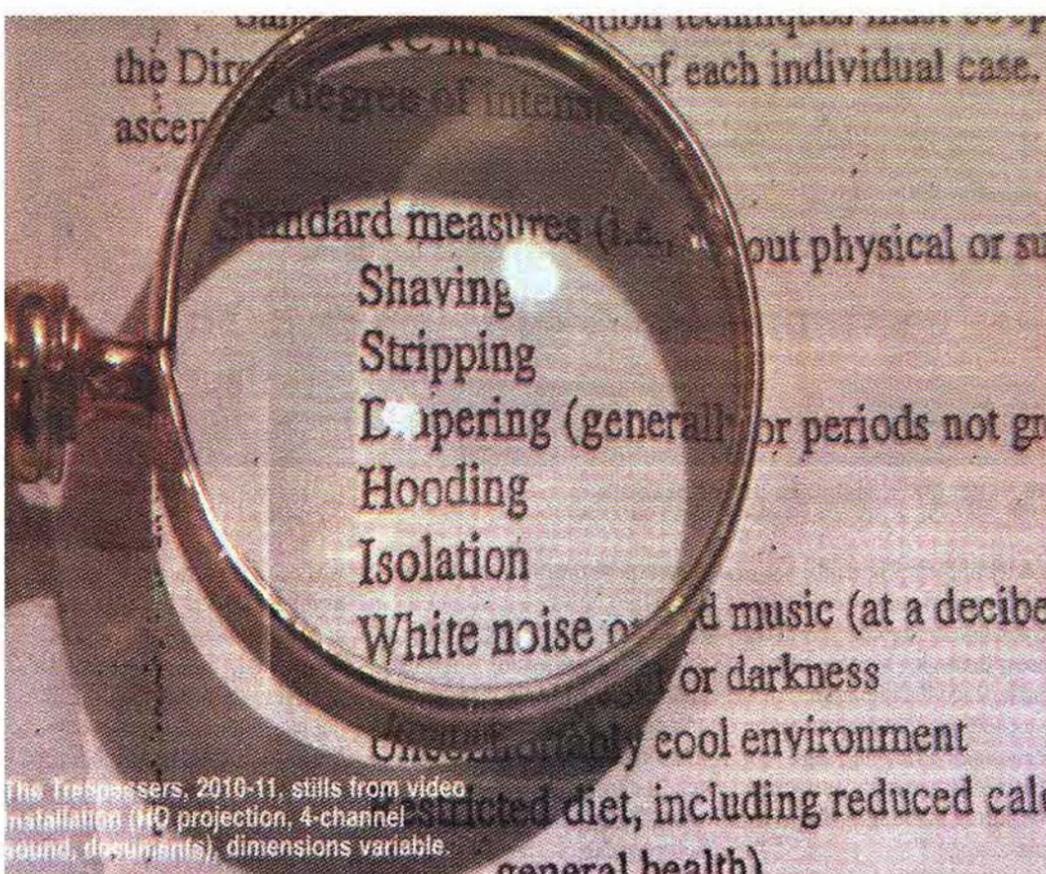
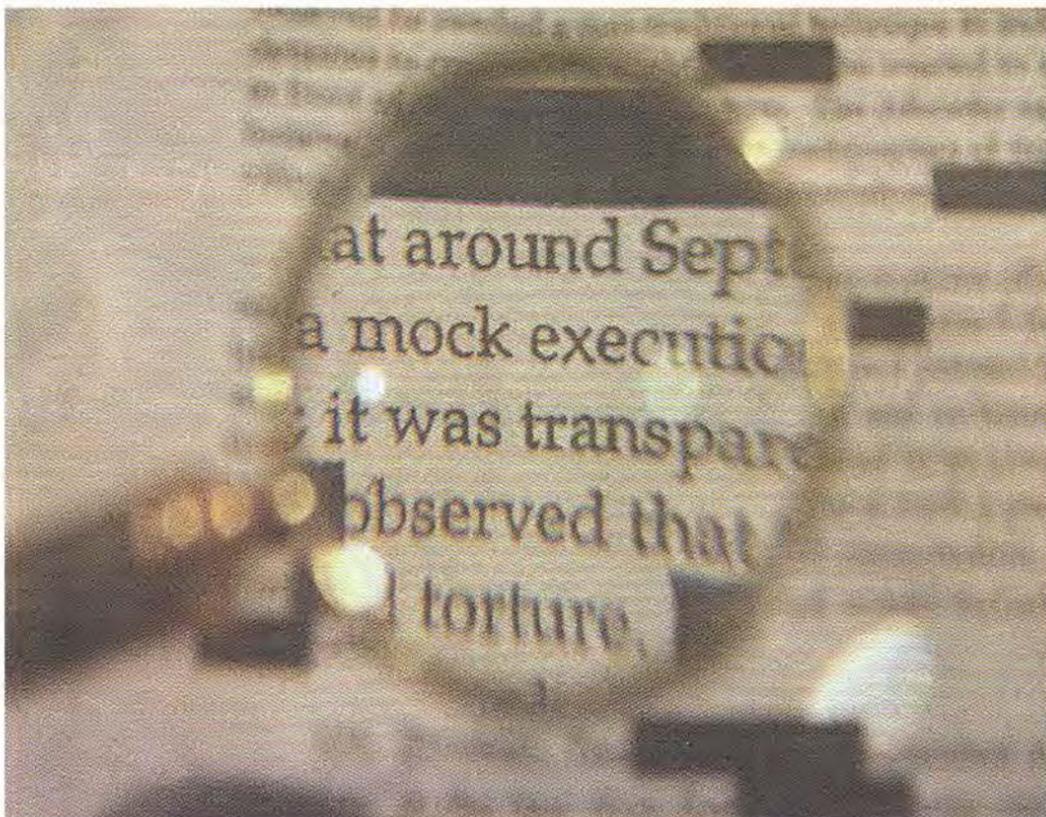
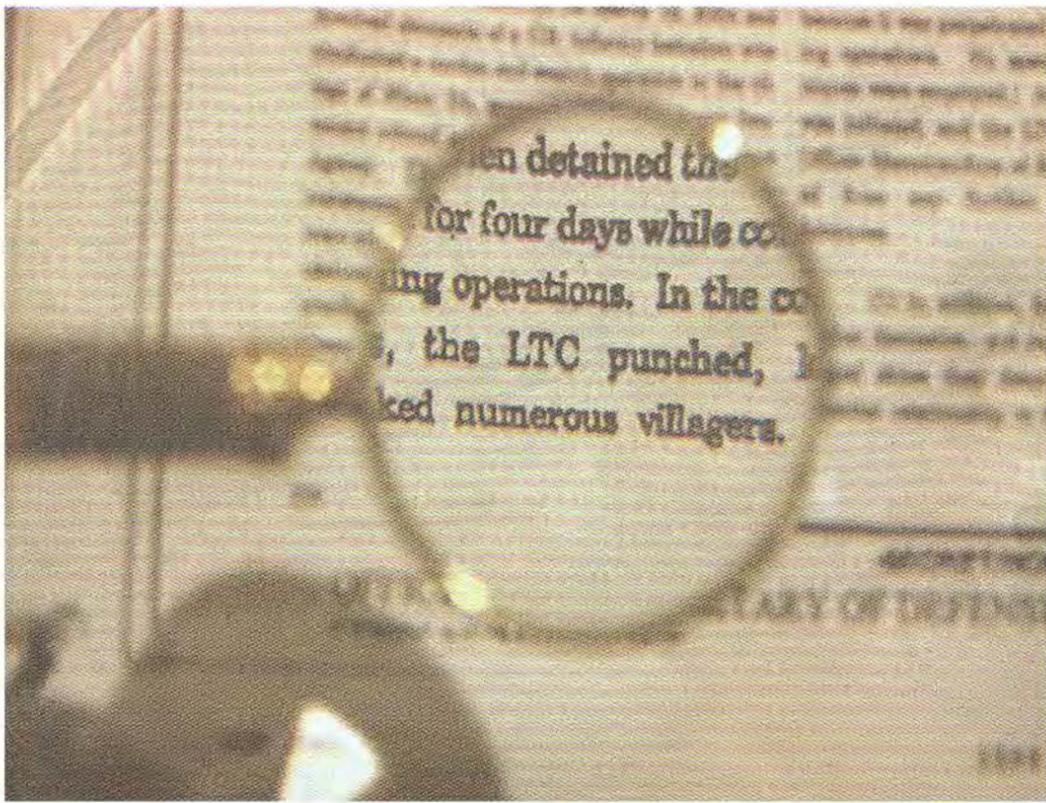
If she sounds like a philosopher-poet, well, she is. But Ms. Ghani is also a feminist, an archivist and an activist, as well-versed in the politics of extraordinary rendition as she is in the very Brooklyn pursuit of homemade chile-passion-fruit sorbet.

“One of the reasons I wanted to be an artist,” she said, “is because I saw that by being an artist I could be so many other things as well.”

And if she were not an artist? “I would be something totally different,” Ms. Ghani said. “Like maybe a cryptologist.”

DANCES WITH WOLVES

MUHAMMAD YUSUF GOES HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH AN ARTIST WHO DRAWS LESSONS FROM DANGERS



The Trespassers, 2010-11, stills from video installation (HD projection, 4-channel surround, documents), dimensions variable.



Mariam Ghani

Owner of a formidable CV (BA summa cum laude with honours in Comparative Literature, New York University) and an exhibition catalogue that would stretch from the USA to the UAE, Mariam Ghani, an artist who is showing at the Sharjah Biennial (SB), is a tough customer when it comes to doing and defining her work. Using video, installation, performance, pho-

tography and text to construct narratives of place, identity, community and history, she will be showing her work titled The Trespassers at SB. She is currently based in Brooklyn and teaches in the Art and Public Policy programme at New York University. With an Afghani father and Lebanese mother, she is at home in the American, Arabic and Afghani cultures. It has made her preoccupied with putting ideas across cultural and generational

borders. "I am particularly fascinated by border zones, nomanslands, translations, transitions and the slippages where cultures intersect," she says.

All of which formed the incentive to ask her some provocative questions, which she answers generously below

Why do you like to explore faultlines in society as an artist?

I am not interested in faultlines (which implies the places where societies begin to crack) so much as borders (which are the places where different societies encounter each other and overlap). Border zones can be places of difficulty and danger, but they can also be places where new cultures and new understandings of culture are produced in the translations and transitions between States. I include countries in States of conflict or post-conflict like Afghanistan in this category of border zones because of the influx of international actors into those countries.

Are you a historian or an artist?

I am interested in history, but I am not a historian. While traditional historical narratives are constructed as linear progressions of cause and effect, acts and consequences, as an artist I have the freedom to look at history in a different way - as a series of contesting narratives told by particular storytellers, each of whom (like every storyteller back to Shahrazade) has a particular audience for which they pitch their tales, a reason for the telling, and a vested interest in how the tale is received. In border zones, especially, this contrapuntal notion of history (as explained best perhaps by Edward Said) becomes very clear, as in those places you will rarely find two narrators of any given history who agree with each other in every particular.

my work with Chitra Ganesh on the post-9/11 archive *Index of the Disappeared*, ongoing since 2004; (3) my family history and connections in the Afghan diaspora; and (4) my work in Afghanistan, ongoing since 2002. For me, the story of the Afghan-American translators in the US military in Afghanistan not only illuminates previously hidden facets of the Afghan war, but also raises much larger philosophical questions about the role played by translators in any war, the intersections of translation and treason, the trespasses involved in the return of diasporas to their countries of origin, and the ways that experience can condition translation.

Are you a fly on the wall?

material that has been officially declassified or that is freely available to the public, so the project in itself is not some kind of provocation. It is simply an archive. It builds up a picture of a system, rather than trying to indict or confront specific individuals within that system. As far as voyeurism goes, in the *Index* we only follow individual narratives of people who have already been in one way or another 'public victims' of the system, and have provided personal testimony about their experiences, in order to restore some sense of their individual humanity to the ghosts they trail through the media and court transcripts.

In my video projects, as for example in the *Kabul* projects, I

Biennial, Smile, you're in Sharjah (2009), the camera again maintains a certain distance - neither too close nor too far - which reflects our position as filmmakers with some knowledge of the place who were nonetheless not yet intimate with it, and were continuing to make discoveries through the camera as we filmed.) However, it's important to note that the overall *Kabul* project is called *Kabul: Partial Reconstructions*, and "partial reconstructions" would be an appropriate title for all of my work about cities in states of transition and reinvention, because those works are partial in every sense of the word. They do not pretend to be complete pictures of the places, but neither do they

ations or conditions in which translators themselves operated are given to those same translators as material?

When a translator's own experience is very close to the content of the document (for example, an investigative report) will it affect the choices made in translation? When a document is heavily redacted, but a translator may know what has been left out, how will the translator react to the redaction? Will different translators with different degrees of distance from the material make different choices in translation?

And again, I don't think the form in which the project will be presented at SBX is particularly confrontational - there will be a projection with English documents, Dari and Pashto voiceover translation, and Arabic subtitle translation on one side of the room. Through a divider there will be a table where people can sit and browse through binders containing the original documents, and if we can manage it some typed translations as well.

The documents will not be dramatised, made into shocking images, enhanced in any way except by having a magnifying glass pass over the text in time with the voiceover. They're just documents, not documents that I created, but documents that exist in the world already, that are floating around on the net right now.

All I am doing is saying hey, maybe you should pay attention to these for five minutes, and I've taken the time (months in fact) to read through thousands of pages and pull out the few hundred that are most worth your time, and SBX has helped to translate them. What's so confrontational about that?

All I am doing is saying hey, maybe you should pay attention to these for five minutes, and I've taken the time (months in fact) to read through thousands of pages and pull out the few hundred that are most worth your time, and SBX has helped to translate them. What's so confrontational about that?

I'm interested not in confronting the translators but in complicating the discussion of their complicity (which is a very real discussion in the Afghan diasporic community, where these translators are branded as traitors) with a consideration of the task and burdens of the translator. The fidelity of translation is always a slippery slope; in situations where words have weight and consequences, is the translator responsible to render the spirit or letter of the original?

Can the translator be a witness or will (s)he always be a special class of native informant? How does this relate to/overlap with the position of the second-generation or generation 1.5 immigrant, also/already placed in the position of translator/mediator/informer caught between two cultures? Does the act of translation, like the presence of an observer or recording device, preclude or occlude, transform or make impossible the act of bearing witness?



Security Blanket (installation and performance)

One gets the feeling you are also a kind of TV anchor, explaining current news, through art. Why is this?

Well, I can't explain exactly why you get a particular feeling about the work in general - that's your lookout. I can only say that I believe art has a responsibility to witness, to record, and to make real (in the ways that only art can) all that is wrong with the world. If you think that is the sole province of news anchors, who provide 30-second sound bites for people to digest along with dinner, I respectfully disagree. However, if you're referring to the themes of this project in particular, the project actually has roots in several longstanding concerns - (1) my interest in translation, which dates back to my studies in Comparative Literature and to projects from the late 90s; (2)

Can one accuse you of voyeurism, as in your *Kabul* project? You seem to be a confrontationist in your art approach (as in the *Index of the Disappeared* project). Won't this create more alienation than solutions?

So I find it a bit difficult to understand how one can be simultaneously voyeuristic and confrontational - don't the two negate each other? Also I find it hard to believe that anyone interprets an archive (the *Index*) as confrontational. The form of an archive, for me, is inherently non-confrontational, since the viewer is free to find her own path through the material, at her own pace, reading only what she chooses and taking away only the information she decides is relevant to her.

If you're referring to the content of the archive, well, we're quite careful about including only

have chosen a specific position for the camera to occupy that reflects my particular position vis-a-vis the place I am documenting. In *Kabul 2,3,4* (2002-04) that was filming from the window of a car passing through the city, without ever leaving the car (which reflects the international/diasporic experience of *Kabul* by car, which is always at a certain security-mandated distance); in the single-channel video *Kabul: Reconstructions* (2002), meanwhile, you see *Kabul* from many different distances, both intimate and estranged, and in the 3-channel installation *Kabul: Constitutions* (2003-04) viewers are taken behind the scenes of the Afghan constitutional assembly, and given access to the spaces of the assembly far beyond the usual media coverage.

(In the video I made with Erin Kelly for the last Sharjah

pretend to be objective, fly-on-the-wall, cinema verité. They are meant simply to convey a sense of what it was like to be there in that moment, and they necessarily do it through my sense of what it was like to be there in that moment.

In this new project for SBX, *The Trespassers*, I am certainly not interested in staging a confrontation with the translators - if that were the case I would be questioning them directly about their experiences, not hiring them to translate documents. Rather I am interested in a series of conceptual questions.

What happens when documents (for example, interrogation transcripts) from which the act of translation and the presence of the translators have been elided are placed back into a live translation situation? What happens when documents (for example, standard operating procedures or legal opinions) which describe the situ-

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'rak'rüm (noun);
 the back room of an art gallery
 where artists and art lovers hang

Mariam Ghani



Mariam Ghani, *A Brief History of Collapses*,
 video still

© Courtesy of the artist

Bio: Mariam Ghani is a Brooklyn-based artist whose research-based practice operates at the intersections between place, memory, history, language, loss, and reconstruction. She has been awarded the NYFA and Soros Fellowships, grants from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, CEC ArtsLink, the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation and the Experimental Television Center, and residencies at LMCC, Eyebeam A...[\[more\]](#)

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- Molly Crabapple
- Cal Crawford
- Rosson Crow
- Aziz + Cucher
- Alexandre da Cunha



Interview with Mariam Ghani

Kassel, June 2012 – Mariam Ghani's research-based projects explore the socio-political histories of specific places, and often respond directly to the site upon which she works and exhibits. For Documenta 13, Ghani collaborated with a team to create the multichannel film, *A Brief History of Collapses*, which is based on and filmed within Kassel's Museum Fridericianum and the Dar ul-Aman Palace in Kabul. In addition she produced *Afghanistan: A Lexicon*, with her father for Documenta's *100 Notes, 100 Thoughts* series.

While Ghani was in between Kassel and Kabul, she took time to respond to my questions about her project, its development, and what it was like to collaborate with her father.



Mariam Ghani, *A Brief History of Collapses*, *Dar ul-Aman*, video still; Courtesy of the artist.

Charles Schultz: *I understand you have an academic background in literature and cinema studies. How do those interests inform A Brief History of Collapses?*

Mariam Ghani: I have a B.A. in Comparative Literature as well as an MFA. My background in comp lit informs much of my work, and in particular the way I think about and work with language and narrative. In *A*

Brief History of Collapses this is perhaps most obvious in the preoccupation with the contrapuntal narratives (a term borrowed from Edward Said) that emerge in the interplay between the architectures and histories of the two buildings I filmed, the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel and the Dar ul-Aman Palace in Kabul.

CS: The term "collapse" could be interpreted many ways; how do you think of it in terms of your film?

MG: The collapses referenced in *A Brief History of Collapses* could be interpreted in several different ways: on the physical plane, as the actual collapses of the actual structures of the two buildings depicted; within the historical narrative, as the recurring cycles of political collapses and recoveries undergone by the two states in which the buildings are situated; and on the metaphorical level, as the collapse of history itself, whether through compression or conflation, the passage of history into myth or myth into history, and the elisions and transmutations that occur when history is rewritten after wars and coup d'etats.

CS: There seems to be a fair amount of symmetry involved on many layers. Not only are there a lot of symmetrical spaces in the architecture of the buildings, but their histories also seem to have a certain (mirrored?) symmetry. Do symmetrical movements play much of a role in the installation?

MG: The buildings themselves are axisymmetrical, so that symmetry informed the way I plotted the trajectories that the cameras and performers take through the spaces. Each channel of video shows one of the two buildings, and for each building/channel, the camera's path was designed so that when the two channels were juxtaposed, the two frames would sometimes be moving in the same direction, and sometimes be mirrored (left on one side, right on the other, up on one side, down on the other). The path of the women seen fleetingly in each building, meanwhile, was planned and edited such that their movement frequently implies a kind of illusory continuity between the two spaces (e.g. one crosses from left to right on the left screen, then the other crosses from left to right on the right screen) even though they are played by two different performers, wearing quite different costumes. Meanwhile, the costumes exemplify certain elements of the production design that may appear to be opposed or mirrored, but actually encode the same meanings; one woman wears mostly black, and the other mostly white, but each is the color of mourning in its specific context.

The video is installed with the two channels projected onto two very large screens (in Kassel, almost floor-to-ceiling) which are arranged in a wide V with a gap in the center, like a hinge or an open book. Facing the screen is a semi-circular bench, separated into two parts with a gap in the center. This is of course a symmetrical arrangement that refers to the architecture of the two buildings, and also to the way the piece connects them (like a hinge) without equating them (allowing them to remain separate).

CS: Can you talk a little about how the Brothers Grimm are incorporated in your narrative?

MG: The slightly heightened language, poetic devices and rhythms of fairytales provide an overall framework for the narration of the video. The introduction references the Grimms directly, along with Afghan folklore and the 1001 Nights, to suggest that the story or stories that follow should be understood as unfolding in the time-out-of-time or nonlinear time of oral history rather than the strict linear progressions of written history. A later section of the narration deals directly with the Grimms, speculating about the reasons behind the turn towards moralization in the later editions of their fairytales. The next story told is about something I refer to as the "war of fairytales" and concerns the uses of existing fairytales, and the writing of new and more overtly political tales, in youth recruitment efforts by various parties in Germany during the Weimar period, which ultimately led to the Allied ban on Grimm tales in the period immediately following WW2. I wanted to include these stories about storytelling -- and particularly stories about the political uses of fairy and folktales, along with stories about books that were banned, burned and stolen -- in order to put forward some ideas about the weight and consequences of narration, the role played by culture (whether art, literature, architecture or folklore) in the construction and reconstruction of national imaginaries, and the ways that myth becomes history and history myth.

Zhang Dali
Matthew Darbyshire
Davis Langlois
Christopher Davison
Petr Davydtchenko
Iole de Freitas
Nick De Pirro
Georganne Deen
Dana DeGiulio
Pablo Delgado
Jen DeNike
Malaka Dewapriya
Rodney Dickson
Dino Dinco
Jim Dine
Lecia Dole-Recio
Daniel Dove
Zhivago Duncan
Mark Dutcher
Jack Early
Stefan Eins
Gregory Euclide
Franklin Evans
Cécile B. Evans
Maarten Vanden Eynde
Erica Eyres
Shepard Fairey
Harun Farocki
Tony Feher
eliza fernand
Joshua Field
Broken Fingaz
Jess Flood-Paddock
Emi Fontana
Chantel Foretich
Eloise Fornoies
Justin Francavilla
Jill Frank
Dana Frankfort
Jade Fusco
Francesca Gabbiani
Anna Galtarossa
Chitra Ganesh
Marc Ganzglass
Theaster Gates
Matt Gil
Alexandra Grant
Nicholas Grider
Benoit Grimbart
Philippe Gronon
Bill Gross
Birta Gudjonsdottir
Shilpa Gupta
Antonia Gurkovska
Summer Guthery
Josephine Haden
Khaled Hafez
Emilie Halpern
Nicola Bergström
Hansen
Margaret Harrison
Heather Hart



Mariam Ghani, *A Brief History of Collapses, Fridericianum*, video still; Courtesy of the artist.

CS: Can you talk a little about the dance and narrative elements? How did these come together?

MG: The movement you see onscreen is certainly choreographed but not necessarily dance in any traditional sense. The two figures pursued by the two cameras are always escaping either the frame of the architecture or the frame of the screen, so they are mostly seen in parts, or partially obscured, or in passing, at a distance or from behind. Usually, they are simply walking, but with a certain purpose, as if towards a definite destination. Another choreography, the staging of small events and objects around or alongside the passage of the camera, also operates simultaneously. These can be very minimal, like a particular photograph hung on a wall, or timed very precisely, like a flurry of burned pages wafting past the camera. In either case the camera does not seem to remark them or react to them, in the same way that it tracks the movement of the women; the camera simply passes by or through them without comment. These objects and events are linked to specific references in the voiceover narration, but the references deliberately occur several minutes before or after the visual cue, so the links are probably not immediately apparent on a first viewing of the video but would be clear to a viewer watching the loop a second time.

CS: The lexicon you created with your father seems like a wonderful project on its own. Have you collaborated with your father before? What was that experience like?

MG: *Afghanistan: A Lexicon*, the notebook that my father and I wrote collaboratively for Documenta's *100 Notes, 100 Thoughts* series, definitely does function as a complete work on its own, but reading it would also reinforce or enrich a viewer's experience of *A Brief History of Collapses*, because the ideas that it examines in a more analytic mode overlap to some extent with the ideas explored in a more poetic register in the video's voiceover narration. In fact, the notebook project came out of an overlap between my thinking about and research for *A Brief History of Collapses* and my father's thinking and research at the time. Specifically, we both were preoccupied with the contemporary significance of the Dar ul-Aman Palace, the king who built it, Amanullah, and the period of his reign, 1919-29. We were also both thinking (and talking together) about how to write a non-linear history of 20th-century Afghanistan, which to us appeared more like a recursive cycle (based on a pattern set during the Amanullah period) than a straight line of causes and effects. The lexicon -- which allows for cross-referencing and multiple, overlapping definitions -- seemed like a form that would allow a different kind of history, or histories, to be written. As far as the collaboration goes, we had actually written together before, but in this case the usual roles were reversed, and I was in the position of the "senior author" with the first say on determining the overall structure and the last edit on every text. My father took this with remarkable grace, and I think we're both quite happy with the result.

Kate Hawkins
Iris Häussler
Julie Heffernan
Pablo Helguera
Jeremy Hight
Desiree Holman
Guo Hongwei
Scarlett Hooft Graafland
Marc Horowitz
Paul Housley
Hudson
David Humphrey
Hush
INSA
Invader
Pooja Iranna
Alex Israel
Alfredo Jaar
Matthew Day Jackson
Malia Jensen
Koo Jeong-A
Theodora Varnay Jones
Parker Jones
Hayv Kahrman
Tillman Kaiser
Eemil Karila
Kathy Kelley
Kristi Kent
Laleh Khorramian
Felix Kiessling
Lee Kit
KLUB7
Aukje Koks
Jeff Koons
Tamara Kostianovsky
Anouk Kruithof
Sojung Kwon
David LaChapelle
Deborah Lader
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Frank Laws
Jason Lazarus
Christine Lee
David Leggett
Matt Leines
Tomas Lemarquis
Laura Letinsky
Louise Lincoln
Hong Ling
Angela Liosi
littlewhitehead
Jake Longstreth
Sarah Maple
Ari Marcopoulos
Renzo Martens
Servane Mary
Jakob Mattner
Eric May
Aspen Mays
Heather McGill
Jeff McLane
Steve McQueen



Mariam Ghani, *A Brief History of Collapses, Dar ul-Aman*, video still; Courtesy of the artist.

CS: *Would you consider A Brief History of Collapses to be a site-specific or site-responsive art work? Do you think it would be effective elsewhere, say in New York?*

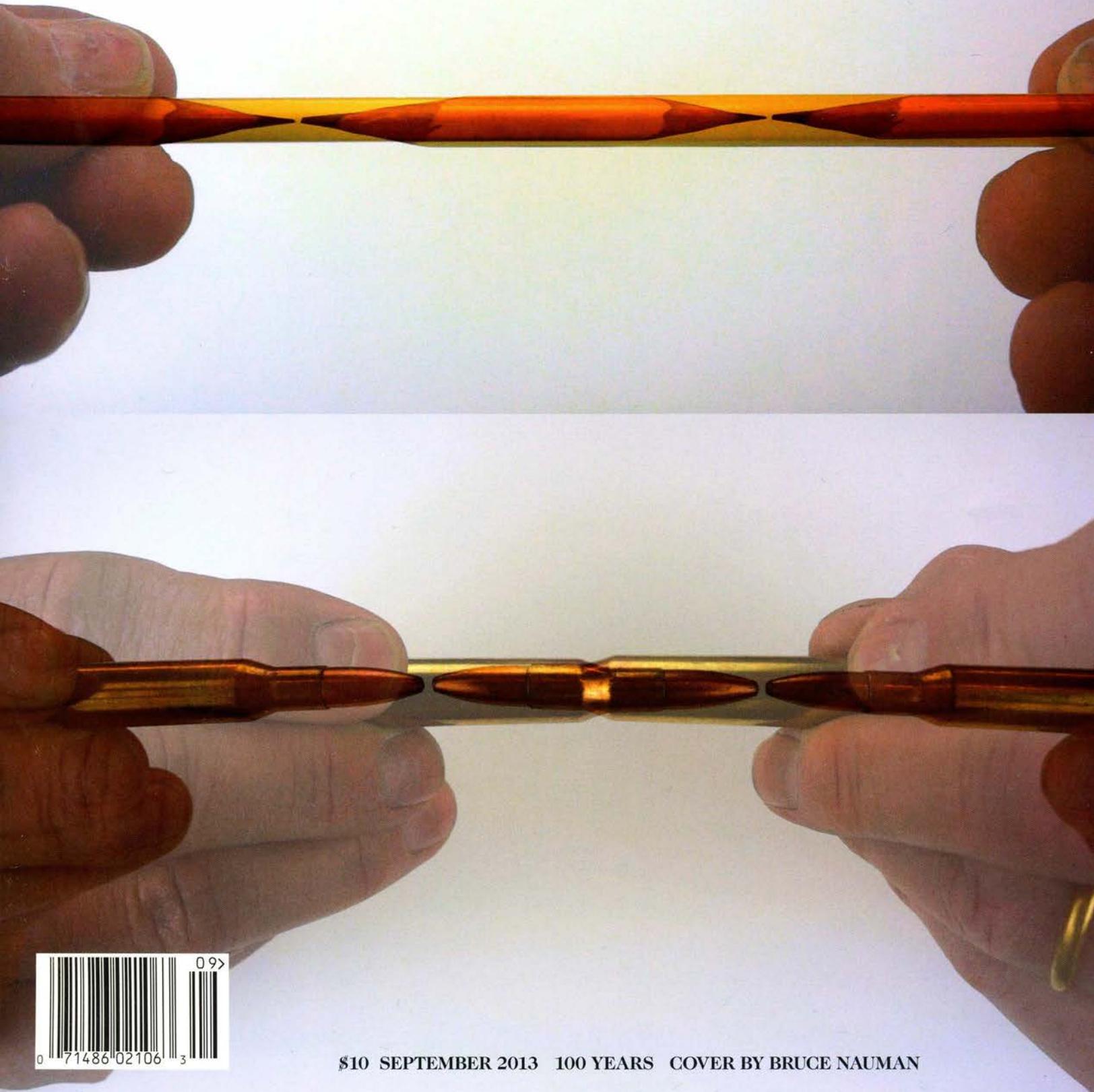
MG: Like a number of previous projects about places or buildings, *A Brief History of Collapses* is a site-responsive work, but not a site-specific one. By which I mean that the video was imagined, developed and made very much in response to the sites of production, the particular buildings where it was filmed, and in relation with their resonances in their particular contexts, the cities of Kassel and Kabul. The installation of that video, however, is a variable and scalable piece that can adapt to many different sorts of settings, rather than an installation developed specifically for the site of viewing at Documenta 13. In fact the project has been premiered almost simultaneously in both Kassel and Kabul, and looks a little bit different, but still recognizably itself, in each place. Of course it adds a little extra fillip to the viewing in Kassel to view the video in the Fridericianum itself, and to recognize onscreen, somehow altered, a corridor you recently walked through. This experience will probably never be repeated after Documenta, however -- in Kabul the video is being shown in another building altogether, not in Dar ul-Aman -- and that seems perfectly appropriate to me. In other places, the effect will be not recognizing the familiar, and having it re-presented as strange and new, but rather being presented with something new and strange, and gradually being coaxed into a kind of intimacy with it.

—Charlie Schultz

ArtSlant would like to thank Mariam Ghani for her assistance in making this interview possible.

Preemptive Media
 Diego Medina
 Saul Melman
 Feng Mengbo
 Mathieu Mercier
 Christopher Lawrence
 Mercier
 Annette Messenger
 Jazz-minh Moore
 Justin Mortimer
 Yoshitomo Nara
 Neighborhood Public
 Radio
 Dona Nelson
 Daniel Nevers
 Camilla Newhagen
 Kristina Newhouse
 Kori Newkirk
 David Nicholson
 Rachel Niffenegger
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 Philosophy of Time
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Art in America



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Five artists discuss their creative encounters with new technologies and digital culture.

DIGITAL EFFECTS



Introduction by Megan Heuer

IMPACT OF DIGITAL technologies on the way contemporary art is made and experienced has become a recent subject of conversation and debate. The discussions among artists, critics and curators are often polemical and definitive. Given easy access to far-flung information, increased attention spans and new models of circulation and distribution, the way we view art is changing. At the same time, artists are embracing digital forms and concepts, not simply posting their work online but deploying the software and hardware that increasingly structure contemporary life. The influence of digital culture—which itself is neither static nor linear—has altered how artists produce and show their work, whatever medium they choose.

Ed Atkins, Mariam Ghani, Lucy Raven, Michael Wang and Aleksandra Domanović are five artists who engage with

digital technologies, from laptops and digital cameras to Google research, advanced software for 3-D imaging and interactive design. The texts that follow are their responses to some basic questions about the role of digital processes in their practices. These artists belong to a generation that came of age with personal computers and the Internet, but what they have in common is not only generational. They all approach digital technologies as potential means of production (ones that reshape the nature and value of human labor, artistic or otherwise) and as everyday aspects of contemporary life that provide a foundation for their thinking. Whether they create artwork that exists online, that circulates between different formats or that questions what it means to be human, these artists shed light on the various ways that new modes of producing and receiving information affect our understanding of ourselves and our world.

View of Aleksandra Domanović's exhibition "From you to me," 2012, at Kunsthalle Basel. Courtesy Tanya Leighton, Berlin. Photo Gunnar Meier.

MEGAN HEUER is a writer based in New York. See Contributors page.





MARIAM GHANI

Mariam Ghani:
*A Brief History of
Collapses*, 2011-12,
video, approx. 22
minutes.

Some quick caveats: I may be older than you think I am; I actually remember the Web before Google, used MS-DOS and Prodigy, and logged onto my first e-mail address via telnet. I think of my students as the generation that really came of age with access to the Internet, in the sense that they experienced that access as a given, not a privilege. I also think this conception of networked culture as always on, always changing and always accessible applies only in some parts of the world, not all of it.

I primarily think of digital technologies as tools that I use to make my work. Like any tools, they shape my sense of the limits and possibilities of the media with which I work. Unlike some older tools, most digital technologies evolve constantly and rapidly, so their limits and possibilities are not fixed but fluctuating. For example, over the 14 years that I have worked with video, shifts in production and post-production technologies have brought film, video, photographic and online practices closer and closer together, to the point where the boundaries between these disciplines are increasingly blurred. The research that feeds into my projects, and the writing around or alongside projects, has also been reshaped by technological shifts over the same period. Long-form online and offline research and writing

are now continuous with an everyday practice of online reading/viewing/listening, archiving and annotation, performed through tools like Twitter and as part of ongoing projects, some of which (like the experimental archive *Index of the Disappeared*, 2004-) involve the re-materialization of documents distributed primarily online.

Most importantly, perhaps, my early work with Net art, interactive installations and other database forms decisively shaped my approach to art-making and the relationship between artwork and audience, even when I moved away from explicitly programmed interactivity. In some ways, I still look at content, form and audience in terms of database, interface and user experience. Every project begins as a collection of research materials and then acquires one interface or more: a map of connections, a narrative reconstruction, a performed or photographic or cinematic sequencing, a lexicon or index, a critical interpretation. The form (interface) through which content (database) is accessed is partly determined by the third variable, user experience. I ask myself: what response should this particular content be evoking from the audience? Active engagement with objects or ideas, passive immersion in an environment or narrative, sly subversion of expectations, attraction (of one kind) mixed with repulsion (of another)? I think about the conditions of viewing, and the quality of attention likely to be paid to the



Two screenshots from Mariam Ghani & Chitra Ganesh's interactive online archive *Index of the Disappeared: The Guantanamo Effect*, 2013. Courtesy Creative Time Reports, New York.

CMUS

- "Guantanamo North" *no right to challenge your imprisonment*
- 79% Muslim Population
- experiments in social isolation *NO PHYSICAL CONTACT;*
- Florence ADX Supermax reborn *A BAN on ALL HUMAN TOUCH*
- severely restricted communication

Current CMUs?
Terre Haute, Indiana & Marion, IL → one 15 minute call a month

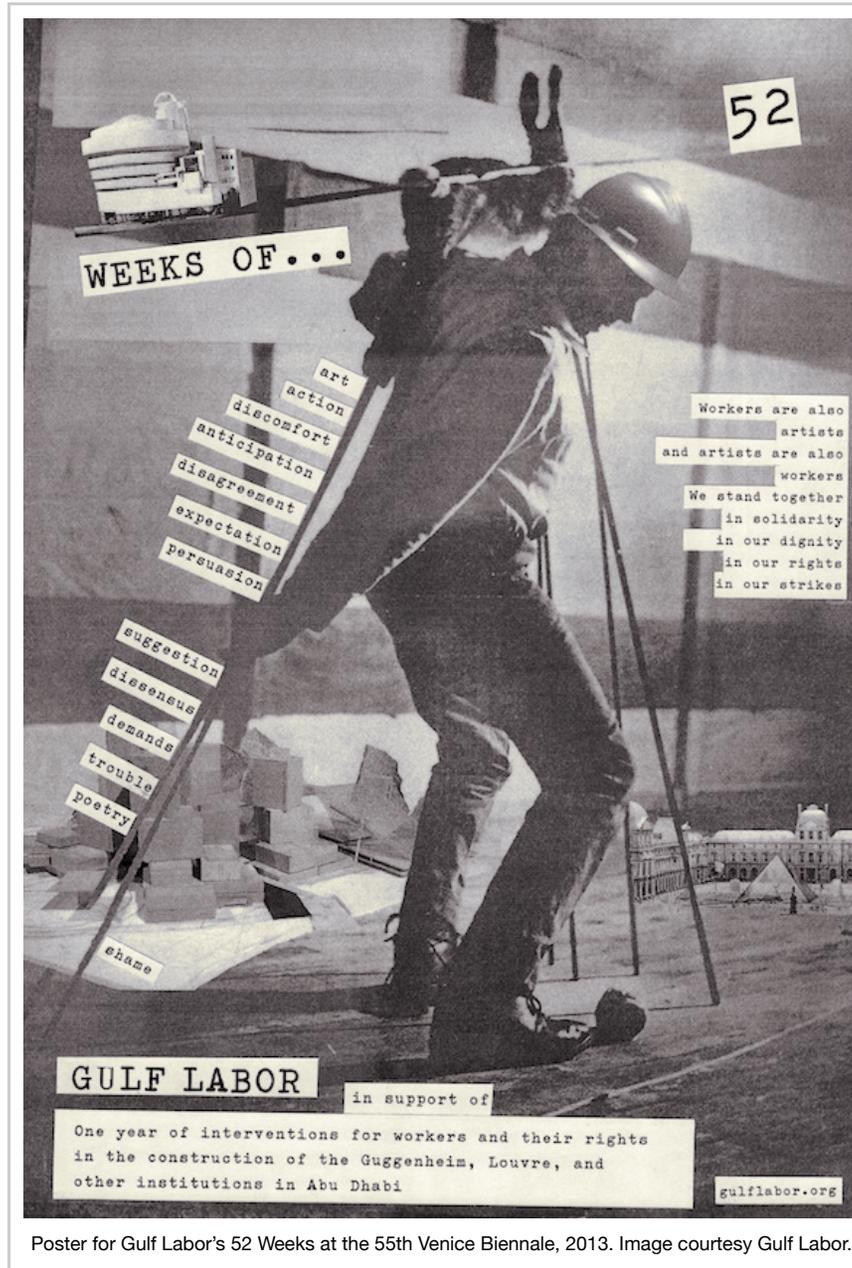
DOCUMENTS IN ARCHIVE
 Aref v. Holder, NYTimes story, NPR audio report, CCR Fact Sheet, Psychological Effects of Isolation (evidence), MacGowan testimony, Shane letters

CROSS-REFERENCES: Prison as Experiment, Surveillance, Islamophobia, Dehumanization, Chilling of Free Speech....

work depending on whether it is experienced in a gallery, in a public space, in a film festival or time-bound performance, or online. Based on those variables, I often either create multiple interfaces to a project database, or build multiple layers of user experience—different ways of viewing or understanding a project, depending on its context or the amount of time an audience can give to it—into a single interface.

This way of thinking obviously derives from a particular fluency with interaction design, but even more specifically,

it was influenced by my graduate studies with interactive art pioneers Grahame Weinbren and Perry Hoberman, from whom I took away the maxim: “nothing should be interactive without a reason,” meaning that interactivity is never an end in itself; it should always have a purpose. I suppose my approach to digital technologies in general has been similar. The technology is never an end in itself; instead, the best tool for the current need is chosen and deployed, as transparently as possible, to serve that purpose.



Poster for Gulf Labor's 52 Weeks at the 55th Venice Biennale, 2013. Image courtesy Gulf Labor.

One of the initial signatories of the coalition's boycott of the