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Narrativising Dispossessed Histories

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NARRATIVISING DISPOSSESSED HISTORIES

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PHD BY PUBLISHED WORK

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ABSTRACT: NARRATIVISING DISPOSSESSED HISTORIES

VALI MAHLOUJI

The commentary investigates the ethics, politics and mechanisms of the retrospective mining of cultural absences, voids, silences, and blind spots where the condemned artefact or cultural object was forcefully and intentionally disappeared by authoritarian, dominant, hegemonic cultural control systems. Each project in this commentary is a creative and generative counter-performance that grapples with memory and counter-memory to produce and militate a space of appearance - materially, affectively, and experientially. The commentary intends to critically evaluate four of my ongoing historical, artistic, and curatorial projects and consider their formal, methodological, and theoretical frameworks. It will discuss the ideations, methodologies and intentions of each investigation, re-presentation, and the creative steps deployed to retroactively engage and exploit those cultural artefacts to expand knowledge, reconciliation, and justice. It will consider the ethics and politics of such militancy. Processual retracing, assembling, and reintegration – the action – is based on performatively opening a great occasion for asserting the “negative” against the visible ‘positive’ established version of history as told by the victor. Curating-as-practice is designed as forensic investigations, performative militancies, and re-constructive system-makings to escape, bypass or refute authoritarian injuries/injustices and to reclaim their restorative possibilities/potentialities.

Creative tension is wrested in narrativising rather than narrating historical discourse, where representation is supplanted by manners of speaking/seeing and being heard/seen. The premise is that the psychodynamic technologies and processes of loss, reconciliation, and justice-seeking correlate with the therapeutic requirement to be seen and witnessed. Negotiations through rituals of collective acknowledgement and witnessing by the wider group are necessary for the voided experiences, traumatised histories, and injured spaces to attain symbolic and real meaning. In line with social constructivist theories, grief, mourning, reconciliation, and cultural healing are considered not primarily interior processes but intricately social ones. The community of spectators are actively implicated as potential witnesses in a dialectical confrontation with historical truth.

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I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Still do the southerly Bug waters know,
Mother the wave that wounded you so?

—Paul Celan, 'Nearness of Graves', *The Sand from the Urns*, 1948¹

PROLOGUE

The ideas in this commentary have been developed over more than a decade of research and exhibition-making dedicated to investigating marginalised, condemned, obscured, and precarious art histories, particularly those that have endured violence. Those violated sites have perhaps remained obscure for a spectrum of reasons ranging from accidental incongruencies of time and place to those that have been purposefully obliterated, erased and dismembered due to material destruction, acts of censorship, or other political, economic, and human contingencies. The forensic lens through which the four projects investigate material vestiges focuses on filling in the gaps or constructing sustainable structures for disappeared histories from the point of view of the defeated. Activating such sites of disappearance is discussed with particular attention to their potential as subterranean reservoirs of radical, disruptive, reconciliatory, or restorative activations and resurgences. Those sites of disappearance are recognised not only as subterranean repositories but as sites of contradictory affect, and as fields of conflict-filled negotiation. They invariably act against various concrete praxes of situations of dominant, conventional forms of authoritarian thought, practice, representation, or interpretation. The four sections grapple with the central question of how meaning is communicated through an artistic practice addressed at long-term effects associated with systemic and selective amputations of cultural lineage and memory. Each section represents a case study in point and reactivates a micro-ecology of forced disappearance or obscurity, a singled-out condemned object, event or space, revealing information and knowledge on a macro level of systemic in the present. The sections investigate the nature and function of what I coin as cultural 'deterritorialisation' and 'reterritorialisation' as tools of political and cultural

reorderings of society. Genocidal, totalising and concretistic regimes never only erase, invisibilise, demonise or amputate (deterritorialisation); they fill in the voids and injuries with constructed replacements/truths (reterritorialisation). The *raison d'être* of my practice is breaking the silence on those violations in the civic sphere. That becomes an essential component of reality testing.

The four case-studies operate on the boundaries of narrative as debated in Structuralist/Post-Structuralist terms, where there is a creative tension between narrative form and historical discourse, or as Hayden White puts it, between “a historical discourse that narrates and one that narrativises, between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns the world to speak itself and speak itself as a story”.² As elaborated by White, “narrative should be considered less as a form of representation than as a manner of speaking about events”³. In that sense, discourse is characterised by “subjectivity” which is explicitly or implicitly linked only to the “ego” of the “person who maintains the discourse”. Narrative, by contrast, is defined by “objectivity” and “by the absence of all reference to the narrator”⁴. The assumed objective narrativising story-telling style and emplotting of accounts in my projects are bent on setting up and maintaining a critical distance (in a Brechtian sense) of spectatorship.

1. Recreating the Citadel

The need to tell our story to ‘the rest’, to make ‘the rest’ participate in it, had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse.

—Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 1947⁵

Recreating the Citadel is a political archaeology of a traumatising and criminal historical fragment ‘committed’ by the state in Iran on the eve of the establishment of the new Islamist state. The project is an artistic, historical, and political narrativisation of that crime which involves the torching and destruction of the red-light ghetto of Tehran in 1979. It is centred on a deep, revelatory, expansive excavation (in material, evidentiary, and symbolic senses) of an urban landscape in which subaltern social, spatial, and historical knowledge is submerged. The landscape, the setting, is one of the southwestern neighbourhoods of Tehran, Iran. The geographical site ‘contains’ the old red-light district and, as such, the social and spatial experiences associated with the area - its relation to human life, the *polis*, social aesthetics, politics and dynamics, and the relationship between marginal and

metropolitan citizenry. The project re-exposes it into social memory and the public domain and utilises the site to unmask an early and lesser-studied crime committed during the early period of the nascent Islamic state in Iran in 1979, exposing it as an epicentral trigger point for the establishment and perpetuation of a state-enforced project of violence against the citizen and history itself. My first exhibition of the recovered material happened at the Foam Museum of Photography, Amsterdam (2014), and thereafter toured the Musée d'art Moderne, Paris and MAXXI Museum, Rome (2014 - 2015). Consequently, the materials toured Photo London Fair (2015), Tate Modern, London (2017-18), Rohtas Gallery2, Lahore (2020), De le Warr Pavilion (2019), and Arnolfini (2019-2020). Tate Modern acquired my project in 2016.

2. A Utopian Stage

"[It is] always most terrifying, most dangerous when elimination and erasure is done in the name of the public, or even worse in the pretence of the protection of the public good."

—James Baldwin⁶

A Utopian Stage is an archaeological mining of the terrain of an art object that was declared 'decadent' and officially banned by the Islamist state project in Iran. Its materials were removed from public access and circulation. The project explores the potential energies and debates, unlocks the atrophied potential of condemned cultural spaces. The research project excavates and recirculates documentary and archival traces of a radically post-colonial, virtually forgotten experimental international performance festival in southern Iran between 1967-77, known as Shiraz-Persepolis. The cultural space was declared decadent and un-Islamic by a religious fatwa in September 1977. Accordingly, all archives and documents associated with the festival, collated by the National Iranian Radio and Television (the festival's founder) specifically amassed for public dissemination, were banned from broadcast, access, and public circulation by the new Islamist state. The authorities forbade access to any of the festival's trove of audio and video recordings, photographic documentations of rehearsals and performances, its vast array of publications, which included critical research into theatre, conferences, annual catalogues with their extensive and in-depth artistic contents, play scripts, bulletins published daily during each festival, program notes booklets, and posters. Some of the material was destroyed and burnt, and the remaining are inaccessible

and censored to the present day. The point of departure of the thesis is the forensic recovery of the missing artefact (the festival's territory) and its traces. Countering cultural cleansing, the project salvages vestiges of archives, disparate materials, documents, and data from the festival's stage and recirculates the material shreds of evidence. It critically analyses the recovered artistic terrain and the praxes and genealogies of its radicality and experimentation. It undoes cultural atrophication and seeks a revolutionary reconciliatory right to assimilation where stigmatising evangelical condemnation deems an object or cultural space corrupt, decadent, immoral, obscene, and blasphemous. Interest in the truth about the festival's ideations, content and productions has grown considerably since my project began circulating its contents and ideations in 2008. The first instance of public discussion about the festival happened at a conference I organised at the Barbican Centre, London, in 2008 as part of my curatorial programme *Iran: New Voices*. My first exhibition of the recovered material was mounted at the Musée d'art Moderne, Paris and MAXXI Museum, Rome 2014. Consequently, the materials toured Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 2015, Dhaka Art Summit, in 2018, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, 2019, Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju, 2020, and its American debut was postponed due to Covid and rescheduled for 2023 in Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

3. Cultural Atlas

*Here, in the new town,
boredom is pregnant with desires, frustrated frenzies, unrealised possibilities. A magnificent life is
waiting
just around the corner, and far, far away.
—Henri Lefebvre*

Cultural Atlas is an archaeology of selected side-lined post-colonial potentials and aspirations of utopian thought and action overshadowed by meta-political global agendas of conservative neo-liberal values and agendas of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It is a reclamation of world systems of *unfinished* aspirational actions, ideas, and ideals of the decolonising world, stretching back to the nineteenth century and exploding in the second half of the twentieth century. The atlas retrieves and connects networks of divergent and convergent unequal bodies of radical action and *pensée* that circulate in non-linear historical cycles

within a great adventurous single but not unified collective unfinished master narrative of desire. It operates at the junction of art, revolution, and international modernisms by conjuring and imagining a world that may have ‘happened’ if neo-liberal capitalism had not so dominantly superseded and castrated or thwarted options for ‘civilisations’ to launch alternative “escapes” and emancipating plots. The plotting imagines invigorating interrupted desires and restoring the vitality and value of desire upon which humans build their civilisations. A relational dynamic exists between the concrete and the abstract, the material and the ideational. The format takes inspiration from a decentring psychoanalytic free association of democratically arranged rhizomatic networks; its spatial design may also be seen as a parody of cyberspace. The research artwork remains an open-ended and ongoing live object of multiple and accumulating or dissipating galactic thrusts and desires. The artwork debuted at Dhaka Art Summit (2018) and toured Garage Museum, Moscow (2019, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2018), and Asia Cultural Centre, Gwangju (2020).

4. Baalbek: Archives of an Eternity

“A civilisation that withdraws into itself atrophies.”

—Aime Cesaire⁷

Baalbek: Archives of an Eternity presents a longitudinal, empirical, and sociological research project into the oppressive political symbolism of ‘archaeology’ itself when it sets up an imbalanced hierarchy of cultures. It unpacks the site of the Lebanese city of Baalbek before and beyond the weight and burden of its epic Roman monumentality and its emblematic rise as a national brand of the modern Lebanese state. The overbearing burden of history and ‘civilisation’, as told from the singular vantage point of ‘noble’ Roman power, is felt perhaps nowhere more strongly, magnificently, and monumentally than in Baalbek. The project anchors creative tension between monumental hegemonic ‘standardised’ history frozen in time and space and that of diverse, multiple, contrary, overlapping, complex and enduring subaltern histories across millennia. The encyclopaedical excavation of the city sets out to unravel multiple and layered realities of the city and its histories to bypass, dismantle and challenge an unhealthily deadening state-sanctioned monolithic account of history. The project reveals Baalbek as a microcosmic paradigmatic

container of developmental history's struggle with inherited historical centralities and submerged fragmented marginalities and historical casualties. Through an integrative approach that accesses multivalent historical landscapes and experiences, the project crosses various political and cultural red lines and sensitivities. It aims to expose and visibilise current explosive political, social, cultural, and ecological tensions and dead ends. *Baalbek: Archives of and Eternity* was the first major exhibit on the full breadth of the history of Baalbek, encompassing 10,000 years of urban history to the present. It involved many state and independent institutions (General Directorate of Archaeology, Musée National-Beyrouth, National Library of Lebanon, American University of Beirut, Lebanese University, St. Joseph University, Alba University, Baalbek International Festival) and ministries of Interior, Culture and Tourism, as well as European missions to Lebanon (Orient-Institut Beirut, French and German Embassies).

INTRODUCTION

My practice began with the intention to fill in blind spots in the canon with those overlooked, to draw attention to incredible works of art, cultural practices, moments, and events that were not only missed but also declared decadent and removed. The artefacts at the core of my projects merit great attention and demand their deserved location in the variegated polyphonic stories of cultures and peoples. My archaeological forensics have resulted in studying and including those objects in public collections, art history syllabi and historical accounts. Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD) has worked alongside Tate Modern, The British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, Musée de Grenoble, Smithsonian Institute, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art to place artists and artworks into public collections. Exhibitions have spanned Asia, Europe and the United States. Public and academic lectures, workshops, seminars and other forms of educational practices, including supervision of academic theses, are integral to the work of AOTFD. The forensic and critical work of AOTFD has attracted a new generation of researchers and critical thinkers to pick up the baton and carry the impulse forth. AOTFD regularly contributes to curation and art history syllabi at the Courtauld Institute of Art and Goldsmiths, University of London. Over the past decade, I have lectured at various institutions, from the National College of Arts, Lahore, to Stanford University, Stanford. In the near future, I will teach a syllabus (System-Design in Research and Exhibition-Making) at the New Centre for Research and Practice (2023), through which students from all corners of the world engage with the AOTFD approach to delve into various investigations ranging from the Philippines and India to Poland and Mexico.

Expansion of knowledge and complexifying the landscape of traditional art history by reinserting new material, geographies, artists, networks, systems and attitudes is a by-product of AOTFD's deep research. However, the slow-burn, long-durational research practice and exhibition-making have contended with stigma, lack of funding, tone-deafness, and, most difficult of all, political violence. The geographies and spaces of interest are precisely those in conflict, war, strife and closure conditions. AOTFD draws a distinct line between its retrievals and recirculations and

the work of nineteenth-century archaeologists. One mustn't be instrumentalised by 'first world' public institutions to fill their coffers, acquire assets, and aggrandise their hegemonic positions as the commanders of world collections and histories. AOTFD has helped set up estates for significant and prolific artists not collected by international institutions in their lifetime, such as the late Iranian photographer Kaveh Golestan and the late Iranian painter, sculptor, theatre designer and assemblage artist Bahman Mohassess. AOTFD exported their artistic legacy abroad. From the early days, it was imperative to withhold some of the most seminal works of the artists safe for a future return to their homelands. AOTFD conscientiously rejected to become a conduit for the removal of material goods from their geographies. A fine line has been negotiated between universalist and worldly attitudes and needs and the imperative for potent artefacts and cultural objects to remain close to the ground and retain their potential for informing, subverting and supplanting formal, aesthetic, social, and political norms at home. Much of the research is devoted to safeguarding the materials for a better day at home. The powerful institutions of Western Europe and North America have been taking advantage of AOTFD's research and exposure. There is a distinct absence of Asian and African institutions in acquiring, although I have ensured AOTFD's exhibitions travel to Dhaka, Gwangju, Moscow, Lahore, Singapore, and Dubai. The issue is power—newly enlarging economies such as UAE, China, and Saudi Arabia will no doubt follow suit with their museum-building enterprises. However, those are precisely the spaces that would want to dismantle the research, approach and, on occasion, the very artefact on show by AOTFD. My exhibitions, texts and lectures faced censorship in Tehran, London, Singapore, Moscow, Dubai, and Istanbul, while Dhaka, Lahore and Gwangju embraced them.



1. AOTFD's complete research archive *Recreating the Citadel of Šahr-e Now* as shown in all exhibitions.



2. AOTFD's incomplete research archive *Recreating the Citadel of Šahr-e Now* as shown by Tate Modern (2017-2018) after acquiring the rights from AOTFD to display it with twenty vintage prints from Kaveh Golestan's *Prostitute* series. Tate Modern removed a substantial portion of AOTFD's conjured archive, dismantling the political ethos of the project. The museum's concern was initially expressed about spatial and design issues and subsequently related to the danger of triggering the public.

AOTFD's mission is never principally focussed on the object but is bent on the de-fetishisation of the art object. The affective, experiential, and ideational networks of potentials, conflicts, connections, contradictions, supplements, dismantlements and realisations drive the research's militancy and curatorial design as a form of resistance. The core art object is a vehicle for an interrogative, supplementary rhizomatic and advancing pursuit of uncomfortable knowledge, experience and realisation. The creative act is in a system building that grasps the great depth, intensity and richness of contested, violated, and repressed sites. Creatively is unleashed through an intentional, directional 'explosion' in the present. Here, the philosopher Walter Benjamin's critique of historicism (linearity, past and progress) has been particularly valuable, as has Jacques Derrida's extension of Jean Jacques Rousseau's notion of the supplement and Jean-Luc Nancy's interest in world-making.^{8/9/10} In those respects, agitational and confrontational forms of intra-cultural reparation and reconciliation are paradigmatically core to my pursuits.

In his Thesis V in *Illuminations*, Benjamin writes:

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. [...] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.)¹¹

In his Thesis VI in *Illuminations*, Benjamin continues:

"To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah "comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious."¹²

Jacques Derrida's deliberations on the supplement as beyond the compensatory, complimentary or addition to the thing but as the endangering contamination, deconstruction, dismantling of the unity of, and ultimately substitution of the thing itself has been a guiding torch. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes:

"But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself.

"This second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first. We shall constantly have to confirm that both operate within Rousseau's texts. But the inflexion varies from moment to moment. Each of the two significations is by turns effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other. But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement is exterior, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added, alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it. Unlike the *complement*, dictionaries tell us, the supplement is an "exterior addition" (Robert's *French Dictionary*)."¹³

Recreating the Citadel of Šahr-e Now crucially enacted and performed certain connections and systems that *could not then be unthought*. the project takes on a radical, even activist, bent whether declared or not. The receiver is left with the (perception of) *responsibility*, a requirement to react, not ignore, as silence constitutes an extension of violence (beyond complicity). Kaveh Golestan's powerful artworks are deployed as a supplement – reintroduced to the 'whole'. Their deployment does not simply 'fill an erased gap' in history but activates a disruption of a multiplicity of ostensibly more consequential given narratives. Furthermore, the gendered violence and terror inflicted on the Citadel subjects supplement the general widespread continuum of terror that defines the systemic power dynamic between the totalitarian state and citizens in Iran.

Early on, I articulated the mission of my archaeological forensics as follows:

"In historicising, it must be clear, the aim is not to resolve, so to speak, the contestation embodied within such historical objects. Archaeology of the Final Decade is not, in essence, a project of setting straight a record. Retracing and reclaiming as reconstructive processes are directed primarily towards an act of intra-cultural assimilation: to withdraw the object from the hubbub, reintroduce it into the public domain and reincorporate it into cultural discourse as an act of healthy historical reconciliation. It is ultimately the authentic and legitimate right for any culture to come to terms with its own traces. If the removal of the historical archive annotated a form of closure, its reopening will facilitate and motivate new value production, symbolically and materially. Whilst the closure signified a forced proselytising resolution, the opening demands a break with accepted truths. Exposure and evaluation will inevitably and positively go some distance in demystifying and demythologising the historical object. It would not simplify the relational dynamics at play, either in respect of aesthetic and cultural genealogies or in terms of non-correlation with dominant political discourses that define the national space. On the contrary, reinscribing the laden object and deconstructing the often dichotomous pre- and the fixed post-revolutionary attitudes is to retrospectively complexify the relational symbolic power systems of culture and politics in Iran during the late 1960s-1970s and beyond the revolutionary juncture."¹⁴

My practice borrows from Jean Luc Nancy's critical thinking around "a world". In *On Creation*, Nancy writes:

*"To create the world means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence. But this means to conduct this struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this world is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely what forms the justice and the meaning of a world."*¹⁵

With an ode to Lyotard, Nancy continues:

*"a judgment about ends, consequently the secret or explicit decision that necessarily subtends a philosophical gesture, and which constitutes its ethos, the decision about what matters-- --for example "a world," a world "worthy of the name"-cannot be a choice between possibilities, but only and each time a decision about what is neither real nor possible: a decision about what is in no way given in advance, but which constitutes the eruption of the new, that is unpredictable because it is without face, and thus the "beginning of a series of appearances" by which Kant defines freedom in its relation to the world."*¹⁶

What my practice absorbs from Nancy is the insistence to *create a world*, a world that opens up *each and every* struggle-for-a-world simultaneously. The creation of A Cultural Atlas constitutes Nancian ethos. Its means, its want of *being-in-the-world* aligns with the Nancian manners of creating. The simultaneity of engagements and openings of modes of history that push for utopian possibilities defy a dominant world narrative. As a living object of conjured moments and emergent worlds clambering to be seen and heard, it insists on not *telling a story* but *interrogating a world*. Its active world-making of intra- and inter-alliances, of talking with rather than arguing about, defies the impositions of a dominant constrictor charter.

Under the "Archaeology of the Final Decade" rubric and through the long-durational and advancing research, fieldwork, exposure, debate and exhibition-making, my process began with an impulse to retrieve objects and evolved into creating an approach, logic, *modus operandi*, methodological and theoretical framework. The advancing nature and requirement of each of the four projects - whether over years or in a single process - and the accumulative knowledge creations across the span have come to constitute a corpus of world-making which I aim to discuss in the present commentary.

The Personal and the Political

Before I expand further, I must make a series of disclosures and clarifications. The work is rooted in my (personal) lived experience of persecution and exile by design and default. I am acutely aware of my self-identification with the situations I depict. My interest in deploying and navigating artistic and cultural artefacts removed from the public eye – omitted accidentally or purposefully - is neither accidental nor merely academic or aesthetic. There is an interplay and often an overlap between my worlds of ideas and aesthetics and the social and political encounters that have shaped my personal life as an exiled cultural practitioner and curator. The dynamic interplay between the two is integral to my practice. My research, discussed here, often traverses an immensely complex and sensitive range of violated cultural landscapes – those exposed to social displacement, annihilation, and deliberate disappearance – where human life in those spaces may equally experience violence. Those relating to my homeland, Iran, put me in the most difficult position of choosing between my work – the conscientious drive to expose and repair - and my safety at home. I have received threatening criticisms, questioning, and messages from officials politically linked to the state of Iran. My last trip due home in 2016 was aborted after I received a call letting me know that I would be questioned on arrival; more alarming was the information that the only reason to go back ought to be an unavoidable family reason. The final message was not to expect any meaningful help or assistance if I were to grapple with security and intelligence units. My curatorial work had arrived at a turning point: I was advised to halt my research and exhibitions or to make the decision to embrace self-enforced exile. The decision to continue my work was a difficult personal decision. The Iranian projects I set out to complete faced resistance from the diaspora due to their contentiousness. Funding, backing and support did not come easily from our Iranian diaspora, itself aware of security issues. After much consideration and conversations with colleagues in similar situations and grappling with similar dilemmas, I decided to charge ahead with my commitments and forgo the privilege of a safe return to my country. Inevitably, the severance with home liberated the capacity to 'speak'. It was a wake-up call that artistic and curatorial engagements with actual violence behold their

dangers – engagement has an implication, even at a distance, even when expressed obliquely through art and about crimes committed in the past. Whether to self-censor or to expose both have their dimensions of violence. One is internalised and exercised by the subjects in return for certain privileges, such as safe contact with home. The other sacrifices contact in return for the privilege of freedom of choice, action, and agency. The real fact that violence perpetuated by totalitarian conditions comes in many forms and hauntingly follows the citizens around their lives and into their homes became palpable. There are always avoidance methods—obedience, conformity, or compliance. Totalitarian control systems are most effective when they successfully delegate the perpetuation and management of violence to the citizens themselves. Either directed at the self and self-honoured values (compliance and conformity) or even more complicatedly performed as complicity.

With hindsight, regarding the Iran-linked projects, the current historical moment has proved they were timely and significant. Although they began over a decade and a half ago, they stand in line with the current climate and the revolutionary uprising in Iran as valid aesthetically and politically driven expressions. One may claim they stand on the 'right's side of history in so far as they pose candid, difficult (often dangerous) and apt questions and point the finger at the very legitimacy of the state, so far as a cultural project or curatorial platform can achieve. Engagement with geographies and topographies of contestations, traumas, neglects, or omissions is common to all. Re-appearance and re-circulation are intended as a necessary and healthy act of reconciliation. Though the contestations are alive, wounds are deep, and the future remains uncertain.

On the personal note, I was deeply conscious, as a child and later as an adult, of the devastation, violence, injustice and pain that plagued everyone and everyday life between 1978 (I was sent to boarding school in England in 1979, but I returned after three months) and 1984 while I remained in Iran and throughout the years of my travels back home until 2016. I adamantly set myself apart from complicities and conformism in my practice (whether artistic, commercial or political). I saw it as an indelible responsibility to raise awareness, resist, and denounce systemic violence – to call out the crime and criminal - because of my privilege shielded by exile. Both first projects discussed in this commentary – investigations into the *fatwa* against the Festival of Arts and forensics into the burning, destruction, and violence inflicted on the residents of the Citadel – sprang directly from my personal need to resolve

conflicting affective and intellectual positions, to uncover truths about those areas of social, cultural, ethical - simply inhumane - violence, contestation and amnesia. Recovery and recirculation, critical analysis and witnessing were part of my personal, emotional and intellectual maturation vis a vis my relationships with memory, homeland, childhood and present conditions. A holistic and critically forensic approach and system of world-making evolved further down the line, becoming the core of my artistic and cultural attitude, process and practice in narrativising dispossessed histories.

RECREATING THE CITADEL

Taking its departure point from a group of portraits by photographer Kaveh Golestan, *Recreating the Citadel* evolved into a forensic narrativisation of an unaccounted-for crime that took place in the red-light district of Tehran called “Citadel (Qal’eh) of Šahr-e Now”. The project claimed it as a defining socio-political and ethical moment – an epicentral and initiation marker of a regime of terror and violence by the Islamist state in Iran. An unknown number of women were charred to death in a deliberate fire (January 1979); some were arrested, and others exiled. No one was charged; the case was shelved. Three sex workers were executed six months later (July 1979) by religious courts for “corruption on earth”. A year later (1980), the district was demolished, removed from sight, memory, and justice. In 1997 municipal authorities reterritorialized the voided site - tabula rasa - as a recreational area, library, movie theatre, and Razi Park with an artificial lake.

Chronicling A Crime

Recreating the Citadel was the first truth-seeking, forensic work on the site and its plight. The title ‘citadel’ (*qal’eh* in Persian) referred to the district ensconced within a wall as a gated ghetto (1953-1979). *Šahr* in Persian denotes ‘land’, meaning ‘town/city’; *No* is etymologically from the same root as ‘new’ in English. ‘Šahr-e Now’ translates as ‘New Town (City/Place)’. As implied, the research set out to spatially, temporally, materially, functionally, and auratically reconstruct and commemorate the disappeared object/subjecthood of the site, its people, and its functions. To *rehumanise the void*, to call back the vanished site, reimagine it, and live with the spectre of memory and a Foucauldian “counter-memory”, *constructing a remembering* in a socio-political context.¹⁷ Finally, to implicate spectators as witnesses. Call for justice. Call out perpetrators and wider systemic violence.

The project’s constructed remembering of that organised violence and that historical crime of paradigmatic dimensions is critical. Having unearthed a seminal group of photographic evidence, *Recreating the Citadel* formally evolved into a forensic plotting of a crime – an investigation into the closure, burning, and

destruction, mysteriously unaccounted for, undocumented and left to historical amnesia. The sex workers were failed by all, including the intelligentsia, who did not stand up for their civil and human rights.¹⁸ That crime had not been called out and certainly never contextualized. It became paramount for me to read intersectional history and link the events that transpired at Šahr-e Now as neither random nor ‘the will of the people’. They were directly linked to gender-based violence. That gender/sexuality/body-political violence was not unique but rooted in an evangelical/ideological practice of sin and retribution as enforced by post-Islamist rule in Iran.¹⁹ It was an integral component of an evangelical state-sponsored regressive (populist), destructive, inhumane motivation bent on social, gender, and sexual violence.²⁰ My project was instead bent on undoing that: challenging the status quo, the silence, the tolerance, the conformity that had been cultivated around it. To reveal that the violence inflicted on Šahr-e Now and its people was neither random nor mystifying – it was systemic. It was an early precursor, an epicentral initiation point, and a signifying marker of a totalising system of discriminatory control and violence that was to become a terrorising norm. as I attested in my essay titled, “Trauma and Traces in the Photography of Hrair Sarkissian”:

“Systems of terror not only deny the truth about crime; they erase all traces of crime and all traces of scars left behind by it. There is always a total form of deterritorialisation. The yoke of their terror infiltrates all dimensions of the experience. As a rule, they prohibit any form of private mourning and inhibit survivors from even the most private processes of dealing with the trauma.”²¹

Their silence rule is imposed right into the heart of the group and the individual.

Recreating... became a criminal investigation/crime plot and a public form of democratic justice seeking through the context of art. It became a disavowal of the authoritarian denial, a demand for the return of law, justice, and the assumption of responsibility. The vicarious materials were arranged around three intersectional sets of constellations articulating a) marginality, politics of inclusion/exclusion, retraction/expansion of the ‘moral circle’; b) modern citizenry, discourses of natural/civil/human rights; and c) genocidal and violent authoritarian situations that decontextualise reality from history.

The crime story chronicled two quasi-chronological subplots. The first chronicled the classic (universal) twentieth-century battle with expanding/retracting moral circle, the fraught, ambivalent attitudes/policies toward marginalised sex work/worker. The main protagonists were the new welfare state, feminist

abolitionists versus feminist compassionates. Early feminist abolitionism based on ambivalent discourses of exploitation, degradation, health, and safety (to remove or rescue) was, by the 1950s-1970s, overrun by new feminisms' more determined compassion, empathy, and inclusion (to integrate with rights). The second subplot chronicled the historical space (specific) of Iran, where state policies activated inclusive welfare, health, and social security (with struggles and ambivalences) and contended with religious, moral and medicalising negative discourses. One trajectory exposed/condemned stigmatising/discriminatory social politics; the other exploited sin, immorality, and infection. The tension was violently resolved in 1979 through fire, blood, and death – God's 'righteous' wrath.

Landscape, Re-territorialisation, Spectral Memory, Counter-Memory



3. The artificial lake at Razi Park, Tehran, 2014. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade

At one end of the exhibition, a landscape photograph confronted the spectator. It revealed a quiet natural stretch of space, with trees around an artificial lake. The banks of the lake slope upwards on an incline to safely contain the stillness of the naturally green water. It was taken in an old urban neighbourhood of South-West Tehran, where I was born and grew up. As the image testifies, it is a peaceful spot, green and open, a refuge to relax away from the grit, noise, and grime of the urban reality of the hectic city of Tehran with its fourteen million inhabitants. That is different from what it looked like when I grew up. The photographic frame was one of a large group of photographs I produced in 2014 as visual records of the site in the present. It is a view of Razi Park, which occupies the former site of Šahr-e Now. Underneath, submerged, swallowed from sight, religiously cleansed out of sight, and 'morally corrected' would be the invisibilised scars of the enormous human and material destruction that eradicated the red-light district. The landscape is a site of

absent-presence—a container of a trauma-drama. The apparent harmony, the ordinary everydayness, distances us from the sinister reality embedded in the image as if it had vanished from reality and memory for eternity. Materially and symbolically cleansed out of being. Here, knowing is not hinged on the evidentiary status of the photograph but on its ability to contain and elicit the traumatising memory of historical truth. In the words of Jeffrey Alexander, “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”²² The demand laid upon the spectator is to do more than look. The viewer must reconcile with what is erased and ‘nowhere to be seen’ in this spectral image. To unescapably recognise that the spectre of violence remains embedded, memorialised, and memorised in the physicality of the space. The referent may be absent, but it has forever contaminated the site. The absent event-object is embedded as an imprint. And it is vital to keep that ghostly permanency visibilised; to undo the disappearance. As observers of the event’s aftermath the photograph demands us to recognise the ghosts of history within the site-as-monument. We are compelled to memorialise the event that has now vanished out of time, to behold the *event-trace* as memory and monument. To be a witness. We must reckon with and reflect upon the precise nature of justice, the anonymity of death, and the violence of erasure while contemplating such a space and its aura. Their significance is valid for further sociological advancement of the project.

Narratological Considerations in the Will Backwards - The Trauma-Drama

From here, the project may take a flashback to the early twentieth century to be ‘read’ backwards, tracing back the socio-spatial evidence of life underneath the lake and working through the plot. The real impulse is to detonate the site’s tranquillity, salvage painful truth or hidden meaning from oblivion, rescue it from death, reveal it, and release it into experience. Creative and forensic tension is consciously devised between empirical research and affective theatrics. Both dimensions inform the topography, the investigation’s style, and the method and tempo of its presentation for spectatorship. The implication of the audience always remains central to the work to bring the detective novel to its criminal end.

The plot's flow for- and rearwards intensifies its tragic dramaturgy, remembering that all may happen again. It has the capacity to be what Jeffrey Alexander calls "trauma-drama"²³. In connection to Milligram's assessment of the democratic capacities of any society for evil, the banality of evil followed through from Hannah Arendt's work on Eichmann. "The symbolic reconstruction of perpetrators" as ordinary folk, in the Arendtian way, is in mind here.²⁴ Representation here is a document (of a document), a 'counter-crime tribunal' where the state-sanctioned crime is formally accused and the antagonist is named.²⁵ It wrests power away from the perpetrator (state), which exercises and controls the narrative of its violence. All four projects are designed to undercut the primary agents of accepted narratives. To complicate the protagonist and antagonist, to dramatically undermine confidence in the dominant acceptances.

Archaeology of Experience

In a common thread with all other projects in this commentary, archaeology was firstly a vertical retrieval of 'the lost cultural object' and the new 'found object' exposure. As we have found in Archaeology of the Final Decade (elaborated below), gaps, silences, blind spots, shadows, cavities, disappearances, and voids are the deepest reservoirs of truth findings. That is meant archaeologically, where archaeology does not only find hidden 'treasures' but investigates cavities, absences, voids, and traces.²⁶ Gaps in topography/facts, cavities/historical amnesia, and contestations/conflicts were potent untapped reservoirs of knowledge. Psychoanalytically (in the Freudian sense)²⁷, we were onto embedded truths in repressed memories, amnesias, behind defensive obscurities. Socio-politically, a horizontal form of archaeology (in the Foucauldian sense²⁸) emancipated knowledge on the conditions, circumstances, and contexts (origination/emergence, disappearance, and present-day reappearance) associated with the object. In Foucault's words, "The never completed, never wholly achieved uncovering of the archive forms the general horizon to which the description of discursive formations, the analysis of positivities, the mapping of the enunciative field belong. The right of words ... authorises, therefore, the use of the term archaeology to describe all these searches. This term does not imply the search for a beginning; it does not relate analysis to geological excavation. It designates the general theme of a description

that questions the already said at the level of its existence: of the enunciative function that operates within it, of the discursive formation, and the general archive system to which it belongs. Archaeology describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive."²⁹ It is considered radially ongoing in what it exposes and radical in its retrospective truth enquiries of past violence and social trauma. Those parameters regulate and define the politics and aesthetics of 'narrativisation' and the directions of knowledge enquiry. That horizontal archaeology remains ostensibly alive so long as radical knowledge enquiry merits advancement.

Collated archival components came from national, official, and personal sources in Tehran and across Europe (London, Paris, and Stockholm). They comprised visual, spatial, evidentiary, textual, and testimonial material cover to its geography, histories, spatial maps, and social dimensions. My chronicles built an infrastructural scaffolding of knowledge and seeing/meaning along a lifespan from 1910 to 1980: its inhabitants, its functions, and the space's struggles with mainstream societal, political, religious, moral, medical, and legal norms and attitudes, the living conditions of the residents, their rights, and their tribulations.). Edward Soja's socio-spatial dialectic informs the story-telling method.³⁰ Socio-spatial relates to interactivity where "people make places, and places make people."³¹ When considering the anthropology and geography of space, the research considered the paradigmatic dimensions of 'gendered' space and 'urban zoning' of urban geographies.³² Both govern power within social space. I recovered documents elucidating rights-seeking feminist discourses, actions, and women-centred social work travails. I set them up against feminist abolitionist discourses of degradation, exploitation, and immorality that exercised (at various intensities) the need for eradication.

Geography, Dispossession, and the Politics of Inclusion / Exclusion

Tehran's city map of 1891 (image 4) stood as a contrapuntal archival bookend, showing the Šahr-e Now's site outside the city walls circa 1910 (an orange dot mine). The bookends were Šahr-e Now 1990 – 'Šahr-e Now' 2014. The city map was clearly a visual illustration of an early form of exteriorised, exclusionary landscape, the earliest attempt at urban zoning and moral management of

'undesirables' in Tehran's modern city-making. The wall stood as a clear 'moral circle'³³- a geo-sociological dehumanising exclusion following the logic of protection of public morality and security and bourgeois ideals of a healthy city.³⁴ In the words of sociologists, "Dehumanisation is a process through which people are denied membership in a community of interconnected individuals and are thus cast outside the 'moral circle' to a place where the rights and considerations attached to being human no longer apply."³⁵ The philosopher Peter Singer argued that the twentieth century saw an ethical and sociological expansion of the 'moral circle'. "Altruism has broadened from the family and tribe to the nation and race, and we are beginning to recognise that our obligations extend to all human beings."³⁶ The paradigmatic site of Šahr-e Now experienced serial inclusion/exclusion histories: interiorised after the walls, gates, and moats were removed (circa 1932-34)³⁷; exteriorised when the military government erected a high brick wall (circa 1953), enshrining it as a walled ghetto (image 6).³⁸



4. Map of the Naseri (reign of Naser al-Din Shah, the Qajar king, r. 1848-96) Capital City of Tehran, by Abd al-Ghafar (Najm-al-Molk), drawn by Soleyman Khan, Teheran 1891. The map shows the configuration and perimeter of Old Tehran and its eleven gates. The orange dot (my addition) marks the approximate location of Šahr-e Noww outside the southwestern Qazvin Gate.



5. Kaveh Golestan *Prostitute Series*, 1975-77, Šahr-e Noww, Tehran. © Kaveh Golestan; Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade. The photograph shows the entry gate into the district.



6. Ground plan of Šahr-e Now District, Tehran, 1969, from Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *On Prostitution in the City of Tehran, 1969* (Massachusetts: Ty Aur, 2012). The street layout shows its boundaries (outlined in red) after 1953. The segregated ghetto became popularly known as the Citadel of Šahr-i Now (Zahedi Citadel). Access was free, although controlled through two iron gates, at the northern and southern ends of the walled ghetto. In 1959 the Tehran municipality and police shut down the north gate, and access was controlled through the single southern gate.

Prejudice, Ambivalence, Compassion, Violence and Feminist Perspectives

Iranian religious discourses predictably prejudicially circulated paradigms of power, property, and discipline along notions of sin, shame, and moral decay – the body of the sex worker was not only a site for sinfulness but decadency, dangerously un-owned (patriarchy). That prejudice now had to take responsibility for the deadly annihilation of 1979.

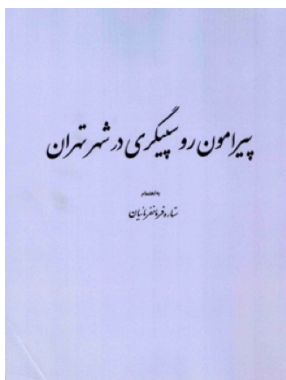
In contrast, early modern secular feminists were heavily guided by discourses around public health.^{39/40/41} Sexually transmitted diseases, at the forefront of new health awareness, were openly discussed, expressly, in Iranian women's-led journals as a concern for individual citizens, the social sphere, and the central state with its public health programme, although early feminists contended with issues of moral decay, adultery, promiscuity, and perversion.⁴²

Importantly, the project highlights an important distinction missed by many contemporary Iranian feminist commentators - a revolutionary women-led paradigm shift from the 1950s through the 1970s. Ambivalence or saviour syndrome gave way to compassion/rights and instrumentalised the containment/control of the walled

citadel as a site for operations. New gender and family laws and the founding of the (independent but state-linked) Women's Organisation and the Tehran School of Social Work, both headed by women, were, I contend, game-changers.⁴³ Both played a decisively progressive, socially conscientious role in visibilising the body/space of sex work and demanding equal civil/citizenship rights. They pushed back and overtook the male gaze, lens, and voice, decisively brushing aside abolitionist retractions and medicalising reproaches.⁴⁴ My archive presented two seminal objects that exemplify that shift. The Women's Organisation commissioned a documentary film - *Qal'eh – The Women's Quarter, 1966-1980*, directed by Kamran Shirdel - with the sex workers as protagonists in their own voices/settings.⁴⁵ In 1969, the government commissioned an exhaustive empirical scientific research - "On Prostitution in the City of Tehran", by Sattareh Farman Farmaian and her newly founded School of Social Work.⁴⁶ The two entities were instrumental in health, sanitation, childcare, education, and skills provisions and demanded equal citizenship status, state pension eligibility, and a fund to cover personal debts.⁴⁷



7. Kamran Shirdel, "Qal'eh (The Women's Quarter)", 1966–1980, film still. Courtesy Kamran Shirdel/Women's Organisation of Iran.



8. Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *On Prostitution in the City of Tehran*, 1969 (Massachusetts: Ty Aur, 2012).



9. (Left) Zakaria Hashemi, *Touti: yek dastān* (*Touti: A Story*), (Tehran: Rowzan Publication, 1969). It is a romantic novel set in the citadel.
10. (Middle) Feroz Farrokhzad, film still, *Khaneh siyah ast* (*The House Is Black*) 1963, Dir. Feroz Farrokhzad. Courtesy Feroz Farrokhzad/Ebrahim Golestan. It is one of the finest and most intellectually and aesthetically sophisticated examples of socially conscientious art. The film was recently shown at Documenta 2018.
11. (Right) Ali Khadem, Photograph, *Šahr-e Now*, date unknown. Courtesy Ali Khadem/Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Art, Civil Contract, and Points of Contact

An offshoot of that new awakening was the seminal set of sixty-one gelatin silver prints of the citadel residents titled “Prostitute”, produced by documentary photographer Kaveh Golestan (1975-77).⁴⁸ The series constituted the strongest photographic corpus produced in modern Iran around the female figure and occupied the central visual core of my archives.⁴⁹ I recovered them from the photographer’s Tehran home, where—held under lock and key—they had remained unseen, archived for forty years.⁵⁰ It played the central protagonist in the plot – the sex workers in the flesh (metaphorically). They were not only the most poignant authentic visual triggers, they were the only civic refuge at the disposal of those robbed of citizenship (as articulated by Ariella Azoulay),⁵¹ where segregation was defined not just by abject poverty or illegal profession but also by physical and geographical removal and confinement, and in our case, by violent disruption and death.⁵² My activation underscored a humanising gaze of Golestan’s transgressive lens.⁵³ The presence was an ode, an elegy, a monument, anything but voyeuristic. The protagonists spoke directly, for themselves.⁵⁴ They imprinted themselves on the spectators, not as objective data, but with an inherent demand to be seen.



12. Kaveh Golestan (selection), *Untitled, Prostitute Series*, 1975-77, Šahr-e Now, Tehran. © Kaveh Golestan, Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Citadel, Initiation Point, Traumatizing Revolutionary Terror

"[It is] always most terrifying, most dangerous when elimination and erasure is done in the name of the public, or even worse in the pretence of the protection of the public good."

—James Baldwin⁵⁵

In a dramatic plot twist, performing at the speed of fire, my third archival constellation turned to visual/textual evidence of the burning (images 14, 15, 16) of the citadel.⁵⁶ On 29 January 1979, mobs apparently acted mysteriously in unison in an episode reminiscent of the alleged spontaneous mob attack on Capitol Hill. In Iran, the recent systematised violence perpetuated in public spaces goes back to the Rex Cinema torching on 19 August 1978 in Abadan, which claimed at least 370 lives, according to various sources.⁵⁷ The revolutionary period witnessed many other unaccounted-for torchings. In the case of the Rex Cinema, it gained massive coverage and became a political marker in the revolutionary timeline. Although reported in detail, the unaccounted-for crime of torching the Citadel of Šahr-e Now failed to draw attention from public figures, intellectuals, revolutionaries, and politicians. In the moralising and patriarchal throes of revolutionary zeal, the human rights of sex workers, a most marginal of marginalised groups, did not feature at all. Indeed, according to newspaper reports, the army claimed it had been "ignited by the will of the people" (caption, image 13). The most stigmatised were the perfect unknown citizens to be utilised to initiate terror against the citizenry at large, particularly a patriarchal kind of violence bent on repressing gender, sexuality and equal citizenship rights. No records exist of the human casualties. Surviving workers escaped or were imprisoned. Several were absorbed into the prison service as interrogators – a sinister show of repentance. It was a brazen, outright (moral, religious, chauvinistic, and patriarchal) violence that collided head-on with the century of women-led feminising interest, action, and struggle.



13. Newspaper article, "West and South of Tehran in Flames of Fire" (outlined in red), *Ettela'at*, front page, 10 Bahman 1357 - 30 January 1979. The primary headline reads, "Vast Preparations for the Moment of the Imam's [Ayatollah Khomeini]'s Arrival" (top right). The second headline reads, "West and South of Tehran in Flames of Fire" (top left marked in red). Areas affected by the fire were Šahr-i Now, the famous Šokufeh No cabaret, two beer factories, and tens of liquor stores.

The spatial juxtaposition of the two pieces of news is symbolically powerful. The preparations for the arrival of the religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the violent eradication of the targeted urban spaces were concurrent. The paper reports two crucial facts:

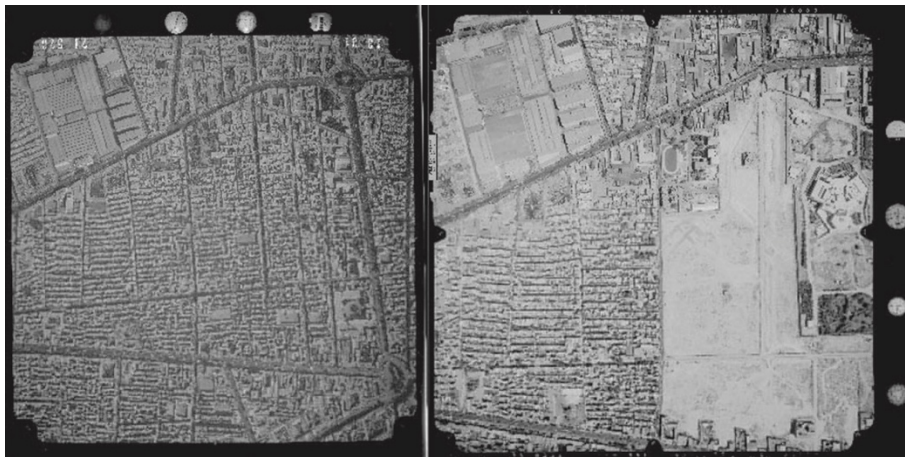
- 1) "Crowds gather outside the Citadel of Šahr-i Now on 9 Bahman 1357 (29 January 1979) at around 17:00 and attack the Citadel at about 18:00 and set fire to the area."
- 2) "The Fire Brigade stands back while the area burns down. It issues a statement declaring that it will refrain from fighting to put out 'fires that are ignited by the will of the people'".



14. (Left) Unknown, *Citadel Burning*.
 15. (Right) Karman Shirdel, *Citadel Burning*, Tehran, 1979. ©Kamran Shirdel.



16. Abbas, Caption reads: IRAN. Tehran, January 1979. A revolutionary mob exhibits the burned body of a presumed prostitute as evidence of the atrocity of the Shah's regime. The mob had just set fire to the "red light" district in "Islamic Purifying Fire". Published in Iran: *La Révolution Confisquée*, (Paris: Cletrat, 1980), ©Abbas/Magnum Photos (here reproduced as fragmented).



17. Aerial satellite views of Šahr-e Noww (left, 1972) before destruction and (right, 1993) after destruction, National Cartography Centre of Iran.

Victim, Elegy

Intent on exposing systemic violence, the following document (12 July 1979) revealed evidence of Islamist revolutionary firing squads executing three citadel residents (images 18, 19).⁵⁸ Tate Modern censored those materials and the information in our exhibition in 2017 (even in mention – that never happened elsewhere).

"Black milk of daybreak we drink it at sundown
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night
we drink it and drink it"
—Paul Celan⁶¹

A UTOPIAN STAGE

In September 1977, the Islamist Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a religious *fatwa* (decree) denouncing the Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis (in Persian *Jašn-i Honar-i Shiraz*) as un-Islamic, decadent, and immoral, demanding its 'death'. In February 1989, he issued one declaring Rushdie's novel, "The Satanic Verses" (published in 1988) as blasphemous, condemning the author to death. A reward was set and still stands for the author's head.⁶² The festival, too, retains its 'death sentence'. *A Utopian Stage* set out to undo the death sentence and to salvage the condemned, 'so-called decadent' cultural artefact. Dissecting the complex areas of polemical contestation and obscurity of the project was a multi-dimensional address of the art historical gap and the pitifully poor and outright absent critical scholarship around the object⁶³; a much-needed critically objective, empirical, and demystifying evaluation of the aesthetical, ideational, and political genealogies of the stage; and a broad contextualisation of its allegedly dangerously radical potentialities during the post- and de-colonising era and now.⁶⁴

Archaeology as Process

The Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis, was an international performance (music, dance, dance-drama, theatre, live art) festival in Shiraz and the Persepolis ruins in Iran from 1967 until 1977. Its 1978 iteration was cancelled due to security concerns when it was targeted by religious bigotry; its institution and annual events were immediately dissolved after 1979. Many associated artists never worked again; several were threatened, and one imprisoned subsequently committed suicide.⁶⁵ The authorities burnt and destroyed materials and forbade access to any of the festival's trove of documents/archives, which remain inaccessible and censored to the present day.⁶⁶ Attack on the festival's landscape, ethos, heritage, and legacy began so early that new generations of Iranians did not know of its historical existence until Archaeology of the Final Decade began restitution of the object.⁶⁷ Factual blackouts had reduced history to sexualised and offensive crude myths

around the stigmatised archetypal “bad object”.^{68/69} Securing funding was near impossible – most Iranian patrons disassociated from my remit of art in crisis in the face of potential harsh state repercussions.⁷⁰

Countering Cultural Atrophy

My archaeological work was determined to ascertain that cultural obstruction is not abstract; that it curbs our capacity for expression and limits our experience of existence for a purpose. Amputations, exterminations, and evacuations of cultural experiences, whether perpetrated by strangers or by us, psychoanalytically speaking, swap containment for alienation. Their *raison d'être* is to disorientate, to levy an experience of being internally colonised. Life ceases to be safe or pleasurable at home, and home becomes a “breeding ground of every uncertainty of the self,” in the Barbadian writer George Lamming’s words.⁷¹ The alienating experience of suffering to settle in one’s own home is not dissimilar to one of disruptive exile in a foreign land; or one of being colonisation at home. It, too, inflicts savage and enduring psychic and historical damage. The annulment, hollowing out, and unreadability are like what Jacques Derrida calls the “hell of our memory.”⁷² When we reclaim heritage in such disorienting contexts of dismemberment, we are on a *real* mission. Our claim attains soul and spirit – political charge, historical function, curative meaning – beyond any fetish we may assign to a given desired cultural object. Only then is the dreamer allowed to dream again, a nation to aspire again. As the poet Aimé Césaire said, “A civilisation that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilisation.”⁷³ Nostalgia or fantasy is not at play. Working through (disrupted history) is an antithesis of the traumatisation which severs us from a relationship with ourselves. It is essential to come to terms with one’s traces. As Césaire remarked elsewhere, “A civilisation that withdraws into itself atrophies.”⁷⁴ *A Utopian Stage* reclaimed/recirculated/recontextualised that cultural history – the most prominent cultural casualty of the revolution - primarily against such atrophy.

The Great Assault – Culture in Peril

The new political order institutionalised an Islamising “cultural cleansing” (*pāksāzi-e farhangī*) within weeks of taking reign.⁷⁵ It replaced our Ministry of Culture with a “Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance”,⁷⁶ a machine, by its definition, to swap emancipation, edification for evangelisation. The objectives of that modern inquisition, I argued, were to enforce cultural homogenisation, gender segregation, the censorship of our thought, restriction of our expression, restraint of our aspirations, regulation of our connection to ourselves and to the world. The outcomes: severance, atrophy, the nihilistic narrowing of *being*, of meaning, of experience, of expression, of love, of *joie*. Wherever contemporary space is under duress, administered by fear, cultural dispossession is experienced internally and intra-culturally as internal colonisation. As though one were colonised by aliens whose pursuit was to sever us from ourselves and to whose self-serving project we must be subordinated. Perhaps it is necessary to qualify *us*: we are those ordinary citizens who find ourselves on the margins of Khomeini’s delineations of Islamic moralities. The colonial analogy is apt when one observes the system of (*intra-*)cultural dispossession. Khomeinists’ populist right-wing agendas aimed at the *extermination of difference*.⁷⁷ The divine-led “moral guides” set about to forcibly *re-civilize* society, aimed at cultural “correction” and control, subjugating the totality of the public sphere to ideological state control.⁷⁸ *A Utopian Stage* was a direct affront to that. Politically, the project was a counterattack and counter-performance against that cleansing of ‘decadent art’. What did the atrophying project find inherently, enduringly, dangerous in the cultural artefact, its footprint, and its ethos?

“Psychoanalysis has taught that the dead – a dead parent, for example – can be more alive for us, more powerful, more scary, than the living. It is the question of ghosts.”

—Jacques Derrida⁷⁹



20. *Šahr-e Qesseh (City of Tales)*, Bijan Mofid (playwright & director) – University Hall, 1968. World Premiere. Commissioned by the 2nd Festival of Arts.
 Courtesy of Dariush Hajir/Bijan Mofid Foundation/Archaeology of the Final Decade.
 This seminal socio-critical play by Atelier Theatre Company became the most popular ever. It was later performed in Tehran. Bijan Mofid was the writer, director, and an actor in the play. His other notable works staged at the festival include *Mah o Palang (The Moon and the Leopard)* in 1969 and *Bozak Namir Bahar Miyad (Don't Die Little Goat, Spring Shall Arrive)* in 1973.

The First Exposure

The first time my archived historical materials of the Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis, were exhibited was in my first “Archaeology of the Final Decade” section at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.⁸⁰ The cultural attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Paris, invited for a special preview by the museum, stopped, looked through the documentary moving/still images, books, pamphlets, and captions. By then I had materials from virtually every one of the eleven years of the festival. He turned to me in Persian, “How did this material get here?” I replied, “Years of deep research.” He cynically replied, “It is part of history, after all”. The museum’s director swiftly diverted him and the Iranian embassy’s diplomatic corps through another route so they would not encounter the second section of my “Archaeology of the Final Decade’s” erased histories. The second section was “Recreating the Citadel”. Auspiciously for the diplomats, the museum *protected* them from the gaze of the unnamed sex workers of the ghetto staring out at them in my exhibition.⁸¹ The women’s experience was annulled; the portraits were robbed of their power. Any evidence of the violence and inhumanity could not taint the afternoon visit. Perhaps the diplomats’ exposure to new-found knowledge, to the festival’s enlivening aesthetic and political proclivities, which were exploded across the walls and vitrines, was already too much of a culture shock or calamitous, injurious to their fragile biases. The museum director later apologised to me for his

cowardice: "I did it to *protect* you," he said. That was certainly not my last abject experience of that recurrent erasure of heritage, either within or without Iran.

"We are our own liberators".⁸²

A critical evaluation of the festival's annual catalogues revealed it as already contentious during its run, a *temporary autonomous zone* ahead of the conventional realities of its time.^{83/84} Too liberal. Too unpredictable. Uncensored. Uncontained. Its rebellious philosophical outlook stirred controversy and contestation. In its 6th festival programme, it states:

"The Sixth Festival was considered by many to be the most 'difficult' to date. [...] There was little appeal to 'popular' taste, a sure sign that Festival organisers now knew what they wanted and were prepared to present it regardless of critical comment, which was not slow in coming. The controversy that boiled over in normally placid Shiraz was rightly considered part of what the Festival is all about, and as a welcome stimulus to artistic creativity and art criticism in Iran."⁸⁵

By its own admission, the festival had boldly set out to challenge, not conform. Those were detrimentally heightened by the fact that at Shiraz-Persepolis, the artwork itself was not only inherently potentially subversive but also not insulated within institutional walls, safeguarded. The festival set out to break down the proscenium, deconstruct the draconian concept of gallery-as-temple, artist-as-prophet, and art-as-relic or a means in itself. Its transcendental realm intuited to shift reality actively and was more immediately, intimately linked to life and the landscape, as performance is.

Shiraz-Persepolis belonged to a unique moment when there was a euphoric incorruptible new-world innocence in the air that art, and particularly live art, was going to change the world.⁸⁶ Those were auspicious years (1950s-1970s) for freedom-seekers: in 1960 alone, seventeen African nations severed French colonial ties, including Senegal, which beckoned African pride in its historic World Festival of

Negro Arts in Dakar only six years later. The era radiated, to borrow from Martin Luther King, "a revolution of values,"⁸⁷ and unleashed dreams and aspirations, revolutions and manifestations of change that had art and politics enmeshed and spilling onto the streets. Shiraz-Persepolis must be seen in that junction of art, emancipation, and revolution. Decolonization, despite occasional dissonances,⁸⁸ generated an uninhibited flourishing of new narrative-shifting *nativistic* cultural initiatives in a modern context, a network to which Shiraz-Persepolis also belonged.⁸⁹ They reimagined rekindling millennia-old reciprocities with vigilant wisdom that the new world was ready and overdue for plural historical sensibilities, polyphonic reordering. Artists, poets, musicians, dramatists and performers, writers and critics assembled and convoked with three aims – disrobing, disassembling an unjust and disfiguring past; defining, steering, and conducting the revolutionary discharge; and restoratively aspiring towards new realms where creative realities and utopias could intersect. Their disassembling and dismantling strategies were structured by forging new fidelities and alliances, borrowings and exchanges, adaptations and adoptions, looking-ins and looking-outs, essentialisms and universalisms. Those were fundamental to new modes of knowledge and know-how designed for troubling old and defunct foundational orders of society set up over centuries under the hegemonic guard of European expansion.

Theatre That Was Going to Change the World

The Shiraz-Persepolis stage was a permanent philosophical workshop. Audaciously free. Empowered by confident optimism. Its philosophical enquiry into the *euphoria of togetherness* shines irredeemably antithetical to the catastrophic notion of a *clash of civilizations* perpetuated by the current regime and similar politics of isolationism, fragmentation and closure. The festival, like its artistic African brethren (discussed below) was a triumph of creative, vital diversity over antagonistic adversarial antipathy. Head-on incursions into the existential question of the future of culture. Affirmative. Tolerant. Elevating the free, the strong. An advocate of a Nietzschean restlessness towards moderation and restraint. Overcoming stillness and inhibition was their temperaments. Dionysian destructiveness and regeneration were their norms. Revitalisation and regeneration of native life their intention and practice. Transforming Asian and African cultures through a *utopian* proposition their honourable missions. Their inquiry was open-ended, philosophical, always on

the mark of freedom, antithetical to totalitarian politics – propelled by euphoric optimism, openness, emancipation, inclusivity. They brought the unknown *other* right inside the city walls. Shiraz-Persepolis thrived on a *phyloxenic* curiosity towards the other. It was an open-ended act of courage. It was genetically unpredictable and dangerous. Its ideological bomb could have been anywhere. It was not just an ephemeral cultural site but an ethos; otherwise, why attack it?

Otherness in Sameness - Sameness in Otherness

Shiraz-Persepolis' radical, exuberant, inventive, and progressive *euphoria of togetherness* was by no means a unique vision. Its cultural politics found alliance with only a handful of performance festivals around the world, namely Belgrade and Nancy, and two elevating African festivals that happened in 1966 and 1969 in Dakar and Algiers (First World Festival of Negro Arts and *Festival panafricain d'Alger*, respectively).⁹⁰ Collectively, they intervened to dismantle Eurocentric myths of culture.⁹¹ Each emancipated new and subversive postcolonial cultural mappings; their politics of society/art (like movements in plastic arts such as Arte Povera) defended radical desires to "destroy the myth of culture".⁹² Belgrade, and especially Nancy, challenged systems of official culture, and their transnationalism correlated closely with the politics of Shiraz-Persepolis, with the difference that they operated within Europe while the latter operated on the ground outside and beyond Europe.⁹³ The Senegalese and Algerian festivals, First World Festival of Negro Arts (1966) in Dakar, and *Festival panafricain d'Alger* (1969) shone as two inspiring markers of African renaissance.⁹⁴



21. (Left) First Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Paris, 1956
22. (Middle) Poster, 1er Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres, Dakar, Senegal, 1966.
23. (Right) Poster, Pan-African Cultural Festival, Algiers, 1969.

A tour of writings of the time, especially of African thinkers, reminds us as much about radical *otherness* as it does about the dream of *otherness in sameness* or *sameness in otherness*. As the poet Aimé Césaire declared: "I have a different idea of a universal. It is of a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars there are, the deepening of each particular, the coexistence of them all." Elsewhere, he said poetically, "...and no race possesses the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of force. And there is a place for all at the rendezvous of victory."⁹⁵

Those ideations and praxes interrogated "the rise of Europe" and insisted on a radical shift towards the *present*. Their cosmopolitanism protested the European construction of "world civilisation". They determinedly negotiated universal intercultural connectivity, permeating, circulating encounters of heterogeneous expressions. The festival's territory belonged to the confrontation of diversities, competing solidarities, and proliferating visions. A contested site of an interconnected world, following a liberal praxis of pluralistic accommodation of the *other in the narratives of the same*. It revolted against the impairments of "African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation."⁹⁶ Its stage was close to what Sylvia Wynter calls "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom";⁹⁷ in essence, an equalising call for what Homi Bhabha would name a "third world re-writing."⁹⁸ It shifted the centre of gravity towards the (re-emerging) *other*, intent on annulling colonialism as a system of exploitation or articulation of cultural dominance. The annulment and the bypassing were done not through the binaries of them and us but through the realisation of a juxtapositional universality (temporal, spatial, and political) and an idealistic dream of a *utopian unity of disunities*⁹⁹.

The Imperative to Remain Awake

Those internationalist efforts coalesced on the idea that if the "ethnic other" were to take the lead to realise the dream of a new world order, then it was imperative for its civilisations to be *awake*. Without unlocking the potential of its indigeneity, unleashing the power of its ethnic ingenuity, and encouraging an intellectual and cultural return to its "authentic self," the mission of advancing contemporary reality would not be realised.¹⁰⁰ In Heideggerian terms, it was only meaningful if you existed in the authentic mode of "Eigentlichkeit", having "achieved yourself in your being".¹⁰¹ The regenerative liberation of its compressed internal forces, the free

explosion of its soul, would sever the colonial experience once and for all. That was the shared sentiment and belief. And as put by the thinker Rabindranath Tagore, "Therefore, in art, man reveals *himself* and not his objects." ¹⁰²



24. Rwanda Drum Ensemble - Open-Air Theatre, 1969. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade.
25. Uma Sharma performing *Kathak* Classical Indian Dance - Open-Air Theatre, 1969. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Origins and the Eternal Return

The "return to the self" had to dispose of the Heideggerian notion of horizontal time, and embrace, conversely, cyclical, and vertical models of time as more authentic, or relevant, temporal structures. Those alternative philosophies of time, with ancient roots in Asian thought, accommodate concurrences of ancestral and modern and the *simultaneity of opposites*. Iranian philosopher Daryush Shayegan often returned to the "kaleidoscopic vision" notion to explain the parallel concurrence of old and new.¹⁰³ Shayegan elaborates on the coexistence of an intoxicating quest for the archaic with a driving desire for all that is modern.¹⁰⁴ The model embraces simultaneous infatuations with constancy/change, eternal/new. Vertical time holds the past, present, and future on the same time plain. The Japanese Philosopher Kuki Shūzō (1888-1941) theorised the Oriental notion of time (cyclical time) as a way of escaping inauthentic temporal models. He further discussed the intellectual negation of time, found in "nirvana," associated with Buddhism and the voluntarist innate rejection of time, as "bushido," which is unconcerned with temporal structures.¹⁰⁵ Those Asian thoughts had long exerted

influence on Europe. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche elaborates on the concept of “eternal return” – all energy and existence within the universe is eternal and constantly recurring.¹⁰⁶ Through the same interchange of ideas, many European philosophers, from Winckelmann and Schiller to Goethe and Nietzsche, declared sympathy for the archaics “as a possible source of direction for moderns.”¹⁰⁷ With insightful knowledge into the archaic appeal of *revelations of beauty through the wisdoms of the ancestors* as dreamt by the dreamer Aimé Césaire, the directors, cunningly co-opted a natural ally in the internationally fluid neo-avant-garde, who explicitly venerated the “third world” as the force behind the revolution.

“‘Ritual theatre’ was the theme of the Fourth Festival – an appropriate choice since Asia still remains a rich storehouse of ritual and ceremony, and after a long period of lack of interest, the West is once again rediscovering its roots in Asian arts. Shiraz was the ideal meeting place for the purpose.”¹⁰⁸



26. No Balinese Gamelan & Traditional Dances: *Legong Keraton* and *Tari Topeng* Masked Dancers – Open Air Theatre, 1969. Courtesy of Malie Letrange/Archaeology of the Final Decade.





27. (Top and bottom) Ceremonies of the *Zour-khaneh* in rehearsal - Persepolis, 1969. Courtesy of Malie Letrange/Archaeology of the Final Decade.
Zour-khaneh is a traditional form of ritual sport with archaic roots in Iran. The sportsmen exercise to the rhythm of percussion.



28. *The Constant Prince*, Calderon (playwright), Jerzy Grotowski, (director). *The Laboratory Theatre* – Delgoša Pavilion, 1970. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade
 Each performance at the Delgoša Garden Pavilion was limited to an intimate audience of forty.

29. *Fire*, Peter Schumann (creator and director), Bread & Puppet Theatre – TV Hall, 1970. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade.
Bread & Puppet was an experimental American theatre company employing giant puppets. Each of their performances began with reading a statement of protest against political oppression followed by the distribution of bread amongst the audience.

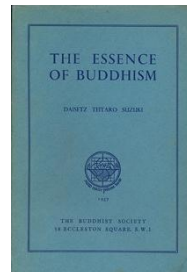
Over its span of eleven years, the festival integrated an impressive constellation of confrontations and self-confrontations.¹⁰⁹ It consolidated a nexus for *modernizing nativists* mingling with *ritualizing modernists* linking form to spirit. It underscored the reverse transmission of knowledge from the “periphery” to the “centre,” highlighting the depth and continuity of Asian philosophical influence on European and American modernist movements, supplanting conventional definitions of contemporary, traditional, native, and alien, with Asia and Africa as inspirations.¹¹⁰

“With the recent involvement of the Third World, a new perspective has been opened... World theatre seems even closer to achieving the goals set by the visionary Artaud. . . . An important trend of the avant-garde is devoted to developing this kind of expression for an intercultural audience.”¹¹¹



30. Poster of *Theatre and Ritual*, 4th Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis, 1970. Designed by Ghobad Shiva. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade.
31. Poster of *The Third World Theatre* – 2nd World Festival and Conference, 1973. Designed by Ghobad Shiva. Commissioned by 7th Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade.

The festival’s ideation elevated notions of common sources, universal pools, and the unconscious world of the collective. That allowed the performative – represented by the archaic, ritual, ecstatic, epiphanic, cathartic, “primitive” – to supplant the textual as a deliberate retraction from the modern European tradition.¹¹² In the words of experimentalist Tadeusz Kantor, in theatre, “it is necessary to recover the *primaeval* force...”¹¹³ And in those of poet Ted Hughes, one would be able to create a “language belonging below the levels where differences appear, close to the inner life of what we’ve chosen as our material, but expressive to all people, powerfully, truly, precisely.”¹¹⁴



32. (Left) *Persepolis Event*, The Merce Cunningham Dance Company – *Persepolis*, 1972. World Premiere. Courtesy of The Merce Cunningham Trust.
The Merce Cunningham Dance Company also performed in *Rainforest*; *Argentine Tangos*; *Birdcage*; *Soliloquy*; *Open-Air Theatre Events* in collaboration with John Cage, David Tudor and Gordon Mumma at the Open-Air Theatre. *Rainforest* used Andy Warhol's Silver Pillows as décor, which drifted freely in space and rose to the sky.
33. (Right) Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, book cover, *The Essence of Buddhism*, (London: The Buddhist Society, 1957).



34. 35. (Left,Right) *Orghast Part II*, Ted Hughes, Mahin Tajaddod (playwrights), with excerpts from Calderon, Seneca, Achile and Leon Chant, Peter Brook, Arby Ovanessian, Geoffrey Reeves, Andrei Serban (directors) – *Naqš-e Rostam*, 1971.

International Centre for Theatre Research, commissioned by the Festival and the French Ministry of Culture, with the participation of the Ford and Gulbenkian Foundations and UNESCO. World Premiere commissioned by the Festival of Arts. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade.



36. (Top Left) *Mantra*, for two Pianos – Sarāy-e Mošir, 1972. Composer: Karlheinz Stockhausen. Pianists: Alfons Kontarsky, Aloys Kontarsky. Courtesy of Stockhausen-Stiftung für Musik.
37. (Top Right) *Rostam & Sohrāb*, *Kathakali* from Kerala Kalamandalam – Persepolis, 1972. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade
South Indian Dance-Drama, based on Ferdowsi's epic story in the *Šāhnāme*h.
38. (Bottom Left) *Caligula*, Albert Camus (playwright), Arby Ovanessian (director), Kārgāh-e Namāyeš – Persepolis, 1974
Courtesy of Mehdi Khonsari/Archaeology of the Final Decade.
The set design by Arby Ovanessian consisted of a grid of runways, with the audience sunken into the empty voids. Side-lighting the performance space created a vision of a sea of severed heads (those of the audience), above which the performance took place.
39. (Bottom Right) *Renga Moi*, Robert Serumaga (playwright and director), African dance-drama, National Theatre of Uganda – Sarāy-e Mošir, 1975. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Ought we not to leave
The free-born mind of man still ever free?
Since vain is the attempt to force belief
With the severest instrument of death?

The raptur'd soul defies the sword,
Secure of virtue's claim,
And trusting Heav'n's unerring word,
Enjoys the circling flame.
No engine can a tyrant find,
To storm the truth-supported mind.
The raptur'd soul. . .
—Didymus, Händel opera *Theodora*¹¹⁵

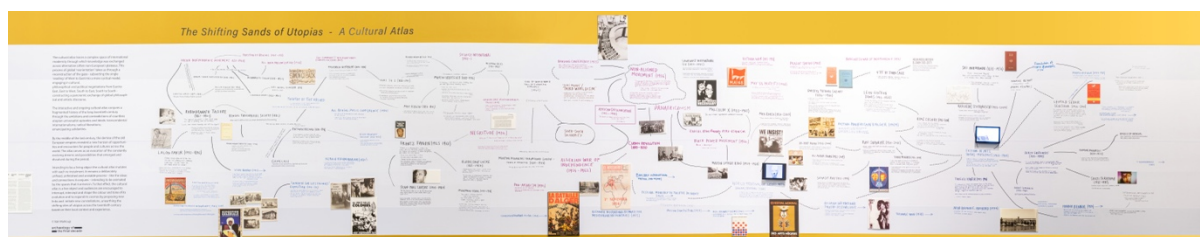
The Rubble of History

The archaeological rummaging into the festival's ruin revealed radical potentialities of cultural politics, then and now. Opening its territory revealed that what 'counter-revolutionary decadence' erased was a nexus of the peripheral, the "third world," the dissenting, the unorthodox, the *countercultures*, and the revolutionising outsiders offering a precociously profound and sophisticatedly novel postcolonial posturing. It was, in essence, a germinal project of discovery and rediscovery of the self. A cultivator of re-awakenings. An open enquiry into the essential questions of *being*, which still stands at the forefront of "third world" radical imagination today and marks a triumphant pinnacle, an essential chapter from our radical histories of the twentieth century. Its multivalent pluralistic praxis remains a forerunner of cross-historical and interwoven aspirations of art and anti-colonial struggle in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of those refinements, like the festival's own stage, were dealt a hard blow by the rise of an antagonistic new world order, concocted simultaneously by neoliberal global agendas and neo-religious/right-wing populist evangelicalisms. Like those dreams and the musician Max Roach's ideal that "...we must re-define ourselves and our lives, in our own terms,"¹¹⁶ the festival became a target, demonized, demolished, erased, replaced by the temporary artificial success of lesser and tendentious ideas.

A CULTURAL ATLAS

A Cultural Atlas: The Shifting Sands of Utopias is an evolving research artwork. It creates a monument to inter-subjective wisdom—a monument to stories at the cross-section of art, pensée and emancipation (revolution). It reflects utopian and emancipatory intellectual, artistic, political, ethical, and spiritual international networks, conjuring networks of utopian exchanges and ideals across the Global South in the wake of post-colonial struggles. It conjures the horizons of opportunities and encounters liberated from beyond the detritus of the old European empires in their demise. It calls forth a celebration of the human voice that has willed to act and speak with courage. As put by Hannah Arendt, “The connotation of courage, ..., is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all...”.¹¹⁷

A Cultural Atlas: The Shifting Sands of is a cartography of emergent and fragmented histories of the long twentieth century through the ambitions and contradictions of countless utopian universalist episodes and ideals - transcendental internationalisms, radical liberations, and emancipating solidarities – that were exchanged across alternative (often non-European) plateaus. Its 'reorientation' takes us through a reconstruction of the gaze – subverting the single reading 'from the west to the rest' into a more cyclical model, engaging in cultural, philosophical, and political negotiations from East to East, East to West, South to East, South to South – constructing a panoramic exchange of multiple cross-national philosophical and artistic discourses.

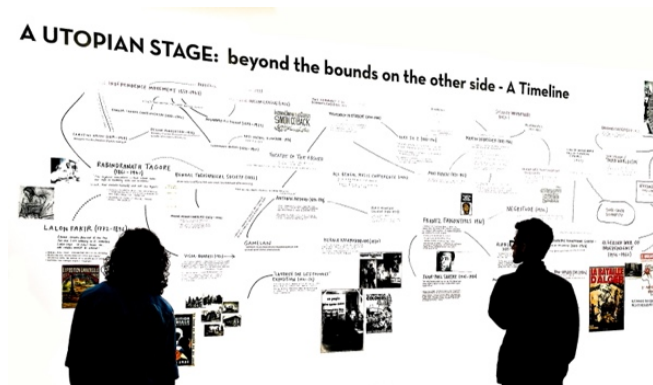
40. *A Cultural Atlas: The Shifting Sands of Utopias*

An Archaeology of Ideas

As an *archaeology of ideas* beyond the European closed-circuit model, the research unearthed a wealth of borrowings and collaborations across spatial and temporal lines, some of which had directly shaped European thought itself (most often unacknowledged). The transcultural flows and ebbs of shared pools of desire, urge, and thought, often through direct transpositions. The fluid undercurrents of cultural resemblances, echoes, reflections, and direct or oblique constellations of relations became the Atlas' driving machine. The 'stories' that cycle and recycle subjectivities, aspirations, and desires - whether materialised, actualised or not – that optimistically re-emerge and resurface to shape cultural vitality. It is true to claim that its blueprint originated in the immensity of South Asian thought and fascination with Afro-Asiatic worldviews. Its cosmos enlarged over time. With each instalment, it mutated, intentionally left open to be animated by the spaces that it arrived in. Audiences were encouraged to interrupt, intercept, and shape the colour and tone of the interactive space of the Atlas. To that effect, the Atlas is, and remains, a live object. It remains deliberately unfixed, unfinished, and unstable – like the ideas and connections it conjures. Audiences are encouraged to shape its evolution and to expand its cosmos by initiating new links and constellations, unearthing what the Atlas calls "the shifting sites of utopias" stretching back and pushing forward based on their local context and experience.

Formation / Per-formation

The form is handwritten and loose. Images, films, publications, and audio recordings sit as physical objects atop the artefact. The public in Dhaka, Bangladesh, impatiently added poets and dancers, events and ideas with simple pens provided at various points – they declared affinities and connections of their own. Interactivity was audience-led. Audience animation/performativity led to spontaneous or planned actions on and around the Atlas. The Atlas evolved its own free-associative will. Two facing eleven-metre-long walls supported the English and the Bengali versions, one on each.¹¹⁸



41. Installation view (English), Dhaka Art Summit, 2018.



42. Installation view of full length without objects (Bengali), Dhaka Art Summit, 2018.

The audience responses differed theatrically depending on location. The Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow (2019) forbade any interaction with the artefact to protect the object's sanctity - its beauty must not be tampered with. All animation was rejected (clear wall space; removable sticky labels). Finally, authorities categorised the artefact as politically precarious, able to incite unacceptable, uncontrollable anti-government action. It was politically explosive. Audience passion was denied. Nothing happened in Moscow. No Russian or Soviet, or ex-Soviet spheres exploded on the wall. No academics engaged in debate. No public conversation took shape. The restraining order reduced the artefact to an aesthetic object, fixed, dead. Without interaction, the Atlas had no to life. Although, retrospectively, the irony dawned that Moscow's censorial paranoia could be interpreted as the most solid validation of the object's transgressive potentialities. It is not merely an infographic artwork. Two invigilators manned the artefact throughout the duration, one at either end of the very long floor with English and Russian versions in one long length.



43. Installation views (Russian), Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2019.

At SAWVY Contemporary: The Laboratory of From-Ideas, Berlin, the Atlas exploded a few months later (2019). The installation was continually animated, interrogated, ruminated on, discovered. An entire day of lectures, performances, debates, dance, and musical installations took shape by Berliners from around the world. The remit was open in the spirit of the festivals of the 1960s. Garage, Moscow, still promised to find a format to play the game: a Russian colleague was sent out from Moscow to experience the events. The final verdict was again negative. It was impossible for Moscow to indulge. At Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju (2020), the Atlas was most beautifully displayed in the apt context of South-South constellations of the Non-Aligned Movement era. No activation was allowed. Here, infrastructural, and budgetary considerations were apparent blocks. The Atlas did not gain muscular strength from its East Asian tour.

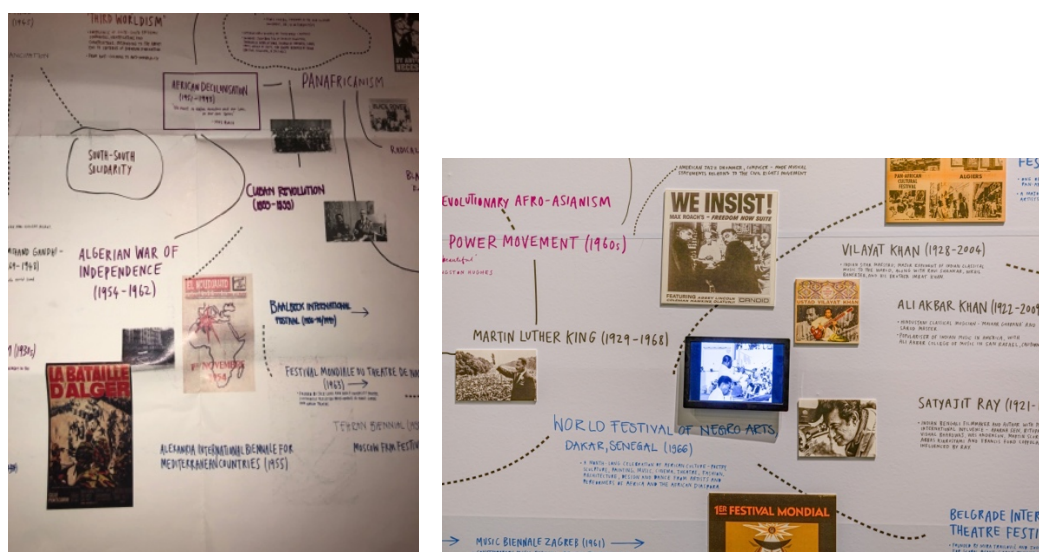
Subjectivities / Inter-Subjectivities

The censorial restriction of the Atlas' performativity consciously/intentionally castrated its innate performative threat to the insecure status quo. My "archaeology" series understands any attack on art as a form of attack on wider democratic social rights. The foreclosure, the disavowal of potential, is implemented to impose impotence, castrate, and control the capacities of individual/audience subjectivities to register their own states of consciousness. Those must be cancelled. If consciousness itself developed when creatures became aware and able to register conscious feelings and subjective experiences, then systems of power had their job cut out for them - to shape and control that consciousness. It is understandable why

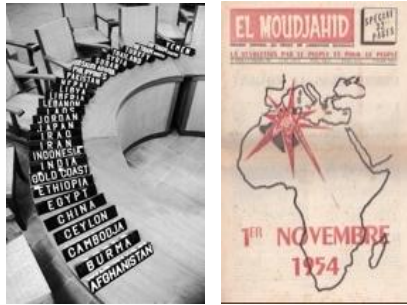
the cultural memories/counter-memories mapped in the Atlas required management by those power systems. Lest the whole would add up to more than the sum of its parts. The Atlas, instead, expanded with the freedom that such a radical position necessitated. It posed as a mapping of consciousness - an intermediary between the external and the internal and between the objective and the subjective. It mapped a phenomenon peculiar to human minds and human existence, that is, inter-subjectivities, in other words, realms that exist between humans and are developed between minds. The subordinating control of the artefact, its castration, inhibits that inter-fluidity, impressing a form of curfew to protect the fragile ego of power.

Subordination / Sovereignty

The Atlas' rhizomatic nature was a 'zooming out', whereby a single artefact may only be recognised/liberated within a broader context of sparks and episodes. It charted a new mind of history. At the geo-cultural centre of the Atlas sat the Non-Aligned Movement, mid-century civil rights movements, and African/Black emancipation, and the revolutionary rise of gender and sexual politics and aesthetics. Routes of meaningful influence and linkage were traced beyond colour lines, domination/subordination representations and exclusionary practices to play an anthem and pay homage to historical 'others'. It was designed for flexing muscles, claiming sovereignties, realising affinities. The energetic core of the Atlas



44. Details of *The Shifting Sands of Utopias: A Cultural Atlas*.



45. (Left) Bandung Conference, 1955 in Indonesia.
 46. (Right) *El Moudjahid* Newspaper, 1954, Printed Algiers.

accused (to borrow from architect Pier Vittorio Aureli's reading of Walter Benjamin's "Experience and Poverty") "the very materialist core of capitalistic oppression, that is, the unconditional belief that we are destined to be part of the unstoppable development of our means of production – technology, science, and all the forms of social and political injustice that the development of our productive (and reproductive) apparatus has historically always triggered".¹¹⁹ The *raison d'être* of the Atlas became the cancellation of that straightforward objective landscape of history. It took heed from Benjamin's knowledge of "the story about the Communards, who, when they took Paris in 1871, first shot out the clocks."¹²⁰ The Atlas' tentacular non-linearity also shot out the clocks: cyclical time, vertical time, overlap, and repetition are endemic to its form. It is, by default, a menacing, intimidating transgression from the capitalist linear idea of progression towards betterment. It is designed to put forth and present us with the negative imprint of the straightforward objective landscape of history as determined by the apparent stability of technology and capital power. To disorient. And its abundance of joyful inter-subjectivities impresses upon us a counter-cartography of the link between capital and growth. It sets in motion its own destructive urge to radically undermine capital's gleeful exploitation and claim to infinite resourcefulness, of "the urge to adapt to new (and often more adverse) conditions"¹²¹ along a direct and fixed developmental path. The expansive cartographic cosmos of the Atlas upheld the infinite destructive urge to disrupt that claim. To expose its insecurity. To audaciously implant uncertainties. To confidently purport to overwrite it with a historical evolution of consciousness.

The fluid seepage and spillage of urges stopped time and disorientated the linear capitalist historical landscape to supplant it with an alternative dreamscape. For

'civilisations' to courageously launch alternative "escapes" and emancipating plots. In the words of Hannah Arendt, "to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own."¹²² The plotting imagined invigorating interrupted human rites, rhythms, desires, resistances, and aspirations that restore the vitality and value of multiple intersecting inter-subjectivities and desires upon which humans build their multiple civilisations above and beyond any claims of truth by the models of capital. It was a *utopian protest map*. It was a reclamation of world systems of *unfinished* aspirational actions, ideas, and ideals stretching back to the nineteenth century and exploding in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Atlas retrieved and connected networks of divergent and convergent unequal bodies of radical action and *pensée* that circulate in non-linear historical cycles within a great adventurous single (but not unified) collective unfinished master narrative of desire. In spirit, it reflected the words of Henri Lefebvre: "Here, in the new town, boredom is pregnant with desires, frustrated frenzies, unrealised possibilities. A magnificent life is waiting just around the corner, and far, far away".¹²³

"I have been to the mountaintop."
"Only when it is dark, can you see the stars."
—Martin Luther King Jr.¹²⁴

"Either we go up together, or we go down together."
—Martin Luther King Jr.¹²⁵

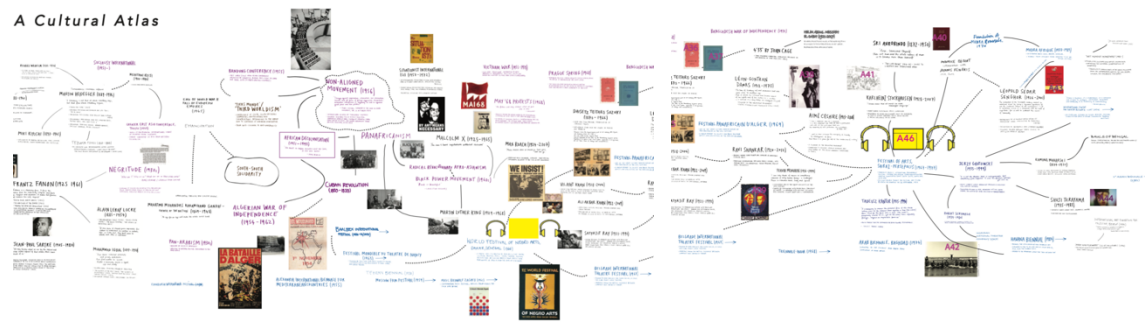
"Pass from matter to spirit. Matter is diversity; spirit is light, life and unity."
—Mohammad Iqbal¹²⁶

"For many people... in modern life, it is something organic and natural, to look for the original, for the first, for the primary, for the true, which has no practical utilisation... but is a completely other proposal."
—Jerzy Grotowski¹²⁷

"A real theatrical experience shakes the calm of the senses, liberates the compressed unconscious and drives towards a kind of potential revolt..."
—Antonin Artaud¹²⁸

"To the ancestors, only when the spiritual part of man was awakened had art served its basic purpose. For in his cosmic dance in space and time man is forever seeking to unravel the secrets and the infinite and silent world of the spirit, a world that is forever beckoning him."
—William Greaves¹²⁹

A Cultural Atlas



47. 48. The Shifting Sands of Utopias: A Cultural Atlas.

BAALBEK, ARCHIVES OF AN ETERNITY

Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity presented a longitudinal, empirical, historical, and sociological research project and exhibition on the city of Baalbek, situated in the Beqaa Valley of Lebanon.



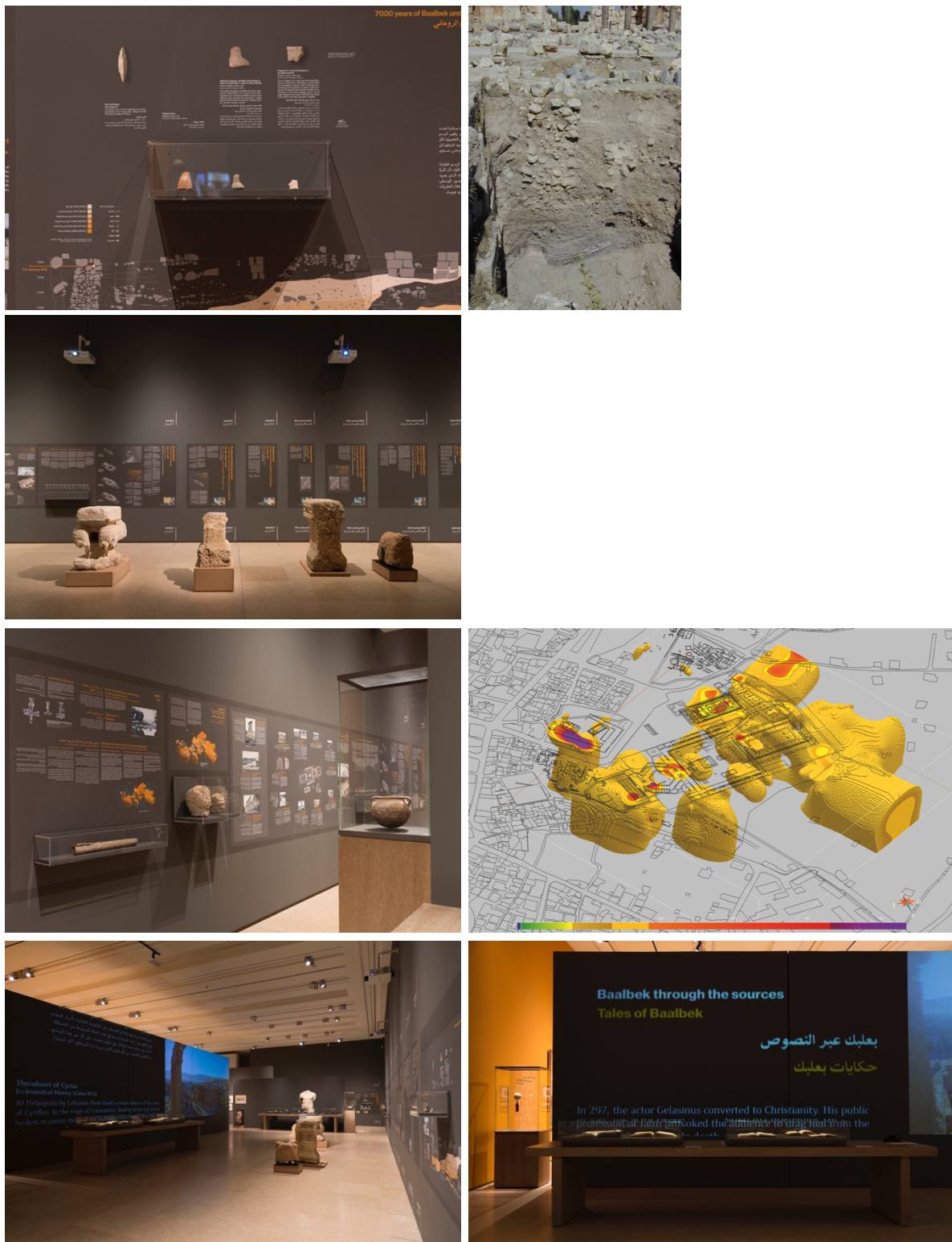
49. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity* exhibition plan, Sursock Museum, 2019.

The Sursock Museum in Beirut commissioned the project. From inception, the project was an institutional one, a rarity for my Archaeology of the Final Decade platform, which initiates its reclamations of lost histories and carves its path into mainstream art history. That meant conformity with the museum's (and their board's) requirements and their conservative aesthetic visions and political proclivities. Sursock Museum's constitution inhibits anyone but a Greek Orthodox from leading it as a director. That already set the scene for the difficult and illiberal terrain that manifests itself in various forms in Lebanon - never had a cultural project of mine experienced such an open yet fragmented space. Ministerial, national, regional,

provincial, cultural, and academic entities operating freely rarely willed to collaborate. Naturally, the museum and its authorities, paralysed by political fears, were reluctant to be ambitious, generated obstacles and institutional impasses, and undermined the process of engagement with contemporary realities. It was typical of traumatised, sensitive, and fragile spaces to self-censor; systems of fear and repression delegate much of the repression and violence down to the level of the individual and citizen. That truth manifested itself across all – contributors and audiences alike. It was no surprise that the institution itself adopted conformism and complicity. Navigating the terrain was curatorially incredibly tricky and fraught with dead ends.

I transferred to Lebanon for half a year physically on the ground along the Beirut-Baalbek route. The result was a vast cultural success - a testament to the real possibility of reconciliations through head-on action - pulling in their largest-ever crowds and uniting many disparate factions. Head-on was the healing experience of many institutions, government bodies, and audiences. Nevertheless, the museum kept the printing press catalogue, fearing controversy, sabotage, and its own propensity for self-censorship. A particular issue arose intermittently with me as curator. Baalbek and the Beqa'a are under the political rule of Hizb'allah, an Iranian-backed religio-militia Islamist organisation – at total political odds with my platform's work. Baalbek is the emblematic symbol of modern Lebanon. How did it come to be that the most important museum in Beirut commissions an Iranian-born to investigate that monument to Lebanon in Hizbollah-controlled Beqaa?

Beirut's claim on the peripheral Baalbek (inland and beyond the massive Lebanon mountain range) was limited in vision and reality and bent on ownership, custodianship, and exploitation of its archaeology. In line with that the museum was reluctant to engage with any other than the various central government and Beirut-led organisations that claim the site. Central power was organised through the national archaeological mission, the various European missions, the ministry of tourism (not the ministry of culture), and the annual Baalbek International Festival (1956-present). Baalbek as a city – its contemporary reality - was abandoned, shunned, and feared. The archaeology of its Roman ruins, internationally acclaimed, was upheld as a symbol of civilisation and the nation.



50. Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity exhibition views, Sursock Museum, 2019.

Curatorial Strategies of Dismantlement

The fissure between the real and the constructed became the main curatorial mission of the exhibition. The project's central focus was to set up and anchor creative tension between 'power' and 'the common man' – between 'standardised' history and layers of diverse, multiple, contrary, overlapping, complex and enduring subaltern histories. Diversities and complexities were reduced to casualties at Baalbek by the power dynamics of inherited historical hegemony and centralities. Curatorially, it became imperative to unflatten, decompress, and hoist up the multiple life stories at Baalbek, the city, to counter the singular vantage point of 'noble' Rome. That purified, falsified singular truth and its associated artificially constructed scaffoldings of cultural pride had to be supplanted by actual, multiple, and ongoing human histories.¹³⁰ Democratisation compelled me into a longitudinal research and exhibition format as an honest central axis for threading a cohesive story through multiple equal lenses. My long developmental research started from the "Fertile Crescent" (8000 BCE) and finished with the realities of the contemporary city and its citizens. It meandered through ten thousand years of eventful episodes (one of them Roman) through the recent establishment of the Lebanese nation-state declared by the French mandate in 1923.

With the retreat of Ottoman power and the European political takeover, it was initially unclear whether Beqaa and Baalbek would become part of Syria or modern Lebanon. However, the fertile geography of the Beqaa played a decisive role in convincing the French Mandate that modern Lebanon would benefit from its acquisition. In the 1920s, French colonial influence ensured that the Beqaa was incorporated into the republic of Grand Liban, and the Lebanisation of Baalbek was officiated.¹³¹ Handover included a transfer of the long trajectory of Baalbek's European-articulated symbology and the European 'historicist aestheticisation of politics'¹³²: Baalbek stood in as the very symbol of civilisation itself. With Lebanisation, Baalbek went from an unreconcilable (prehistoric, historic, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Ottoman) past to becoming the new nation's most reproduced emblematic (in its Roman version) brand.^{133/134} A myth of an ideal past, frozen in the cleaned-up image of Baalbek, became the bedrock and launchpad of the new nation.¹³⁵ The archives traced all written appearances of Baalbek in

historical sources - from Aramaic to Greek, Latin, Arabic, French, German, and English and used numismatics to consolidate objective historical knowledge.

Living History

The encyclopaedic excavation of the city's 'lives' was an experiment never previously attempted; it was a revolutionary and revelatory mission and exercise. Contradictory and disconnected Baalbek's accumulatively coalesced into a kaleidoscopic whole to perform in a public space for the first time. The meticulous, exhaustive revelation of the total truth did more than loosen multiple layers; reclaimed more than an unhealthily deadened state-sanctioned monologue; dismantled more than the image and myth of an ideal past; side-lined more than European archaeological/civilisational discourses or national agendas. The excavation revealed the developmental story of Baalbek as a microcosmic archetypal and paradigmatic container of the developmental history of 'man'. Unbeknownst to the Lebanese public at large, Baalbek is one of the oldest and continually occupied cities in all urban history, never abandoned like nearby Palmyra or Jerash. Obscured underneath Roman remains (1BCE-2CE) or otherwise overshadowed by them across millennia was a 'total' history of ten-thousand years, as old as settled 'man' – older than history itself. Objective history put epic-ness in crisis at Baalbek, robbed it subtly from the supremacy of its Roman stones to deliver the site to itself, to its common man, past and present.¹³⁶ Epic-ness was endemic to the very site itself, not inherent in the celebrated Roman stone. The monumentality and designated superiority of the Roman stones (cleaned and frozen in time and space) suppressed history before and oppressed everything that came after. Now Roman archaeology was set upon by all the other archaeologies.

The Monument, the Self, the Object

Unearthing/staging that 'total' history was to instrumentalise the exhibition space as a performative site of appearance/action/reconciliation - a transformational therapeutic site for object performance. The intellectual/affective achievement of the exhibition was to displace epic-ness; relocate monumentality, pride, and

curiosity; radically shift the discourse from construction/myth/European historicisation all towards the real inherent 'selfness' of the subject/object/thing itself. The reveal of "an expanse of ruins" beyond the visible rubble and remains commemorated a monument, in the Freudian sense.^{137/138} My personal archaeological and psychoanalytical interests were at work to subtly erect a 'monument-to-the-self', no feathers ruffled. In a psychoanalytical analogy, the subject's fragmented, splintered selfhood (living Baalbek) constituted a psychopathological condition to be reckoned with. From the get-go, it was obvious that the split-off aspects of the self (Baalbek) had to be reintegrated into the otherwise defective selfhood as a form of 'self-cure'. My interest was more specifically from a Kohutian slant. Psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut's refusal of Freudian orthodoxy elaborated traditional frameworks towards an understanding of 'self' and 'other' beyond object relations, particularly regarding narcissistic disturbances. Analogically, from the Kohutian lens, the personality (narcissistic) disturbance of the subject (living Baalbek) - its 'traumatic frustration' – would be assigned to the aspects which have, therefore, "not participated in the maturation and development of the rest of the personality"¹³⁹. Analogically bending Kohut's ideas, "the resulting cleavage in the personality is [...] 'vertical,' i.e., a split which separates a whole segment of the psyche from the one that carries the central self, manifested by an alternation between (a) states of grandiosity which deny the frustrated need for approval and (b) states of overt feelings of emptiness and low self-esteem." Those ideas were aligned with my effort to make sense of a 'whole Baalbek'. It would be sociologically less pathological and developmentally therapeutic if we would remove the singularity of the image and identify with the totality of the damaged, fragmented or disappeared remnants of history from below and from beyond Rome. Therefore, the therapeutic performance of Baalbek's split-offs rendered the space as a site for 'selfobject-functions' – the Kohutian selfobject refers to those objects that are developmentally in the service of the self and are experienced as part of the self; they promote the healthy development of a sense of self. More precisely, the selfobject could be described as the internalised, subjectively experienced, mental representation of external introjected objects (empathetic caregivers) which respond to and fulfil the needs of the subject (infant) for the healthy development of a cohesive sense of self.

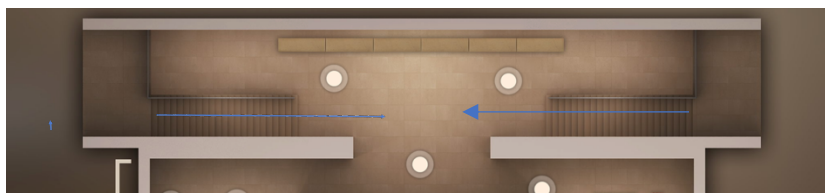
Baalbek, as image, myth, and national emblem does not reflect an authentic reality. Unless the various 'subjective' experiences of Baalbek's developmental trajectory were represented and re-enacted within the space, the curatorial work (also as

curing) would remain incomplete. Those had to be visually and auratically present to exert “authentic and consistent participation in the rest of the psychic activities”¹⁴⁰ - (living city, as opposed to piles of purified stones). All parts must participate. In therapeutic terms, “increasing their integration into mature and reality-adapted sectors and segments of the psyche”¹⁴¹ (history). That would traverse the gap between what the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott would refer to as the ‘real’ and the ‘false’ selves.¹⁴² That would produce a flash of new power or meaning/knowledge. The exhibition platform and the curatorial attitude, in short, were to address the contradictions between the millennia of living history and a single highlighted dominant historical moment. In visually and affectively experiencing and ingesting absences, the audience's accumulative empathetic experience was to overcome the inherent dissonances between the various Baalbeks.

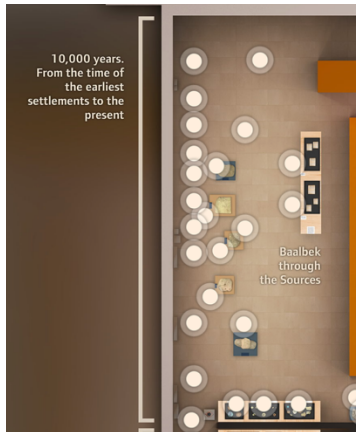
The Scenographic Curve of Life¹⁴³

Scenography was always an instrumental dimension. If the exhibition is an active site of happening – to facilitate the appearance and performance of new knowledge production and affective challenge – the spatial and temporal arrangement of its elements was choreographically very specific. Like the reader of a literary plot, the scenography must aid the spectator to construct an arc.

The audience was first greeted down the flanking steps by an immense fifteen-metre-long single photographic image of the fertile Beqaa Valley, symbolically replicating the descent to the valley from the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains (see image 52).¹⁴⁴ Like a forecourt, or ‘propylaea’, it performed as a preparatory enclosure to pay tribute to nature, geography, and its earliest settlements, of which Baalbek is a survivor.



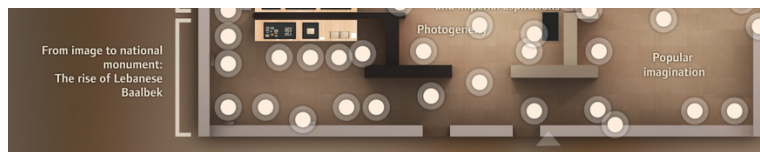
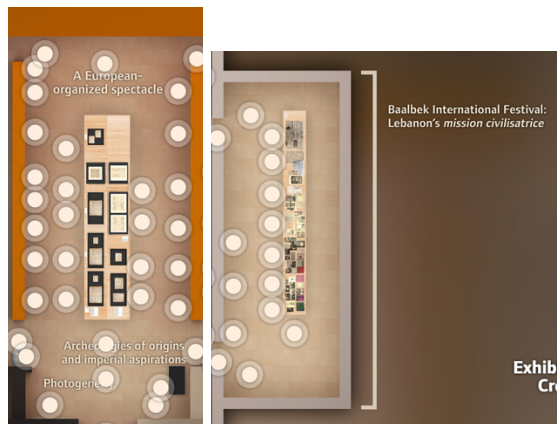
52. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity* forecourt plan view, Sursock Museum, 2019.



53. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity* "10,000 Years" plan view, Sursock Museum, 2019.

The first archive (10,000 years of History: From the Earliest Settlements to the Present) was twenty-five metres ode to the breadth of the will to exist, to thrive and to be Baalbek. Traversing that space, even if only to glance, was humbling. My focus was less on what the audience dipped in and out of and more on the spectator's performance by simply walking the length – an unwittingly ritualised acknowledgement of epic-ness as a prologue. Projected on the opposite wall and in vitrines were excerpts from texts about Baalbek throughout history, consolidating the scaffolding of enduring history prior.

In the scenographic centre, I situated the museum's invested interests: conceptually, they coalesced. Firstly, 'Orientalist' paintings that had been borrowed from private collections. Those collectors were close friends of the museum, patrons, and supporters of the exhibition. It was politically salient for the museum that their collections were seen and were seen in the best light. Secondly, the museum presented me with a stash of posters promoting tourism in Lebanon from the 1950s-1970s. Thirdly, the board of the Baalbek International Festival (1956-1975; 1997-present), an official partner of the exhibition and a quasi-state institution, expected a display worthy of their 'civilising' mission at the Roman temples – bringing high culture to Lebanon, along with celebrities and glamour.



44. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, "10,000 Years" plan view, Sursock Museum, 2019.

45. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, "The Rise of Lebanese Baalbek" plan view, Sursock Museum, 2019.

To tackle the first, the curation contextualised the grand paintings in gilt frames within the context of European texts of expeditions and invaluable engravings. All European accounts of Baalbek were mentioned, and through those, it was easily possible to unpack the underlying European assumptions of intellectual and imperial supremacy and their mechanisms.¹⁴⁵



46. 47. 48. (Top Left, Right, Bottom Left) *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, "The European-Organised Spectacle" installation views, Sursock Museum, 2019.

49. (Bottom Right) Louis-François Cassas (1756-1827) *Reconstruction des Trois Temples de Baalbek* (Reconstruction of the Three Temples of Baalbek) Undated, circa 1784-87, Watercolour and ink on paper, 71 x 138 cms, Philippe Jabre Collection.

The reconstruction idealises and imagines the temples. We believe the effort is honest and close to the truth. However, such images made sure they refracted history and focused on the 'superior' glory of Rome, an imperial power that had conquered the East. They were instrumentalised in constructing a direct lineage to Europe.

To tackle the second, I created a section titled 'Popular Imagination' and dropped those hideous tourism posters into a larger pool of popular/art-house films, songs, and images that comprise a corpus of material that over-indulges and exploits the Roman stones as a green screen. It can be claimed, categorically, that they never refer to the city or its people. Those never feature. The third was given its own separate ante space, lit up with film clips of live theatre, dance and song with the temples as the backdrop, some of which were previously unknown to the festival board, and a dense archival display of the performances organised by the festival throughout its unique and long history. The undoubtedly immense project of the festival, enduring despite the political and civil upheavals, was upheld and celebrated, while an en-masse exposure of its own rhetoric and narratives became jarringly and reductively nationalistic and aligned with maladjusted conservative

attitudes towards 'high' and 'low' culture of which high was mainstream/established European. They contrasted starkly with the prevalent revolutionary drives of that contemporaneous post-colonial era shaping elsewhere in the non-European geographies. The festival, I posit, is contrapuntal to the Shiraz-Persepolis, Dakar, Algiers festivals. Its inauguration also predates them by a decade or more.



50. (Above) Baalbek, *Archives of an Eternity*, "Popular Imaginary" installation view (detail), Sursock Museum, 2019.
51. (Bottom Left) Baalbek, *Archives of an Eternity*, "Baalbek International Festival" installation view. Courtesy Baalbek International Festival).
52. (Bottom Right) Reproduction of constructed image of Hebert von Karajan and the Roman columns of the Temple of Jupiter. Courtesy Baalbek International Festival).

Let the People Sing

Emerging from the top-down proscribed official (albeit contextually subverted) narratives, the scenography had to save history once again. It had to conjure the opportunity to undo the victor and recover life through a new strategy. That second important axis of my action compelled me to expose audiences to the indispensable contemporary political, social, cultural, and ecological tensions and dead ends that depress Baalbek in the now and the ordinary people who live through those. For its epilogue, the exhibition's final two archives transposed the audience into a radically antagonistic set of 'conjured' archives: The Modern City; The Citizens. Despite the museum's efforts to clip away, they revealed Baalbek's twentieth- and twenty-first-century trials and tensions. The Modern City displayed war experiences, sectarian standoffs, hashish trade, refugee camps, and ecological

disasters. Present-day citizens (seven selected from over twenty face-to-face interviews) closed the exhibition. On seven monitors, citizens appeared as 'talking heads' at the museum in the centre of Beirut's most affluent neighbourhood despite solid resistance from museum authorities, fearing political dissonances.

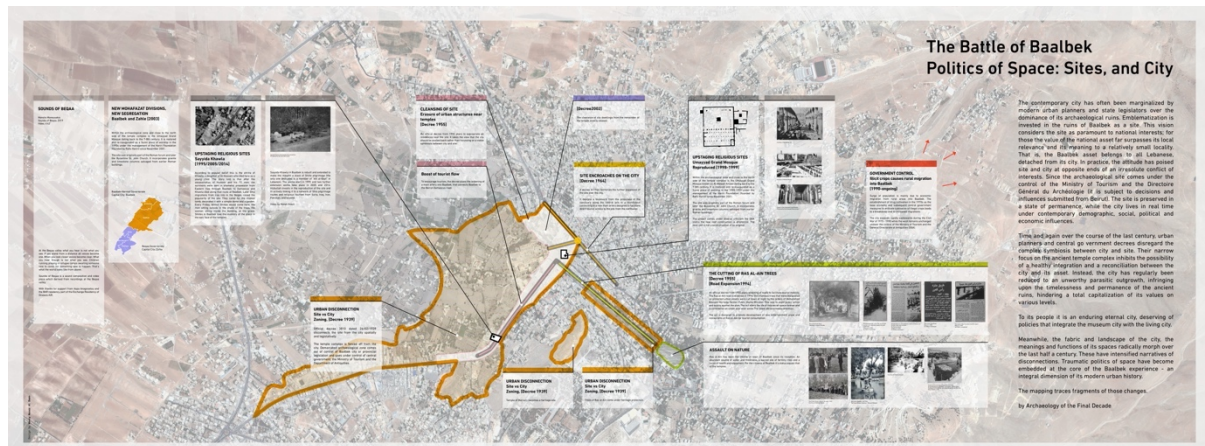
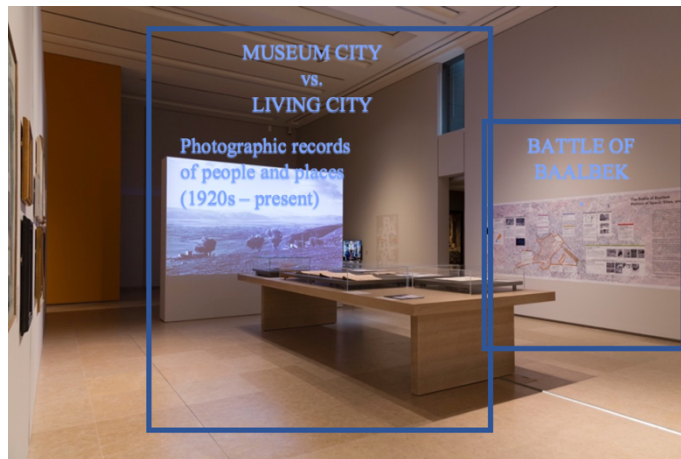


53. Baalbek, *Archives of an Eternity*, "The Modern City" installation view, Sursock Museum, 2019.

54. Baalbek, *Archives of an Eternity*, "The Citizens" installation view, Sursock Museum, 2019.

The modern and contemporary were designed as two interlinked sets of conjured archives: newspapers, state documents, historical maps, images, photographs, film clips and academic studies. One was set out in vitrines, and the other as an infographic wall map (see photographs below). Two main pillars of action emerged. First, the vicious ongoing battle of urban planning between the city and the centre stretches back to the inception of the modern state: the Beirut vs Baalbek tension, the awkward incongruent agendas of people vs state. I called it "Museum City vs Living City". Second, no one is immune from the damaging internal battles on the

ground: demographic shifts, economic fractures, internal and external wars, ecological mismanagements. I mapped those on the physical topographical plan view of the city and its environs. As an allegorical war map, I called it the "Battle of Baalbek: Politics of Space, Sites, and City"¹⁴⁶.



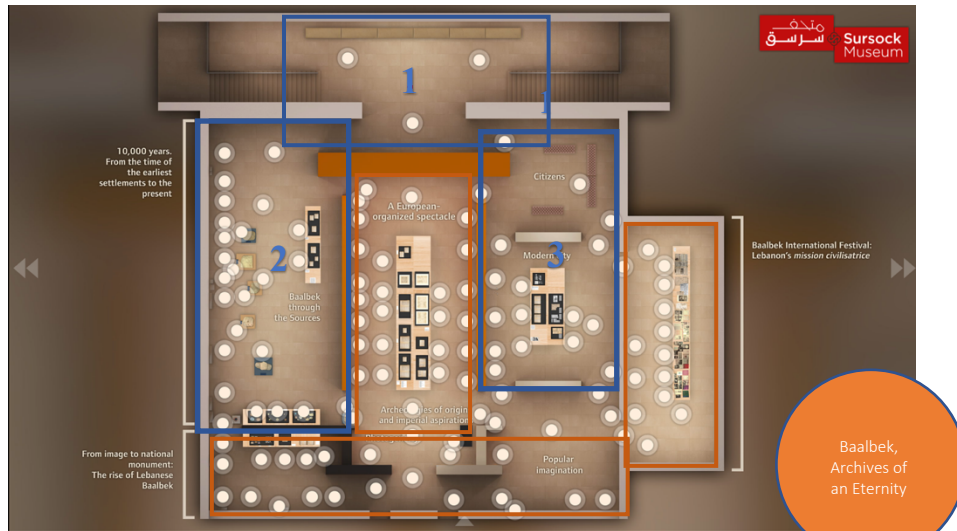
55. (Top) *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, "The Museum City vs. Living City" and "Battle of Baalbek" installation views, Sursock Museum, 2019.
56. (Bottom) *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, "Battle of Baalbek" mapping, Sursock Museum, 2019.
©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



57. 58. (Top and Bottom) *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, “Battle of Baalbek” mapping (details), Sursock Museum, 2019. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Those modern and contemporary conditions immersed the audience into the unadulterated archives of reality beyond and more principal than power without arousing official suspicions. They looped back to complete the opening archives of Baalbek’s ‘total’ history. Together, the spatial layout encircled and thwarted the turgid self-declared supremacy of the European/inherited nation-building narratives (see complete layout plan view, Image 59) and the incompatibility of the officially promoted image. The scenography had to conclude by exposing the audience to a political challenge. “The Modern City” and “The Citizens” flanked and contained

the museum's, the board's, and the patrons' core impositions. The prologue and the epilogue devastated the national/state discourses. Instead, they designed an opportunity to sanction sidelined, peripheral strife and deliver the stage back to Baalbek and its citizens.



59. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, "Battle of Baalbek" mapping (details), Sursock Museum, 2019. Blue outlines define "Prologue" 1-2 and "Epilogue" 3. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.

I was aware that the scenography and content of the final archives of Baalbek had to also problematise the chronology and linearity of my prologue's 'total' past – the story of ten thousand years. To embody 'selfness', I had to brutally assault the tyranny of that very linear narrative that I had unearthed. I wanted to release the audience from the empirical system that my exhibition had intentionally organised contrapuntally to the romanticism and empiricism of the official narratives.¹⁴⁷ Before closing, the legitimate human, the citizen, the subaltern, and the present had to be sanctioned: whose Baalbek and which Baalbek is it anyway; how does an ancient ruin – equipped for celebration and exploitation – relate to Baalbek, the enduring city of its contemporary citizens? The museum's conservatism could not eschew and clip the mission.¹⁴⁸ Real people's testimonies took over the final room. They were less frightening than the imagination of Beirut's elite. They were everyday stories. There is real humour, sadness, grief, pride, and pain in contemporary Baalbek. People openly express a sense of loss and guard their defensive scaffolding of pride. The human voice is enigmatic, affective, and direct. It is real. It lingers longer than any declaration. For opening night, I found sponsors close to the

museum who realised the human value of providing free transportation for Baalbekis who wished to attend the exhibition's opening in person. The palpable clash of cultures, the mistrust, was, at once, both deep-seated and ultimately totally superficial.



Hala Othman



Hussein Al Hussein



Cyrine Othman



Siham and George Awad



Talal Haidar



Oumayma and Hammad Yaghi



Youssef Haidar

61. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, "The Citizens", film stills, Director Vali Mahlouji, Camera and Editing Malek Hosni, Sursock Museum, 2019. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.

CONCLUSION

In the present commentary, I aimed to critically evaluate the methodologies, theoretical scaffoldings, ideas, practices, frameworks, conceptions, constructs, experiences and the creative initiations, designs, productions and advancements that consolidate my curating-as-practice as a conscious, historically engaged and politically motivated operational form of resistance. The doctoral research allowed me to engage in a necessary retrospective critical evaluation of my curating-as-practice - to take a wide-angle lens onto my practice's core ideational, material and actual structures.

In conclusion, I claim that the system-makings I have devised, designed and deployed throughout my curatorial intents, methods and practices revolve around the following leitmotifs:

archaeology of the repressed
politics of erasure
ethics of retrieval
archaeology, archive, enunciation, appearance, performance
memory, archive, and form
trauma, memory, time
trauma and experience
photography and trauma
cultural trauma
absent-presence
aura and space
living-with-ghosts
the social construction of grief
the political dimensions of grief
aestheticisation of grief
organisation through the psychoanalytic lens
trace, evidence, constellation, plot
myth, document, history, truth
seeing, being seen, being heard, para-representationality, spectatorship

form, experience, affect
the scenographic curve
humanising the void
narrativization, representation, transmission, reception, advancement
objectivity, subjectivity, discourse
ethics, activism, reconciliation
counter-hegemonic system-making

My intents, methods and practices have focussed on designing models for dismantling conventional histories and devising concrete strategies for confronting dominant forms of thought, representation, practice, and interpretation. Under the "Archaeology of the Final Decade" rubric, the models discussed in this commentary constitute forensic investigations, constructive system designs, and performative counteractions to escape, bypass or refute 'bourgeois' knowledge systems and their conventional manifestations in art, culture and exhibition-making. The methodology champions the generative radicality of the dissonant, the unrealised, the haunted and the absented. The concerns explore the matrix linking trace, time, and trauma as a most stable line of connection and focus on topographies of loss, grief, and collective resistance, often from an archaeological perspective and through a psychoanalytic lens.

My commitment to engage, reclaim, supplant, demand and *reconcile with the real* necessitates rigorous system designs that militate as performative counteractions. Whether revelatory, direct, tangential, or oblique, those counteractions aim to dismantle hegemonic and dominant narratives of history from above, written by victors, delineated as linear progressions. As a post-representational counter-hegemonic resistance necessarily, consciously and conscientiously, my practice critiques regulative, institutional orders that bureaucratises, structure, contain, invigilate, sanitise, control, rationalise, legitimise, strategise, order, and organise dominant power dynamics between creators, spectators, benefactors and consumers across and through interlinked, interdependent, and expanding worldwide collaborative platforms. Those expanding circuits (not excluding plethoras of biennials and art fairs) perpetuate models of practice and intent that swallow, co-opt, coerce, threaten and reign in radicals, peripheries, outsiders, the hitherto absentees and others into tame bourgeois relational models that perpetuate status quo. The dominant neo-liberal capitalistic production, supply, distribution, confirmation, safeguarding, and consumption models capture the

libidinal and material assets of new geographies and individuals as they do markets. As with all 'elite captures', resources, wisdoms, 'identities', and values lose their radical disruptive-generative potentials as supplements and substitutes, even as aspirations and objectives.^{149/150}

Here, the *modus operandi* and objectives of my curatorial concerns and practices maintain that incisions, breakdowns, and breakthroughs align with healthy potentials for recalibration, reconnection, mastery, and reconciliation with the real. The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott maintained that a mental breakdown could be seen as a 'healthy' sign in that "it implies a capacity of the individual to use an environment that has become available to re-establish an existence on the basis that feels *real*,"¹⁵¹ The exhibition as a site of appearance and its aftermath are precisely such environments in my view. As the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut explains, "increasing integration into the mature and reality-adapted sectors and segments of the psyche through the accretion of specific, new psychological structures which master the drive, lead to its controlled use, or transform it into a variety of mature and realistic thought and action patterns."¹⁵²

The present commentary has aimed to delineate an ideational and methodological approach that pursues cultural health, integration and mastery through radicality, peripheral vision, dissent, and dissonance. It has endeavoured to situate those core disruptive regimes as protocols for opening vitalities, possibilities, potentials and new world-makings for the future.

APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF RELEVANT EXHIBITIONS, DESCRIPTIONS, AND INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPHS

A Story for the Future. MAXXI's First Decade

MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo

Rome | 17 February – 29 August 2021

Curated by Hou Hanru with curatorial and research MAXXI team



A Story for the Future. MAXXI's First Decade. © Musacchio, courtesy Fondazione MAXXI/Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Recreating the Citadel

displacement-assemblage

University of Westminster, Graduate School

London | 17 May – 21 May 2021

Curated by the Hyphen Collective as part of *displacement-assemblage*, an exhibition of research practice.

Solidarity Spores: A Call for the Spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Third World Project

Asia Culture Centre

Gwangju | 13 May – 25 October 2020

Co-Curated by Bojana Piškur; Vali Mahlouji / Archaeology of the Final Decade;
Seonghee Kim; Sulki and Min / Tetsuya Goto; Dongjin Seo; and Sungwon Kim.

The exhibition calls for the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Third World project, which made possible resistance against colonialism and imperialism, the desire for freedom and the vision for equality. Through art practice, the exhibition follows suit to the spirit of the Museo de la Solidaridad. At the start of this decade in 2020, why are we looking back at the Non-Aligned Movement that many deem to be an unsuccessful utopian project of the 20th century Cold War era? The reason may lie in the need to escape the ubiquitous conflicts and divisions arising from neoliberal globalization and the “elective affinity” with the spirit of the NAM that sought to establish a new world order independently.



A Cultural Atlas: The Shifting Sands of Utopias (as artist)

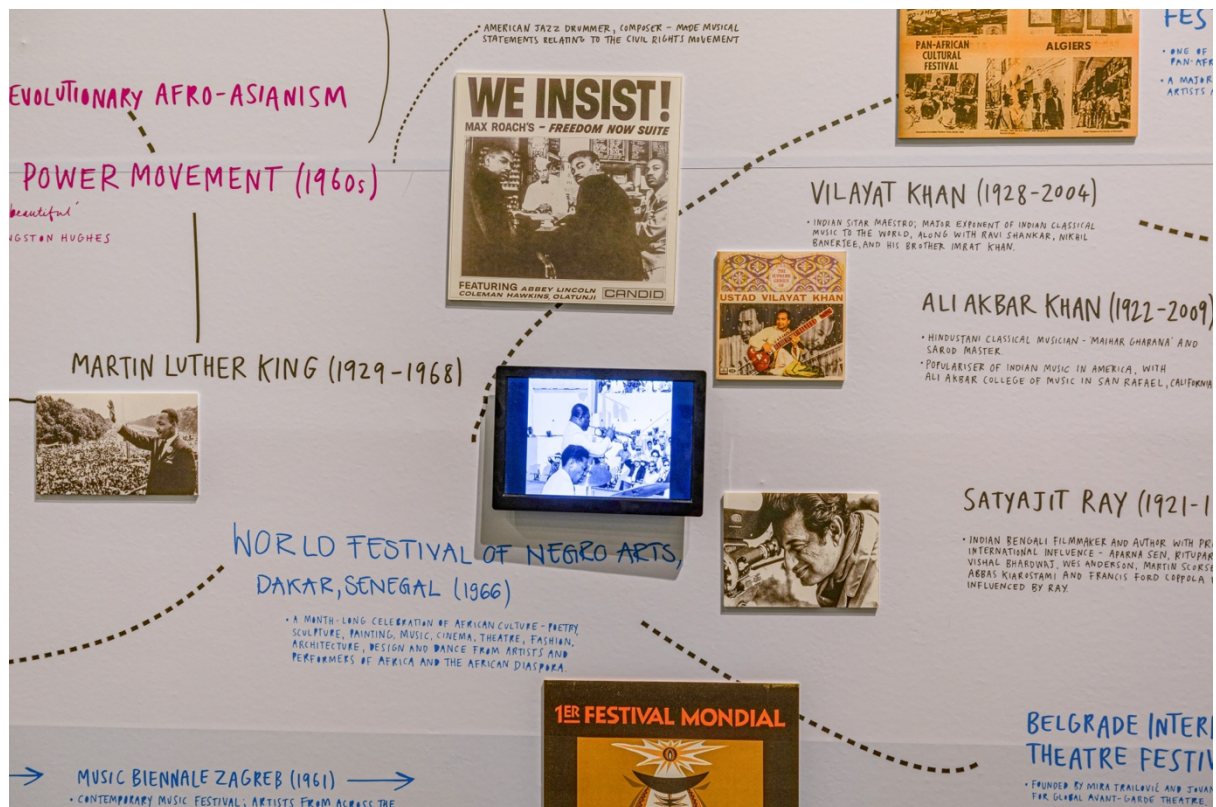
Solidarity Spores: A Call for the Spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Third World Project

Asia Culture Centre

Gwangju | 13 May – 25 October 2020

My Atlas's historiographical/curatorial approach combines archaeological conceptions into an interactive structure as a base for artistic and cultural action. It conjures a fragmented history of the long twentieth century and contemporary history through the ambitions and contradictions of countless objectives: transcendental internationalisms, radical liberations, emancipating solidarities. A Cultural Atlas mines and maps a crucial landscape that echoes heterogeneous voices and forces, requiring harnessing the logics of current dystopias, A Cultural Atlas enhances strategic points of connections and conversions, delineating, foregrounding, and describing a parallel alternative reality to today's algorithmic capitalist atomising post-coloniality, to harvest the principal motive of resistance. The mapping's visual projection transforms the artwork into a panoramic view of

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Solidarity Spores, Cultural Atlas Installation view, Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju, 2020 © Asia Culture Centre/Archaeology of the Final Decade.

A Utopian Stage

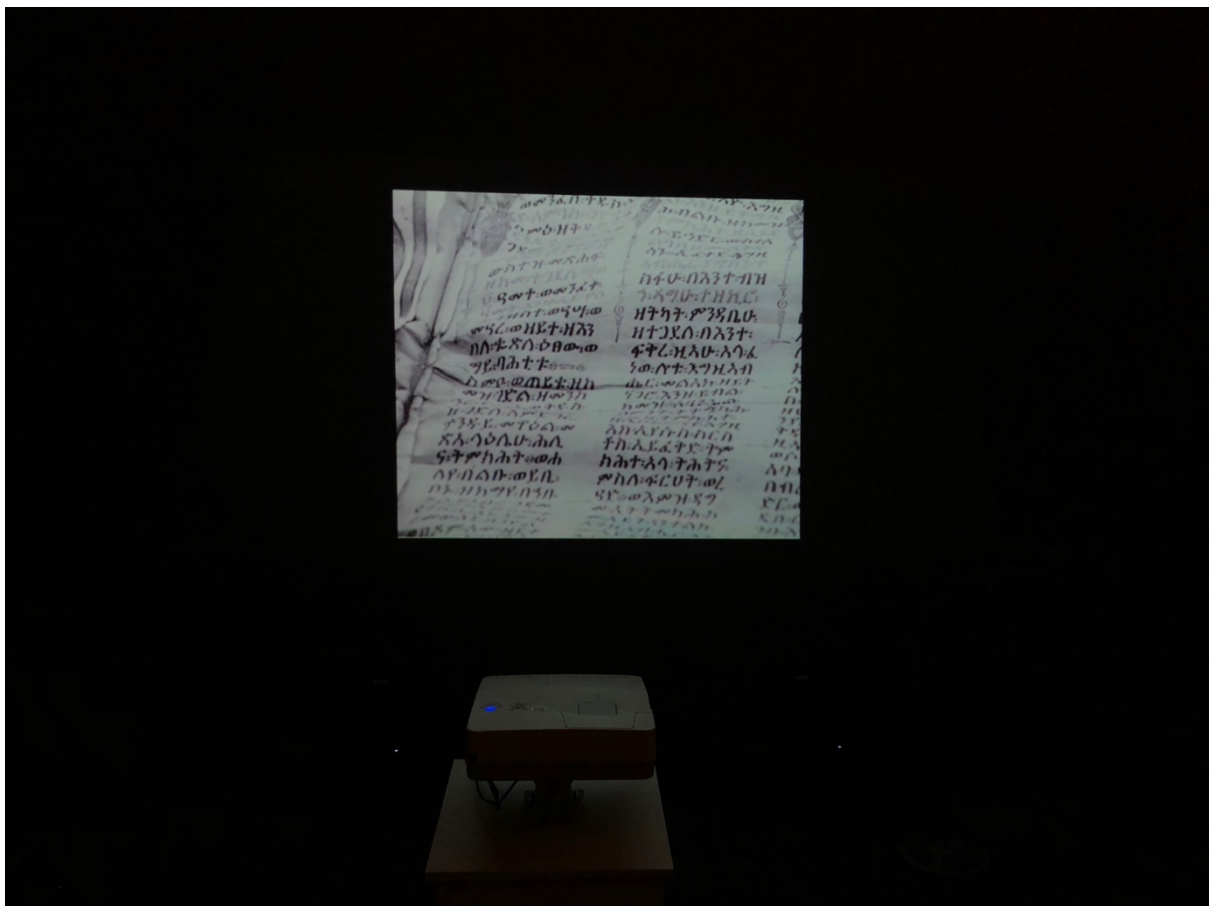
Solidarity Spores: A Call for the Spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Third World Project

Asia Culture Centre

Gwangju | 13 May – 25 October 2020

This iteration expands the model of an art festival as 'A Post-Colonial Rewriting' aligned with the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1950s-70s.

Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju (2020), *A Utopian Stage in Solidarity Spores* Installation views. Courtesy Asia Culture Centre. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Recreating the Citadel (as artist)

Still I Rise: Feminisms, Gender, Resistance – Act 3

Arnolfini

Bristol | 14 September – 15 December 2019

Curated by Irene Aristizábal, Rosie Cooper and Cédric Fauq

The *Recreating the Citadel* research-artwork is an exposé of the erased history of Šahr-e Noww, the red light ghetto of Tehran, circa 1920-1980, in the context of the cultural revolution and Islamisation of post-revolutionary Iran. *Still I Rise* is a timely exhibition focusing on the his/her story of resistance movements and alternative forms of living from a gendered perspective.

Arnolfini (2019), *Recreating the Citadel* in *Still I Rise: Feminisms, Gender, Resistance – Act 3* Installation Views. Courtesy Arnolfini. © Archaeology of the Final Decade.





Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity

Sursock Museum

Beirut | 28 June – 22 September 2019

Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity is an expansive historical survey of the 10,000 year-span of Baalbek. It reconstructs a complex network of histories, encompassing the pre-historic origins of the site, its rise to prominence, mythologies, functions, occupations, appropriations, its role in identity politics, its role in modern national and political agenda, and its contemporary reality. The historical exhibition is organised in nine chapters:

- 10,000 years (From the time of the earliest settlements to the present)
- A European-Organized Spectacle
- Archaeologies of Origins and Imperial Aspirations
- Photogeneity
- From Image to National Monument (The rise of Lebanese Baalbek)
- Popular Imagination
- Baalbek International Festival
- Modern City (The Battle of Baalbek)
- Citizens

The historical exhibition surveys archaeological, ethnological, anthropological, cultural, and artistic perspectives to unpack the history of Baalbek from origin to contemporary, to ascertain if, and how, Baalbek operates as a signifier, a point of reference, and an identity marker throughout history. *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity* traces an epic stage of human drama through its many different lenses, dialogues, and perspectives – traversing ancient and modern; mythological and empirical; symbolic and material; world history and personal testimony; to its emblematic rise as the national brand of the modern nation of Lebanon.

Sursock Museum (2019) *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity* Installation Photographs. Christopher Baaklini and Jacques Abou Khaled; Courtesy Sursock Museum. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.













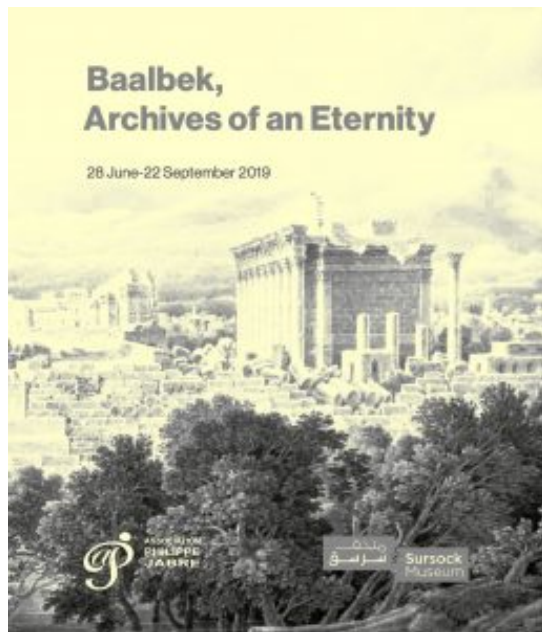












A Utopian Stage

SAVVY Contemporary: The Laboratory of Form/Ideas

In conjunction with Berliner Festspiele and Mäerzmuzik,

Berlin | 24 March – 28 April 2019

Three music performances including *Iannis Xenakis, Persepolis*

An exhibition in three acts:

- Act I: *The Shifting Sands of Utopias: A Cultural Atlas.*
- Act II: *The Excavated Archives.*
- Act III: *Invocations*

Act I: The Shifting Sands of Utopias: A Cultural Atlas

The interactive and ongoing Cultural Atlas conjures a fragmented history of the long twentieth century through the ambitions and contradictions of countless utopian universalist episodes and ideals: transcendental internationalisms, radical liberations, emancipating solidarities.

SAVVY Contemporary: The Laboratory of Form/Ideas (2019), *Act I: The Shifting Sands of Utopias: A Cultural Atlas*. Photographs Camille Blake. Courtesy Savvy Contemporary. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.





Act II: Shiraz-Persepolis: The Excavated Archives

Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD) unearths the archival materials of the radical and virtually forgotten decade-long *Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis* (1967-1977). Over fifty years since its inception, A Utopian Stage explores the genealogies and implications of the festival's modernist ambitions, using it as a lens through which to reconsider the legacies of modernism's radical progressive arc. Embodying an optimistic drive to reimagine the world as an open universal arena for mutual exchange, the festival exalted in the dawn of the post-colonial age, aspiring to new solidarities and connections which marked the emergence of a potential new world.

SAVVY Contemporary: The Laboratory of Form/Ideas (2019), Act II: Shiraz-Persepolis, The Excavated Archives Photographs Camille Blake. Courtesy Savvy Contemporary. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.











Act III: Invocations

Invocations summons performative responses and critical conversations by an eclectic group of artists, performers, composers and thinkers who are invited to activate the contents, discourses, histories and points of reference relating to the radical and experimental spirits of the 1960s and 1970s. The open platform of *Invocations* invites responses, interpretations and engagements with the emancipating ambitions and contradictions of 'the age of modernism and revolution' and the transcendentalisms, internationalisms and the radical desires to unlock utopian potentials.

At SAVVY Contemporary the roving *Invocations* invited contributions from Vali Mahlouji, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Kamila Metwaly, Reetu Sattar, Simon Wachsmuth, Mohammad Salemy, Maco (4 RUDE), Drummers of Joy, Slavs & Tatars, Satch Hoyt & Earl Harvin, Jihan El-Tahri with Hasan El-Malik and Jessica Ekoman. Photographs in order of appearance: Maco (4 RUDE) *Butoh-Solo Invisible Friends*; Simon Wachsmuth in Conversation with Vali Mahlouji; Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung; Slavs and Tatars, *Red-Black Thread*; Drummers of Joy; Jihan El-Tahri in conversation with Hasan El-Malik, *Sounds of Erasure*.

SAVVY Contemporary: The Laboratory of Form/Ideas (2019), Act III: Invocations, Photographs in order of appearance (courtesy of the artists) from top: Maco (4RUDE), Butoh-Solo, Invisible Friends; Slavs & Tatars, Red-Black Thread; Satch

Hoyt & Earl Harvin, *How Sound Informs, Defines and Explains Radical Black Culture*; Hasan El-Malik, *Sun Blues*; *Drummers of Joy* (Ekow Alabi, Mark Kofi Asamoah, Ayo Sonko, Akinola Famson). Photographs Patrik Bablo. Courtesy the Artists/Savvy Contemporary. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.







A Cultural Atlas: The Shifting Sands of Utopias (as artist)

Garage Museum of Contemporary Art

Moscow | 8 March – 26 May 2019

Exhibited in conjunction with the exhibition *Rasheed Areen. A Retrospective*.

The Shifting Sands of Utopias – A Cultural Atlas is a panorama of the intellectual history of the twentieth century. It reflects utopian and emancipatory intellectual, artistic, political, ethical, and spiritual international networks, revisiting the intersection of modernism, art and revolution through radical aspirations of the twentieth century.

Garage Museum of Contemporary Art Installation and Public Talk (2019), *A Cultural Atlas: The Shifting Sands of Utopias*. Courtesy Garage Museum.

©Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Зыбучие пески утопий.
Атлас культур

Настоящий проект реконструирует комплексное пространство современности в интернациональном измерении и представляет собой атлас интеллектуальных обменов между различными (прежде всего неевропейскими) культурными пространствами. Этот процесс глобальной «реориентации» сопряжен с преобразованием единого способа «тени» с Запада на Восток в модель циклического характера, которая прослеживается в культурных и политических контактах между Востоком и Западом, Востоком и Востоком, Югом и Востоком, Югом и Югом, что в целом дает полную панораму взаимодействия философскими и художественными концепциями.

Этот интерактивный и постоянно пополняемый культурный атлас объединяет фрагменты истории XX века, воскрешая порывы и противоречия бесчисленных утопических, универсалистских начинаний и идеалов: всеобщего интернационализма, радикального освобождения, раскрепощающей солидарности.

Закат старых европейских империй в середине прошлого столетия открыл новые горизонты возможностей и контактов для людей и культур всего мира. Настоящий атлас реконструирует непрерывно эволюционировавшие мечты и проекты, которые появлялись и исчезали в течение этого периода.

В своем стремлении быть живым объектом культурный Атлас меняется при каждом новом показе. Атлас целенаправленно является незавершенным, несовершенным процессом – подобием того, к чему идеем, которые и нестабильный процесс — сохранения намерение обрести новую форму в пространстве культуры. Тем самым культурно-жизнь в картине существует как живой объект. Читатель атласа предлагается прерывать, вмешиваться и формировать его по своему вкусу, а также расширить его носимое, цвет и то же эволюции, инцидирова новые события, предлагая новые связи, инцидирование истории XX века, раскрывая подложные пространства и опыты.

Александр Киселев

Среди последних кураторских проектов Мадрида – выставка в рамках Сингапурского международного фестиваля искусства и триеннале «Искусства ассиметрии» (Норвегия). Художественный советник в Дании (Богдан) экспозиции в Музее современного искусства города Парика. Национальный музей искусства XXI века (МООС) в Риме, галерея чайчиан в Лондоне. Музей фотографии в Астерланде, на ярмарке Port of London в Лондоне и Art Dubai Modern в Дубае, в Фонде прикладного искусства в Астерланде и в галерее Open Eye в Ливерпуле. В настоящее время он работает над проектом в павильоне на Вавр в Венеции (он-С) (Венеция), Музей Сурыо в Бейруте (Ливан), Центр SAVVY Contemporary в Берлине и Центре азиатского искусства в Кандоу (Южная Корея).

Основным в 2010 году проектом «Бразилиана» послужило десятилетие (АТОС) представлял собой интерактивную туристическую платформу, цель которой – персонализированное путешествие, включающее, помимо прочего, физическое развитие, искусство и другие политические, экономические или культурные управленческие культуры. Кроме того, АТОС развивает производные искусства в музее международного значения – галереи Тейн Мудри, Бразилское общество. Культурное музей Лос Анжелес, АТОС связан с галереей Тейн Мудри, первый в истории институт, под постоянной экспозицией, посвященный искусству, искусство – в нем представлены серия Кэти Хаммонд «Бразилиана» и «Новый город».

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ТАДЕУШ КАНТОР (1915–1990)

«Необходимо вернуть первоначальную силу потрясения этому моменту, когда против человека (зрителя) впервые встал человек (актер), поразительно похожий на нас и одновременно бесконечно чужой, находящийся за барьером, который невозможно перешагнуть»

- Польский театралый режиссер, известный новаторскими постановками в Польше и других странах мира
- Основал театр-мастерскую «Крико-2»

РОБЕРТ СЕРУМАГА (1939–1980)

Угандийский драматург, сторонник театра абсурда
основатель национального театра Уганды (1967)

АРАБСКАЯ БИЕННАЛЕ, БАГДАД (1974)

Единение художников арабского мира при поддержке
Партии арабского социалистического возрождения «Баас»



философии Раманъ

НАЦИОНА
КОМПАНИ



Recreating the Citadel

Rohtas 2 Gallery in collaboration with Lahore Literary Festival 2019

Lahore | 21 February – 12 March 2019

The research-artwork is an exposé of the erased history of Šahr-e Noww, the red light ghetto of Tehran, circa 1920-1980, in the context of the cultural revolution and Islamisation of post-revolutionary Iran.

Recreating the Citadel (as artist)

Still I Rise: Feminisms, Gender, Resistance – Act 2

de la Warr Pavilion

Bexhill-on-Sea | 9 February – 27 May 2019

Curated by Irene Aristizábal, Rosie Cooper and Cédric Fauq

The *Recreating the Citadel* research-artwork is an exposé of the erased history of Šahr-e Noww, the red light ghetto of Tehran, circa 1920-1980, in the context of the cultural revolution and Islamisation of post-revolutionary Iran.

De La Warr Pavilion (2019), Recreating the Citadel in Still I Rise: Feminisms, Gender, Resistance – Act 2 Installation Views. Courtesy De La Warr Pavilion. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Recreating the Citadel (as artist)

Hydra School Project

Hydra | June – September 2018

Hydra School Project (2018), *Recreating the Citadel* Installation View. Courtesy Hydra School Project. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Recreating the Citadel (as artist)

artmonte-carlo, Contemporary Iran

Montecarlo | 27 – 29 April 2018

Dhaka Art Summit '18

Dhaka | 2 – 10 February 2018

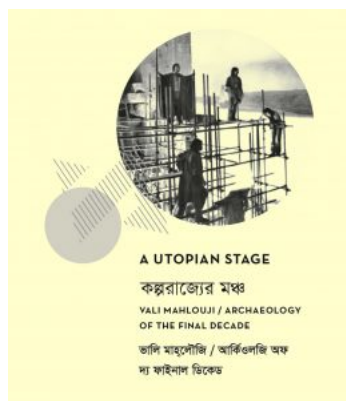
Chief Curator: Diana Campbell Betancourt. Guest Curators: Cosmin Costinas, Devika Singh, Vali Mahlouji, Amara Antilla, Alexie Glass-Kantor, Katya García-Antón, Maria Balshaw, Michelle Newton, Milovan Farronato, Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, Sharmini Pereira, Simon Castets.

DAS is unique in its ability to be a true hub for art and architecture related to South Asia. Expanding on the success of past editions, DAS 2018 extended its duration of exhibitions and programming to nine-days, and for the first time, widened its focus to create new connections between South, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean belt, highlighting the dynamic evolution of art in contemporary South Asia and reviving historical inter-Asian modes of exchange. Over three hundred artists were

exhibited across ten curated exhibitions, and over one hundred and twenty speakers from all over the world participated in sixteen panel discussions and two symposiums that grounded future developments of art in South Asia within the region's rich, yet lesser-known, past.

A Utopian Stage, Dhaka Art Summit 2018 | 2 – 10 February 2018

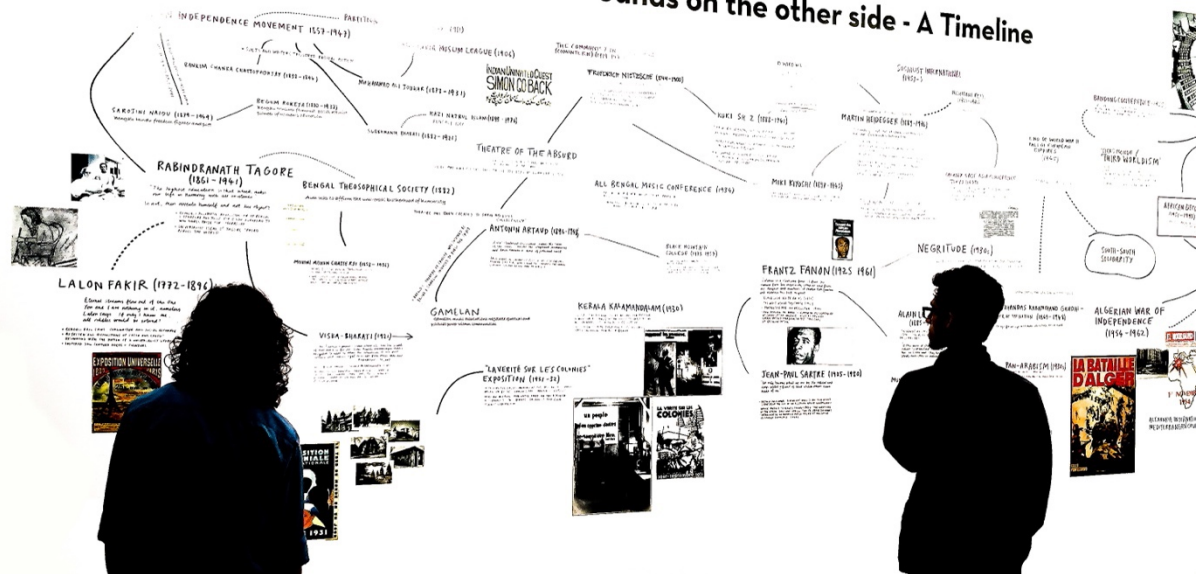
A *Utopian Stage* project examines the reverberations of 20th-century internationalisms, taking Shiraz-Persepolis (1967- 1977) as a case study and point of departure. Its manifestation at Dhaka Art Summit 2018 evolved into a multifaceted project in four acts: historical archives, contemporary live performances, new commissions, and a film festival.



ACT I:

Dhaka Art Summit (2018), *A Utopian Stage: beyond the bounds on the other side – a timeline installation*. Photographs Emma Sumner; Courtesy Dhaka Art Summit. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.

A UTOPIAN STAGE: beyond the bounds on the other side - A Timeline



ACT II

Dhaka Art Summit (2018), *A Utopian Stage: Shiraz-Persepolis - The Excavated Archives*. Photographs Emma Sumner; Courtesy Dhaka Art Summit.
©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



ACT III: The Transnationally Roving Amphitheatre

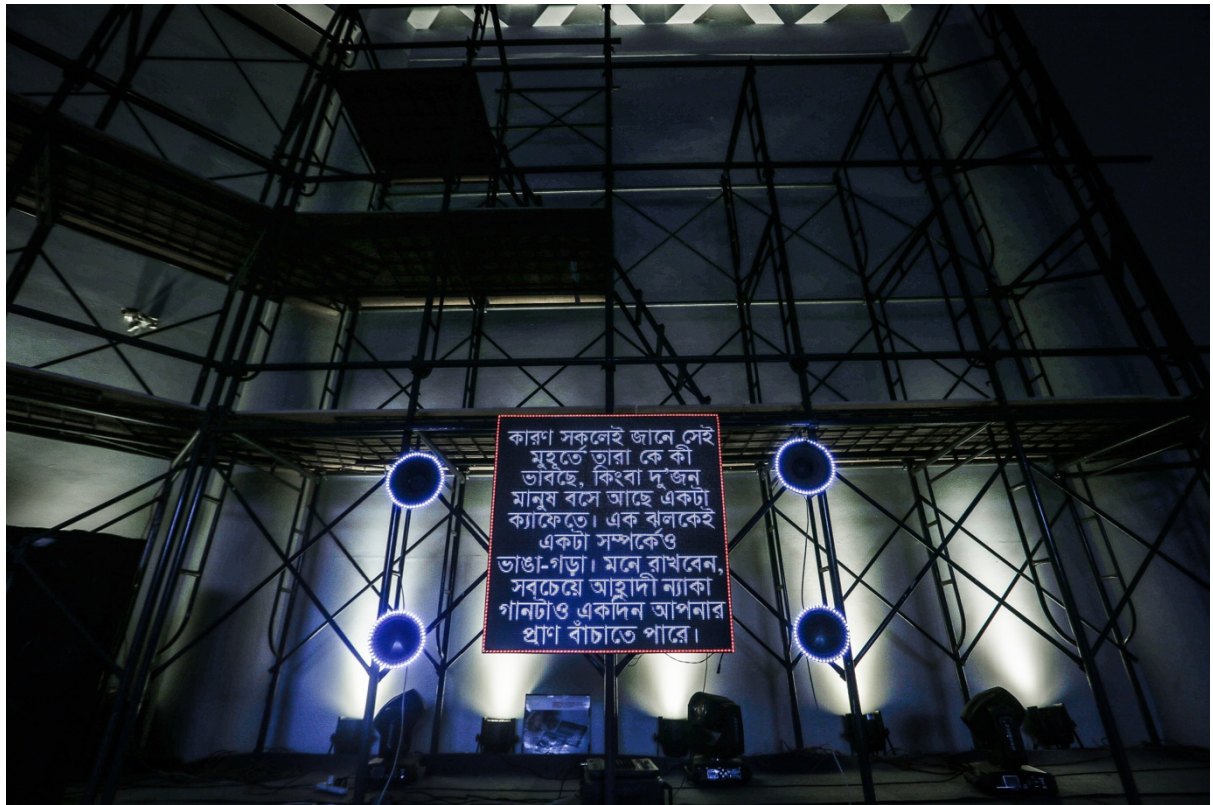
below the levels where differences appear summons performative responses and critical conversations by an eclectic group of artists, performers, composers and thinkers who are invited to activate the contents, discourses, histories and points of reference relating to the radical and experimental spirits of the 1960s and 1970s. We invite the participants to zoom in and out of Cultural Atlas. The open platform of Invocations invites responses, interpretations and engagements with the emancipating aspirations and contradictions of 'the age of modernism and revolution' and the transcendentalisms, internationalisms and the radical desires to unlock utopian potentials.

At Dhaka Art Summit '18 *below the levels...* invited contributions from Hassan Khan, Goshka Macuga with Vali Mahlouji, Silas Riener (Merce Cunningham Trust),

Reetu Sattar, Yasmin Jahan Nupur with Santal performers, and Lalon Baul singers. It took place in Bangladesh sponsored and presented by Dhaka Art Summit '18 and part-funded by Liverpool Biennial 2018 and New North and South. Designed by Vali Mahlouji

Dhaka Art Summit (2018), A Utopian Stage: below the levels where differences appear, a performance installation. Photographs in order from top: Goshka Macuga & Vali Mahlouji, Like water on hot rocks (2018); Hasan Khan, Purity (2013); Reetu Sattar, Harano Sur - Lost Tune (2018); Merce Cunningham Workshop led by Silas Riener, Field Dances Workshop (1963); Yasmin Jahan Nupur with Santal Performers, Enej (2018). Courtesy Artists/Dhaka Art Summit/Liverpool Biennial/New North and South. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.







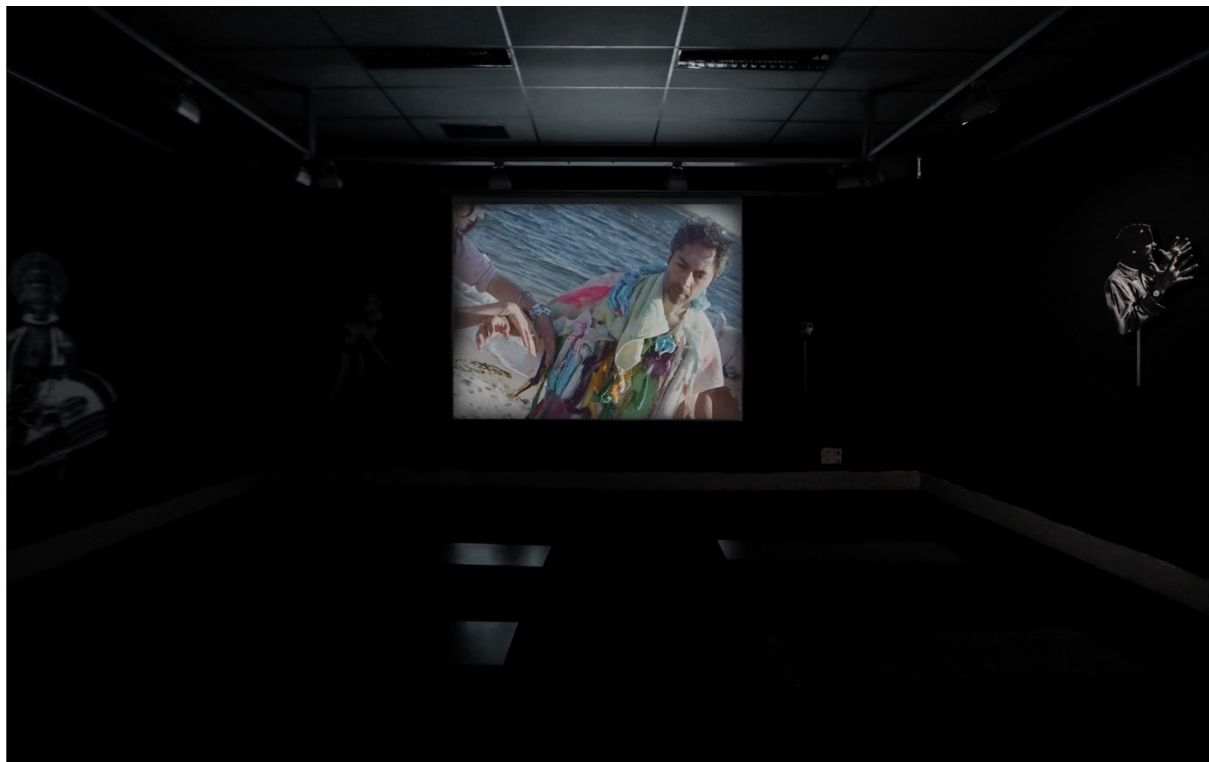
ACT IV: to be free is to lose sight of the shore film programme:

to be free is to lose sight of the shore is an eclectic film programme that conflates artist films, video documentations of live performances, historical documentaries and feature films to realise an ambivalent, exuberant, universal stage, where ideas and impulses can flourish.

At Dhaka Art Summit '18 *to be free is to lose sight of the shore* brought together works by diverse artists and filmmakers: Reza Abdoh, Larry Achiampong & David

Blandy, Ashish Avikunthak, Shezad Dawood, Rose English, Rose Finn-Kelcey, William Greaves, Mikhail Kalatozov, Lindsay Kemp, William Klein, Lala Rukh, Goshka Macuga, Simon Moretti, Sergei Parajanov, Gillo Pontecorvo, Ousmane Sembène, Shuji Terayama and Stan VanDerBeek.

Dhaka Art Summit (2018), A Utopian Stage: to be free is to lose sight of the shore film programme. Photographs in order from top: Shezad Dawood, *It was a time that was a time* (2015); Reza Abdoh, *Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice* (1990); Ashish Avikunthak, *The Emergency of Kali* (2016); Rose English, *Ornamental Happiness* (2006); Rose Finn-Kelcey, *Glory* (1984); Simon Moretti, *Act I Remembering and Forgetting: After the Final Decade* (2018); Goshka Macuga, *Preparatory Notes* (2014). Courtesy Artists/Dhaka Art Summit. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.









A Utopian Stage Film Programme

Curated by Vali Mahlouji /
Archaeology of
the Final Decade

FRIDAY, FEB. 2 & WEDNESDAY, FEB. 7

10:30	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
11:30	Preparatory Notes (53 min, 2014) Goshka Macuga
12:05	Vakratunda Swaha (25 min, 2010) Ashish Avikunthak
BREAK	
12:40	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
12:50	Tight Right White (14 min, 1993) Shezad Dawood
01:00	It was a time that was a time (17 min, 2015) Shezad Dawood
01:20	Onnagata (excerpt, 9 min, 1997) Lindsay Kemp
01:30	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (video work, 18 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh
01:45	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
01:55	Glory (20 min, 1984) Rose Finn-Kelcey
BREAK	
02:30	The Alien Inside Me (30 min, 2015) Goshka Macuga
03:00	Ornamental Happiness (excerpt, 22 min, 2006) Rose English
03:20	Meikyū-tan - (The Labyrinth Tale) (17 min, 1975) Shuji Terayama
03:40	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
03:45	Act 1: Remembering and Forgetting, After the Final Decade (3 min, 2018) Simon Moretti

03:50	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (excerpt, 20 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh
04:10	Flowers (excerpt, 20 min, 1982) Lindsay Kemp
04:30	Kalighat Fetish (22 min, 1999) Ashish Avikunthak
04:50	Rupak (7 min, 2016) Lala Rukh
05:00	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
05:40	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
05:50	The Colour of Pomegranates (78 min, 1969) Sergei Paradjanov
07:05	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
07:15	Finding Fanon, Parts 1-3 (38 min, 2015) Larry Achiampong & David Blandy

SATURDAY, FEB. 3 & THURSDAY, FEB. 8

10:30	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
11:10	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
11:20	Preparatory Notes (53 min, 2014) Goshka Macuga
12:10	Vakratunda Swaha (25 min, 2010) Ashish Avikunthak
12:35	Tight Right White (14 min, 1993) Reza Abdoh
12:50	It was a time that was a time (17 min, 2015) Shezad Dawood
01:05	Onnagata (excerpt, 9 min, 1997) Lindsay Kemp
01:15	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (video work, 18 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh
01:35	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
01:45	Glory (20 min, 1984) Rose Finn-Kelcey
02:05	The Alien Inside Me (30 min, 2015) Goshka Macuga
02:35	Ornamental Happiness (excerpt, 22 min, 2006) Rose English

02:55	Meikyū-tan - (The Labyrinth Tale) (17 min, 1975) Shuji Terayama
03:15	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
03:20	Act 1: Remembering and Forgetting, After the Final Decade (3 min, 2018) Simon Moretti
03:25	Aspothkalin Trikalika - The Kali of Emergency (excerpt, 10 min, 2016) Ashish Avikunthak
03:35	Flowers (excerpt, 20 min, 1982) Lindsay Kemp
03:55	Kalighat Fetish (22 min, 1999) Ashish Avikunthak
04:15	Rupak (7 min, 2016) Lala Rukh
04:20	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
BREAK	
04:40	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
04:50	Finding Fanon, Parts 1-3 (38 min, 2015) Larry Achiampong & David Blandy
05:25	The Battle of Algiers (121 min, 1966) Gillo Pontecorvo

SUNDAY, FEB. 4 & FRIDAY, FEB. 9

10:30	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
11:10	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
11:20	Preparatory Notes (53 min, 2014) Goshka Macuga
12:10	Flowers (excerpt, 20 min, 1982) Lindsay Kemp
BREAK	
12:40	Vakratunda Swaha (25 min, 2010) Ashish Avikunthak
01:05	Tight Right White (14 min, 1993) Reza Abdoh
01:20	It was a time that was a time (17 min, 2015) Shezad Dawood
01:35	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (excerpt, 20 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh

01:55	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
02:10	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
BREAK	
02:20	The Alien Inside Me (30 min, 2015) Goshka Macuga
02:50	Ornamental Happiness (excerpt, 22 min, 2006) Rose English
03:10	Meikyū-tan - (The Labyrinth Tale) (17 min, 1975) Shuji Terayama
03:30	Glory (20 min, 1984) Rose Finn-Kelcey
03:50	Act 1: Remembering and Forgetting, After the Final Decade (3 min, 2018) Simon Moretti
03:55	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (video work, 18 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh
04:10	Aspothkalin Trikalika - The Kali of Emergency (excerpt, 10 min, 2016) Ashish Avikunthak
04:20	Onnagata (excerpt, 9 min, 1997) Lindsay Kemp
04:30	Kalighat Fetish (22 min, 1999) Ashish Avikunthak
04:50	Rupak (7 min, 2016) Lala Rukh
04:55	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
05:40	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
05:45	Soy Cuba (I am Cuba) (108 min, 1964) Mikhail Kalatozov

MONDAY, FEB. 5 & SATURDAY, FEB. 10

10:30	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
11:10	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
11:20	Vakratunda Swaha (25 min, 2010) Ashish Avikunthak
11:45	Tight Right White (14 min, 1993) Reza Abdoh
BREAK	

12:10	Flowers (excerpt, 20 min, 1982) Lindsay Kemp
12:30	Preparatory Notes (53 min, 2014) Goshka Macuga
01:25	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (video work, 18 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh
01:45	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
BREAK	
02:00	It was a time that was a time (17 min, 2015) Shezad Dawood
02:20	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (excerpt, 20 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh
02:35	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
02:45	Glory (20 min, 1984) Rose Finn-Kelcey
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04:05	Rupak (7 min, 2016) Lala Rukh
04:15	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
04:25	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
04:30	Finding Fanon, Parts 1-3 (38 min, 2015) Larry Achiampong & David Blandy
05:10	Xala (123 min, 1975) Ousmane Sembène

TUESDAY, FEB. 6

10:30	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
11:10	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek

11:20	Preparatory Notes (53 min, 2014) Goshka Macuga
12:10	The Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice (video work, 18 min, 1990) Reza Abdoh
BREAK	
12:40	Onnagata (excerpt, 9 min, 1997) Lindsay Kemp
12:50	Vakratunda Swaha (25 min, 2010) Ashish Avikunthak
01:15	Tight Right White (14 min, 1993) Reza Abdoh
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02:15	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
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03:00	Glory (20 min, 1984) Rose Finn-Kelcey
03:20	The Alien Inside Me (30 min, 2015) Goshka Macuga
03:50	Meikyū-tan - (The Labyrinth Tale) (17 min, 1975) Shuji Terayama
04:05	Act 1: Remembering and Forgetting, After the Final Decade (3 min, 2018) Simon Moretti
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05:00	The First World Festival Of Negro Arts (40 min, 1966) William Greaves
05:40	Ori - (The Cage) (11 min, 1964) Shuji Terayama
05:50	Symmetricks (7 min, 1972) Stan VanDerBeek
06:00	Festival panafricain d'Alger 1969 (112 min, 1969) William Klein

Kaveh Golestan

Tate Modern

London | 1 August 2017 – 30 July 2018

Tate Modern (2017-2018), Kaveh Golestan room with documentary materials from *Recreating the Citadel* (vitrines). ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



A Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis (1967-77) – a video installation

Open Eye Gallery

Liverpool | 1 February 2017 – 30 June 2017

A Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis (1967-77)

Bergen Assembly, Biennial Foundation

Bergen | 1 September – 2 October 2016

Bergen Assembly, Triennial Foundation (2016), *A Utopian Stage*, Installation Views. Photographs Thor Brødreskift; Courtesy Bergen Assembly, Triennial Foundation. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.





Kaveh Golestan: Prostitute 1975-77

Photo London 2015

London | 21 – 24 May 2015

Artist: Kaveh Golestan

The first U.K. exhibition of the late Iranian documentary photographer's portraits taken between 1975–77 in the Citadel of Šahr-e Noww (New Town), Tehran's red-light district, a walled ghetto where 1,500 women lived and worked. The exhibition exposes the history of the Citadel being set on fire a few weeks before the victory of the revolution in 1979 (with an undisclosed number of residents trapped inside) and later demolished and erased. Golestan's portraits are the last extant photographic record of the residents of the Citadel. Whether ravishing beauties or distressingly abused individuals, Golestan's *Prostitute* series constitutes one of the most striking visual studies of femaleness produced in Iran.

Photo London (2015), Kaveh Golestan: *Prostitute 1975-77* Installation Views. Photographs Omid Salehi; Courtesy Photo London. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.













2015.05.21 Photo London Talk with Stephen Deuchar CBE, Director of the Art Fund U.K. Photographs Omid Salehi; Courtesy Photo London. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.





A Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis

Whitechapel Gallery

London | 21 April – 4 October 2015

Whitechapel Gallery (2015), *A Utopian Stage: Restaging the Festival of Arts, Shiraz Persepolis* Installation Views. Courtesy Whitechapel Gallery. © Archaeology of the Final Decade.









2015.05.28 Whitechapel Gallery Lecture with Prof. Gough. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



2015.04.21 Whitechapel Gallery Round Table Discussion with Goldsmiths, University of London. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



An Archaeology of the Final Decade Project: Az Div o Dad – Fantastical Polaroids of Kaveh Golestan

Art Modern Dubai

Dubai | 18 – 21 March 2015

Artist: Kaveh Golestan

The project exhibits the series entitled *Az Div o Dad* (Polaroids, 1976) by photographer Kaveh Golestan, exposed for the first time since 1978, a series of fantastical and surrealistic works that blend fairytale and history, appropriating found photographs and imagery from the 19th-20th centuries. Golestan created a series of innovative and striking Polaroids by moving collaged fragments before an open shutter over long exposures. Part was acquired by LACMA, and eight were exhibited in the exhibition *Surrealism Beyond Borders* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Tate Modern.

Art Dubai Modern (2015), An Archaeology of the Final Decade Project: Az Div o Dad – Fantastical Polaroids of Kaveh Golestan Installation Views. Photographs Mohammad Khayati/studiokadr; Courtesy Art Dubai Modern. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.





Unedited History: Iran 1960 – 2014
MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo

Rome | 11 December – 29 March 2015

Co-Curated by Catherine David, Vali Mahlouji, Odile Burluraux, Narmine Sadegh, Morad Montazami.

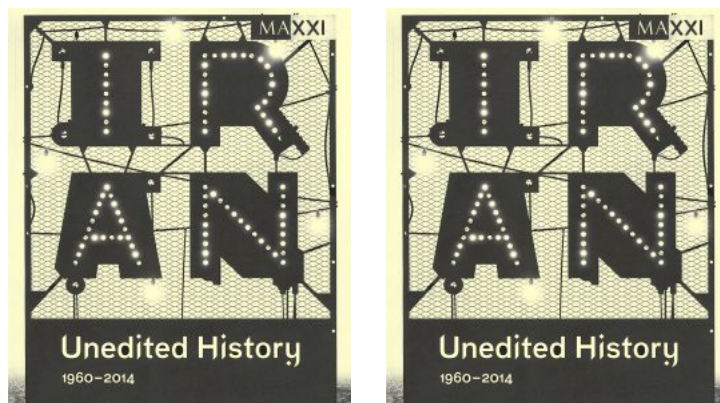
MAXXI Museum, Rome (2014-15), *Retracing a Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis* Installation View. Courtesy MAXXI Museum. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.





MAXXI Museum, Rome (2014-15), *Recreating the Citadel: Kaveh Golestan and the Intimate Politics of the Marginal* Installation View. Courtesy MAXXI Museum.
©Archaeology of the Final Decade.





Unedited History: Iran 1960 – 2014

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

Paris | 16 May – 24 August 2014

Co-Curated by Catherine David, Vali Mahlouji, Odile Burlaux, Narmine Sadegh, Morad Montazami.

Comprising over 200 works, for the most part never shown in France before, the exhibition brings a fresh eye to art and visual culture in Iran from the 1960s up to the present. The exhibition focuses on painting, photography, cinema, and key aspects of Iran's modern visual culture. Whether already historic figures (Bahman Mohassess, Behdjat Sadr, Kaveh Golestan, Bahman Jalali) or members of the contemporary scene (Barbad Golshiri, Arash Hanaei and others), all the artists base their work on a critical approach to form and media. Down the generations, they have played their part in a reassessment of how their country's political and social history has been written. Its survey of the country's contemporary history is arranged in sequences; the years 1960–1970, the revolutionary era of 1979, the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) and the post-war period up until today.

Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2014), *Retracing a Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis Installation View.*





Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2014), *Recreating the Citadel: Kaveh Golestan and the Intimate Politics of the Marginal* Installation View. Courtesy MAMVP. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Kaveh Golestan: The Citadel

Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam

Amsterdam | 21 March – 4 May 2014

Artist: Kaveh Golestan

The Citadel presents 45 vintage photographs from the series entitled *Prostitute* taken between 1975-1977 of women working in the Citadel of Šahr-e Noww, the red-light district of Teheran. The photographs are recirculated for the first time since 1978, alongside a historical timeline, social and political documents evincing the violence inflicted on the sex-workers post-revolution.

Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam (2014), *Kaveh Golestan: The Citadel*.
Courtesy FOAM. ©Archaeology of the Final Decade.





Kaveh Golestan, *Prostitute series* (complete 61 prints), Citadel of Šahr-e Noww, Tehran, 1975-77.













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NOTES

¹ 'Kennt noch das Wasser des südlichen Bug, / Mutter, die Welle, die Wunden dir. schlug?' Paul Celan, 'Nearness of Graves', *The Sand from the Urns* (Vienna: A. SEXTL, 1948). See also Paul Celan, *Paul Celan: Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger and Christopher Middleton (London: Penguin Books, 1972); Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York and London: W.W Norton, 2001); Leonard Olschner, 'Anamnesis: Paul Celan's Translations of Poetry', in *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*, vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 1988) 170.

² Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 2-3.

³ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 2; See also p215, footnote 4.

⁴ Gerard Genette, "Boundaries of Narrative", *New Literary History* 8, no. 1 (1978) 9. See also Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 3.

⁵ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Collier Books, 1961) 5-6.

⁶ James Baldwin, interview cited in *I am Not Your Negro*, directed by Raoul Peck.

⁷ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972). Originally published as *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Editions Presence Africaine, 1955).

⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

¹⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007) 54-55.

¹¹ Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", 255.

¹² Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", 255.

¹³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 145.

¹⁴ Vali Mahlouji, "Archaeology of the Final Decade [Archéologie de la décennie finale]", *Unedited History: Iran 1960-2014*, Ed. Catherine David, Vali Mahlouji, Odile Burlaux, Morad Montazami, Narmine Sadegh (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, 2014) 64.

¹⁵ Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, 54-55.

¹⁶ Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, 59.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ed. Donald F. Bouchard, Trans. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).

¹⁸ Since its initiation, the project has received much attention from the Iranian intelligentsia who privately address a sense of social guilt.

¹⁹ In post-revolutionary Iran, the ‘modernised’ penal code was repealed in favour of religious ‘shari’a’ law, which is based on Abrahamic laws of retribution – either by divine decree (if an action is judged by the clergy to be against the will of god; or by the victim or the next of kin of the victim (if it is a civil case). As a result, Iran has exercised the death penalty and various inhumane practices in excess – it has the highest number of annual executions per capita in the world for several decades.

²⁰ It was reported in the media that the fire was set up by the ‘people’. The sex workers were failed by security forces, the judiciary, the revolutionaries, and the intelligentsia, who did not stand up for their human and civil rights.

²¹ Vali Mahlouji, “Trauma and Traces in the Photography of Hrair Sarkissian”, *Hrair Sarkissian: The Other Side of Silence*, Ed. Omar Kholeif and Theodor Ringborg (Milan: Lenz Press, 2021) 7.

²² Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, Piotr Sztompka (California: University of California Press, 2004) 6.

²³ Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 72.

²⁴ Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” 70.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell set up a counter-war crimes tribunal for Vietnam.

²⁶ Archaeology of cavities

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896) SE, 3.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Historical Apriori and the Archive”, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Trans. Am Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972)

²⁹ Foucault, “The Historical Apriori and the Archive”, 131.

³⁰ Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989) 76–93.

³¹ Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Joe Kerr, and Alicia Pivaro, “Things, Flows, Filters, Tactics”, *The Unknown City Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, Ed. Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Joe Kerr, and Alicia Pivaro (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) 5.

³² For discussions on gender and space see Liz Bondi, “Feminism, Postmodernism, and Geography: A Space for Women?” *Antipode* 22, no. 2 (1990): 156–167; Liz Bondi, “Gender Symbols and Urban Landscapes,” *Progress in Human Geography* 16 (1992): 157–170; Liz Bondi, “Gender and Geography: Crossing Boundaries,” *Progress in Human Geography* 17 (1993): 241–246; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Gillian Rose, “Progress in Geography and Gender: Or Something Else,” *Progress in Human Geography* 17 (1993) 531–537.

³³ The moral circle was discussed as early as the 2nd century by Stoic philosopher Hierocles in *On Appropriate Acts* of which fragments exist; see Ilaria Ramelli, *Hierocles the Stoic: Elements of Ethics, Fragments, and Excerpts*, trans. David Konstan, *Writings from the Greco-Roman World* 28 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). The concept was developed more fully by William Lecky in his 1869 work *History of European morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* “Moral circle expansion: A promising strategy to impact the far future”. *Futures*. **130**: 102756. 2021.102756.

³⁴ The *polis* is well defined here (as was the original antique Greek ideal) as containing or denying certain citizens’ membership in a community of interconnected individuals based on their degree of riskless suitability, efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and cohesion with the group. Petitions in the early 1900s and the formation of a modern police force coalesced in the expulsion of sex work outside the old city walls/gates. The dual advent of modernising experiences – firstly, state building and, secondly, transformative socio-demographic shifts – had inevitable repercussions on the status of sex work and sex workers as they did with all strata of society during the twentieth century. The bourgeois ideal of a healthy city defined its own rigid categories, functions, and spaces and readily cast undesirables beyond and outside its designated remit – sex work is paradigmatically highly charged in that regard. As obvious targets, both the body and the space of prostitution were and often still are perceived as sites of infection, transmission, lawlessness, moral decay, crime, and curiosity. By the 1900s and throughout the following decade, several urban petitions demanded the removal and expulsion of sex workers beyond the jurisdiction of the city and outside the old walls/gates of Tehran (image 4).

³⁵ Graham M. Vaughan and Michael Hogg, *Social Psychology*, 7th ed., (Pearson Australia: New South Wales, 2013) 356.

³⁶ Peter Singer, *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 120. Singer continues, "The process should not stop there... The only justifiable stopping place for the expansion of altruism is the point at which all whose welfare can be affected by our actions are included within the circle of altruism. This means that all beings with the capacity to feel pleasure or pain should be included; we can improve their welfare by increasing their pleasures and diminishing their pains."

³⁷ The removal of city walls and gates transmogrified Tehran from an introverted city space to an open one. Tehran's top-down aggressive programme of modern demolition/development during the 1920s, and 1930s took on the attitude of geography as a 'tabula rasa'. For further discussions on 'tabula rasa' see Pier Vittorio Aureli, "The Theology of Tabula Rasa: Walter Benjamin and Architecture in the Age of Precarity", *The City as a Project* [online]: 9 May 2015), cited 23 June 2016; <http://thecityasaproject.org/2015/05/the-theology-of-tabula-rasa-walter-benjamin-and-architecture-in-the-age-of-precarity>; Asma Mehan, "Tabula Rasa" Planning: Creative Destruction and Building a New Urban Identity in Tehran, (Vilnius: Vilnius Gediminas Technical University-VGTU Press, 2017) <http://www.tandfonline.com/tpa>.

³⁸ Political transformation after the U.S./U.K.-backed *coup d'état* of 1953 ushered in a European to American shift of influence and harsh Cold War anti-communism. For more information refer to Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between the Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). Modern American values (I conjectured) had bearing on the resurgent logic of protection of public morality and security.

³⁹ Despite advances in discourses of natural rights, public health, welfare, and secularising social, legislative, and economic transformations, the abolitionist 'moral circle' remained a solid guiding principle in the first half of Iran's twentieth century. Public health became a patriotic matter for the healthy nation-state and a humanising concern for the welfare of its citizens. See various important Iranian women's journals of the 1920s for open discussions on sexually transmitted diseases in Iran, for example, *Dabistan*, No. 2, December 1922, 26–27; Nahid, No. 11, 8 June 1924; 'Alam-i Nisvan. "The Outbreak of the Illness of Syphilis in Our Country", 'Alam-i Nisvan, Year 5, No. 2, March 1925, 36–39. See Rockefeller Archive Center, "Preliminary Report on Medical Education in Persia," RF/RG1.1, Series 771, Box 1, July 1926, 38 report on the central state concerns over outbreaks of diseases, especially malaria, tuberculosis, and syphilis. For an extensive debate see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran*, (Oxford: University Press, 2015). Also, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, "Patriotic Womanhood: The Culture of Feminism in Modern Iran, 1900–1941", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 32 (1), 2005, 29–46. 'Alam-i Nisvan (1920–34) was a prominent Persian-language women's journal published in Iran under the auspices of the American Presbyterian Mission in the first half of the twentieth century, which encouraged state advocacy of women's rights.

⁴⁰ Newly formed independent women's organisations and journals openly debated women's issues around sexual health, employment and independence. 'Alam-i Nisvan and Payk-i Sa'adat-i Nisvan, published robust debates on the issues of women and sexual health. Rawshanak Now'dust, *Payk-i Sa'adat-i Nisvan*, Nos. 4–5, May–June 1928, 128; cited in Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *ibid.*, "Female journalists such as Rawshanak Now'dust urged women to take their health seriously and to beware of new drugs advertised in newspapers. Rather, Now'dust encouraged her readers to consult physicians or to seek free medical assistance at public clinics as soon as they detected sores or any other discomfort suggesting an infection with either syphilis or gonorrhoea. Women did not necessarily need to fear venereal disease; instead, they had to inform themselves and tackle it head-on." Sexually transmitted diseases, at the forefront of new health awareness, were openly discussed, expressly, in Iranian women's-led journals as a concern for individual citizens, the social sphere, and the central state with its public health programme

⁴¹ *Payk-i Sa'adat-i Nisvan* founded by Rawshanak Now'dust (1927, Rasht), was particularly progressive in its feminist discourse, openly discussing sex work in relation to independent employment. Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, *ibid.*, 82–3, writes: "Now'dust argued that prostitution would remain a social dilemma in Iran until women achieved a measure of financial independence and were no longer beholden to their spouses for support. She explicitly tied prostitution to the dearth of employment opportunities for women in urban centres and the limited financial remuneration of women in rural areas".

⁴² 'Alam-i Nisvan, fifth year, No .2, (Tehran: March 1925) 39. The journal claimed, "This fatal disease [syphilis] threatens the Iranian nationality by encouraging moral decay [*inhibit-i akhlaq*], laziness, weakness, and cowardice"⁴² and in its essay titled "The Outbreak of the Illness of Syphilis in Our Country", attributed syphilis to those who had "stepped outside of the circle of humanity and entered the wadi of perversion [that is, adultery and promiscuity]." Official state policies exercised ambivalence: increasingly concerned with social welfare and citizenship rights while contending with medicalising, moral and religious negative projections. Iran became a signatory to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children in 1921. In 1933, the monarch rejected a bill to deem keeping a brothel illegal. See Onera Amelia Merritt, *Persia: Romance and Reality* (London: Nicholson, 1935) 289.

⁴³ Despite entrenched patriarchal structures and relatively conservative core values, there remained no doubt that between 1950 and the 1970s, top-down policies and bottom-up social and legislative demands forged the emancipation of women at

the forefront of progressive concerns. The policies and experiments conducted by The Women's Organisation and the Tehran School of Social Work were at the forefront of social policies anywhere in the world.

See Mahnaz Afkhami, "The Women's Organization of Iran: Evolutionary Politics and Revolutionary Change," in Lois Back & Guity Nashat (ed.), *Women in Iran from 1800 to the Islamic Republic* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004). See Sattareh Farman Farmaian and Dona Munker, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey From Her Father's Harem Through the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993).

⁴⁴ Sattareh Farman Farmaian, founder and director of the Tehran School of Social Sciences describes in an interview given to Kaveh Golestan dated 1976 the school's determination in providing asphalted roads, running drinking water, electricity, and claims, "We aim to provide other services such as health insurance and retirement pensions. She rejects abolition, "Occasionally, there have been moves to destroy the Citadel. But this will exacerbate the problem by dispersing prostitution beyond and across the country... This is not a phenomenon that we can eradicate. No government to date has been able to eliminate the problem... [but] in a progressive society, there are ways of controlling the phenomenon."

⁴⁵ *Qal'eh*, directed by Kamran Shirdel, was funded by the Ministry of Culture albeit the same ministry panicked at the politics of its own inquiry and banned the project the same year. It was never screened at the time. The rushes were retrieved after 1979 by Shirdel and compiled into a short film by animating Kaveh Golestan *Prostitute* series. The film belonged to a larger pool of artistic production concerned with democratic civil rights. Women-centred feminist standpoints drove a democratic focus on those robbed of citizenship, which informed a distinct, prevalent trajectory that artistically manifested itself, especially in films by Ahmad Faroughi, Ebrahim Golestan, Forough Farrokhzad and Kamran Shirdel in the 1960s and 1970s. Calling for democratic civic practice transposed the spirit of artistic rebellion against authority, especially amid ambivalent and contradictory state sensibilities. They contrast sharply with accounts, films and romantic novels set in Šahr-e Now in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, authored by men, where the male gaze, lens, and voice dominate the works; male protagonists play romantic saviours. The socially engaged artistic outputs of interest are those that, to a lesser or greater degree, investigated the radical implications of the discourse of natural rights as defined by the plights of women, the poor, labourers, abandoned children, the mentally ill and inmates. The artistic lens played the conduit for the marginalised to interact with the mainstream to overcome public denial about the truth of their experiences. It creates a site of militancy defined by proximity of points or elements – an interface between those perpetually on the borders of society and the mainstream to whose needs they have become subordinated. It constructed a relational dialectic between the image of the impoverished, forgotten, forbidden from sight and metropolitan citizenry, where the dispossessed can speak.

⁴⁶ Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *On Prostitution in the City of Tehran*, 1969 (Massachusetts: Ty Aur, 2012).

⁴⁷ Sattareh Farman Farmaian interview with Golestan (1976) audio tape in the possession of the Kaveh Golestan Estate.

⁴⁸ Golestan got safe access to the women of the citadel through the School of Social Work. I set up an estate for Kaveh Golestan (1950-2003) as part of my Archaeology of the Final Decade to protect, disseminate and promote his legacy as a pioneering documentary photographer. Golestan died documenting the Iraq war in Kifri, Iraq in 2003. For more information on the series see archaeologyofthefinaldecade.com.

⁴⁹ See Vali Mahlouji.....Merging his photographic *Prostitute* series into a tripartite juxtaposition of dispossessed citizenry with low-paid labourers and mentally handicapped, abandoned children in an 'asylum' (an archetypal family of man, woman, and child), Golestan situated his documentary practice within wider social urgencies, as a topical work centring on his/her stories of resistance and social movements and alternative forms of living from a social and gendered perspective.

⁵⁰ The photographic series had two brief exhibition opportunities in 1978 at the University of Tehran, shut down and at Seyhoun Gallery).

⁵¹ *Recreating...* recovered and exhibited materials showing Golestan deployed mainstream media and public exhibition as radical sites of operation and contact, splintering the 'moral circle' in shifting public opinion, implicating the viewer as a witness, and motivating democratic civic action in line with the struggles of the women's movements. *Ayandegan* published three consecutive photo-essays exposing the interior life of the Citadel in 1977. Golestan wrote, "The Citadel of Šahr-i No confines some of Tehran's prostitutes within its walls, like a detention centre with a tight beehive of tiny cells. [...] The Citadel of Šahr-i No demands a focused and pragmatic revision, now more than ever. A deeper study can shed light on its issues and facilitate solutions. Tehran University organised an exhibition of Kaveh Golestan's triptic, in 1978 including the *Prostitute* series. The exhibition inaugurated on the symbolically significant day of 1 May 1978, International Workers' Day. Radical politics performed at the core of those experiments. State ambivalence led to the early closure of the exhibition. Kaveh Golestan, wrote in his notebook dated 1975-77, "[... some suppose] that social and political agendas must not corrupt art. And yet, has art ever been about anything but this? And will it ever be about anything but this?"

⁵³ Vali Mahlouji, "Kaveh Golestan: Prostitute Series", *Photo London 2015 Catalogue* (London: Photo London, 12 January 2016) 227-233. Golestan's lens has to negotiate the unequal power dynamic of the situation of the photograph and sublimate the sexualised male gaze and the voyeurism that haunts a lens onto the pain of others.

⁵⁴ Kaveh Golestan quoted in Kaveh Pedram, “Golestan’s Camera Investigates the Truth”, *Kayhan*, 10 May 1978, “I consider this an exhibition of portrait photography. This is the context within which I framed the work. Naturally, to portray the reality, I have ensured that some of the sitters are portrayed within their [individual] setting.”

⁵⁵ James Baldwin, interview cited in *I am Not Your Negro*, directed by Raoul Peck.

⁵⁶ The exact date was still unknown at the time of the first exhibition of my archive. Photographers who had documented the fire could not recall the exact date. That amnesia became a vital driving force behind advancing the research.

⁵⁷ Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017) 719.

⁵⁸ As if the heinous crime of torching (no account was made of the number of charred bodies) were not enough, Khomeini’s newly established Islamic revolutionary courts first cunningly targeted the most vulnerable, marginalised, stigmatised citizens of Tehran: the sex workers from that poverty-stricken ghetto. Three women associated with the sex district became the first women to be executed for immoral sins, for “corruption on earth”, in an act of divine retribution. Those executions mark the initiation of executions of thousands of women after the establishment of the Islamist state and the abolition of the modern civil code of law in Iran in 1979.

⁵⁹ The practice of executing women was rare before 1979: the project traced three recorded cases of women sentenced to death by the modern Iranian judiciary during the 20th century up until 1979. The exact figure of post-revolutionary executions of women is in the thousands. In total, the number of executions in Iran increased by an astronomical figure of 2000% when comparing the forty years before and after the establishment of the Islamist state. (See Abdolrahman Boroumand Foundation). Iran holds the highest number of executions per capita worldwide. According to the Amnesty International report: *The Death Penalty in 2016: Facts and Figures* published on 11 April 2017, 87% of all executions in the world, excluding China (due to lack of accurate information), took place in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Pakistan.

⁶⁰ To conclude the polemic, however, it is clear to any historian that the totalising system of control and closure at play here is fundamentally in keeping with the delusional strategies imposed by any totalitarian catastrophe. It distinctly lacks ingenuity or originality. There is no mystery to the method nor to the ruin in its wake. The hypocrisy deployed is that of *protecting* people and space. The citizens are to trust that the state’s sadism is for *their* benefit.

⁶¹ Paul Celan, “Death Fugue”, *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger (New York: Persea Books, 1988) 61.

⁶² Liam O’Brien, *Iranian Media Increases Price on Salman Rushdie’s Head*, (London: Melville House Press, February 25, 2016). The article claims the reward has just been raised yet again to the tune of nearly \$4 million. Parisa Hafezi reports for *Reuters*: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa, or religious edict, that called on Muslims to kill the author after his book was condemned as blasphemous, forcing him into years of hiding. Iranian hardliners say Khomeini’s decree is irrevocable and eternal after his death. A wealthy Iranian religious organization offered \$2.7 million reward to anyone carrying out the fatwa and in 2012 it increased the amount to \$3.3 million.

⁶³ Vali Mahlouji, ‘Perspectives on the Shiraz Arts Festival: A Radical Third World Rewriting’, in *Iran Modern*, Fereshteh Daftari and Layla S. Diba (eds.), New Haven (Asia Society Museum/Yale University Press) 2013; Vali Mahlouji, *The Contested Space: The Metapolitics of The Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis, in Unedited History, Iran 1960 – 2014*, Paris (Musée d’Art Moderne de la ville de Paris) 2014; and Rome (MAXXI museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo) 2014.

⁶⁴ Since the commencement of my restitution students of in Iranian cultural studies show a significant amount of interest. I am regularly invited to lecture for underground art circles in Iran. No serious cultural enthusiast condemns the festival today.

⁶⁵ Abbas Na’albandian committed suicide in 1987. The careers of associates Arby Ovanessian, Bijan Mofid, Sadreddin Zahed, Ashur Banipal Babilla, Farrokh Ghaffari, Sheherazade Afshar, Reza Ghotbi, Bijan Saffari, amongst other came to an abrupt and premature end in Iran.

⁶⁶ All the festival’s archives and documents, originally collated by the National Iranian Radio and Television (the festival’s founder and sponsor) specifically amassed for public dissemination, were banned from broadcast, access, and general circulation by the new Islamist state. They included audio/video recordings, photographs of rehearsals/performances, publications, catalogues, play scripts, bulletins, program notes, and posters.

⁶⁷ It happened long before there was any inkling that “Khomeinism” (the term I use for the very particular form of populist totalitarianism established by Ayatollah Khomeini) would assault the course of Iran’s modern history, aspire to brutalise the country’s cultural landscape. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California, 1993.

⁶⁸ For more on ‘bad object’ in a Winnicottian psychoanalytic sense see Donald W. Winnicott, “Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self”, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (The International Psycho-Analytical Library, 64:1-276. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965). The sheer madness (an early instance of systematic fake news) has sometimes ascribed superpowers to the festival, reaching near mythological status, with flamboyant histrionics blaming the festival as a cultural trigger even for the 1979 political downfall itself. Albeit the level of creative power to change the course of history would be the envy of any artist.

⁶⁹ Offensive stigmatization rages still to this day, especially on Persian language online platforms.

⁷⁰ My practice relies on a deep recognition that the restitution of histories carries enormous gravity and momentous charge and healthy healing capacities - firstly, to rescue the artefact from history’s rubble and then, to demystify the object as a healthy restoration act. The enormous gravity of the job became palpable after a period of engagement when alarming anxieties arose amongst Iranians associated with my forensic archaeology. In 2008, I intended to excavate the theatrical and musical landscape of a festival. Little did I realise that the materials were tough to get hold of and that all leads and sources in the ministries who promised access to the locked-up material failed to produce results. Funding and support for my “archaeologies” are scarce from Iranian sources, which remain anxious about associating with my remit of art in peril and the political implications of the re-circulations. Sources wished to remain anonymous.

⁷¹ George Lamming, quote from Tate Britain, *Life Between Islands*, 2022; *The Emigrants*, London: Michael Joseph, 1954.

⁷² Jacques Derrida, “Shibboleth for Paul Celan,” in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 50.

⁷³ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972). Originally published as *Discours sur le colonialisme* by Editions Presence Africaine, 1955.

⁷⁴ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972). Originally published as *Discours sur le colonialisme* by Editions Presence Africaine, 1955.

⁷⁵ An expanded discussion of the “Islamic cultural revolution,” which merits serious study, is not within the remit of this text. However, it is essential to remember that its systemic ambush on intellectual and artistic life ultimately failed to silence or quell society’s innate drives for emancipation, our cultural openness, adaptability and tolerance, our ability to negotiate *difference*. The free will of the Iranian phenomenon insists, in spite of terror, on asserting its own complex and variegated picture of the individual and society, wherever possible. Art has successfully devised survival tactics and means to circumvent the state-imposed monistic vision of existence.

⁷⁶ *Vezerat-e Farhang va Ershad-e Islami* in Persian.

⁷⁷ See Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California, 1993.

⁷⁸ Its grandest narrowing of liberties was the enforcement of the veil on *all* women in public. That was first announced on March 7, 1979, on the eve of International Women’s Day. The cynicism at the heart of it was intended to break the spirit and remains a deep wound, a profound humiliation. See Hengameh Golestan, *Witness ’79* series, Women’s protest marches against mandatory veiling (hijab), Tehran March 1979 on www.archaeologyofthefinaldecade.com



⁷⁹ Mitchell Stephens, “Jacques Derrida,” *New York Times Magazine* (January 23, 1994).

⁸⁰ Vali Mahlouji, *The Contested Space: The Metapolitics of The Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis* [L’espace contesté: la métapolitique du Festival des arts de Shiraz-Persépolis], *Unedited History: Iran 1960-2014*, Ed. Catherine David, Vali Mahlouji, Odile Burlureux, Morad Montazami, Narmine Sadegh (Paris: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2014) 52-59.

⁸¹ Kaveh Golestan’s series of portraits of sex-workers in Tehran’s red-light ghetto, Šahr-e Now. The series entitled *Prostitute* dates from 1975-77 and formed part of my curated exhibition *Recreating the Citadel: The Intimate Politics of the Marginal* by Archaeology of the Final Decade at Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2014, part of *Unedited History: Iran 1960-2014*, co-curated by Catherine David, Vali Mahlouji, Odile Burlureux, Morad Montazami, Narmine Sadegh.

⁸² Borrowed from Jalil A. Muntaqim, *We Are Our Own Liberators: Selected Prison Writings* (Oakland: PM Press, 2010).

⁸³ “Temporary autonomous zone” as used here is an expression coined by Hakim Bey (alias Peter Lamborn Wilson), the poet and critic who wrote a book by that title. Wilson paid numerous visits to the festival and produced different texts on the content of the projects. He went on to be employed by Seyyed Hossein Nasr at the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy until 1978. For him, the temporary autonomous zone is a new territory on the boundary line of established regions, its focus on the moment being beyond any structured system that fuels individual creativity.

⁸⁴ Vali Mahlouji, *The Contested Space: The Metapolitics of The Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis* [L’espace contesté: la métapolitique du Festival des arts de Shiraz-Persépolis], *Unedited History: Iran 1960-2014*, Ed. Catherine David, Vali Mahlouji, Odile Burlureux, Morad Montazami, Narmine Sadegh (Paris: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2014) 52-59.

⁸⁵ Original catalogue of the Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis (1972); Archaeology of the Final Decade Archives.

⁸⁶ Shiraz-Persepolis emerged as the brainchild of a close-knit group of progressive Iranian cultural practitioners led by the visionary Reza Ghotbi, the director of the National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT), Farrokh Ghaffari, who returned from work at the Cinematheque in Paris, and Khojasteh Kia, who was educated at the Old Vic and led theatre research at the NIRT in its initial stage. The festival had the support of the crucially culturally proactive Queen, Shahbanu Farah Pahlavi as patron. Her emancipated relationship to art and patronage and the open-minded leadership of Reza Ghotbi ensured the festival’s relative autonomy from the main state cultural apparatus and protected its open liberal space across political restrictions and a relatively conservative and challenging national cultural terrain. Many important cultural practitioners were intimately involved with the programming of the festival, including Sheherazade Afshar, Bijan Saffari, Hormoz Farhat, Dariush Savvat, and Fowzieh Majd, amongst others. For its type of radical cultural position and experiment, the longevity of Shiraz-Persepolis was remarkable and exceptional.

⁸⁷ Martin Luther King. *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ The roads and ideals to social betterments also met dark and deranged antimonies. Power adjustments were marred with battlefields and witch-hunts, dead-ends, and proxy wars, and sometimes befell a bloody death. Emergent and circumscribed nativisms occasionally acquiesced into postcolonial dissonances. Most notably, the Festival panafricain d’Alger of 1969 addressed an internal postcolonial conflict that emerged between *negritude/blackness* and *Africanism*. In Algiers, the African continent came together as a unified and cross-pollinating entity with a shared set of struggles and legacies. By 1977 in Lagos, the FESTAC festival referred to both Black and African in its title. For all intents and purposes, though, the earliest of such African festivals – the First World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966 – deliberately distinguished between North Africa and Black sub-Saharan Africa. It was masterminded by Léopold Sédar Senghor, independent Senegal’s first leader and one of the champions of *negritude* as a paradigm. The poet Senghor had dedicated decades to the cause, as an active and founding thinker of the emancipatory *negritude* movement, with the literary giant Aimé Césaire and others such as Alain Leroy Locke. In Dakar *blackness* was celebrated gloriously and on an unprecedented scale. Artists and performers came together from all around Black Africa and its diasporas, especially the Americas. North Africans were not, however, invited to Senghor’s grand celebration of *negritude* at Dakar. That omission certainly aggravated unresolved issues and tightened a rift between various postcolonial African impulses (*negritude/Blackness* and *Africanism*) and urgencies, which the Algiers and later Lagos festivals consciously addressed.

⁸⁹ The Bienal de Sao Paulo launched in 1951. The Alexandria International Biennial for Mediterranean Countries inaugurated in 1955. Tehran held its first Biennial in 1958. Moscow opened its film festival in 1959. Zagreb founded its international contemporary Music Biennial in 1961. The First Biennale of Arab Art was held in Baghdad in 1974.

⁹⁰ Unlike Dakar and Algiers, Shiraz-Persepolis bypassed, as a conscious strategy, affirmation of raciality, ethnocentricity or regionality. Shiraz-Persepolis came from a somewhat particular political trajectory. Its artistic and political remit was insistently driven by *cultural particularism* but not the delineation of *difference*. There may be good reason for that: Iran’s experience of colonialism was tangential. It certainly suffered significant political, economic, and cultural consequences of semi-colonial Anglo-Russian exploitations, especially in the nineteenth century. Still, it was one of only a handful of geographies that never officially fell under colonial rule. It perceived its cultural, linguistic, and ethnic soul and spirit as having escaped, for the most part, intact and unbroken by mainstream disturbances and disorders and moral indignations of colonial angst and damage.

⁹¹ By its third iteration, the festival’s curation instrumentalised a distinct strategy to break down hierarchies of high and low and geo-spatial divisions of culture, to put non-European and European traditions on the map as valid and equal. It consciously designed programmes to tap into repositories where non-European expressions were highly developed. That was actualised in 1969 around percussion. Percussive forms were identified as the oldest and most basic of instrumental types, indigenous to all cultures. Rhythm, as the most fundamental ingredient to all music, signified a return to basic elemental instinctual drives. The festival insisted on an unrelenting and dynamic progression, constituting an international sonic narrative – one that specifically emphasised the skill and sophistication of Asian and African percussives. Its articulation of

unification and universalism through sound allowed for fluid programming, opening with Balinese *gamelan Gong Kebyar* and closing with Iannis Xenakis' *Persephassa*, a site-specific composition in the ruins of Persepolis. Uma Sharma dancing Indian *kathak*, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, Brazilian Percussion Ensemble and Rwanda Drum Ensemble (which made its world debut) were all among the performers. Iranian *tombak* by Hossein Tehran and *santur* by Faramarz Payvar shared a stage with Chien-Tai Chen playing Chinese *yangqin*. See Vali Mahlouji Asia Society...

⁹² Roberta Minnucci, *Poor Art / Arte Povera, Italian Influences, British Responses* (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Art, 2017, referring to Germano Celant's critique in, 'Untitled', in *Arte Povera*, ed. Eva Madelung (Munich: Kunstverein, 1971), published in English in *Arte Povera. storie e protagonisti / Arte Povera. Historis and protagonists*, pp. 155-62.

⁹³ The Belgrade International Theatre Festival (BITEF), also inaugurated in 1967 like Shiraz-Persepolis, survives the political shifts of the late twentieth century. The university-based Nancy World Theatre Festival opened four years earlier in 1963 but folded in 1988.

⁹⁴ For documentation on the First World Festival of Negro Arts see film by the same title by William Greaves (1966). For documentation on festival panafrican d'Algers see film by the same title by William Klein (1969). Over two thousand writers, artists, and performers from Africa and the African diaspora participated in the historic Dakar event. Those festivals were limited to a single iteration, but they epitomised the spirit and experience of vast swathes of human culture and history, and their legacy leaves an enduring imprint. It was the FESTAC World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria, that brought African cultures and diasporas together once again in 1977. See Chimurenga, *FESTAC '77: The 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture*, (London: Chimurenga and Afterall Books in association with Asia Art Archive, the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and RAW Material Company, 2019). The Publication critically examines FESTAC '77, in Lagos.

A new FESTAC took place in Zanzibar in 2022. Interestingly, FESTAC 2022 linked its lineage to Dakar 1966 but made no mention of Algiers 1969. In my view, 2022 was a very corporate affair with no real connection to the spirit, ethos or politics that defined the 1960s and 1970s. The official announcement of FESTAC 22 reads more like a tourist brochure than a serious art event. A detailed study of the rhetoric and the content leaves little doubt that the ethos, spirit, and politics that drove the festivals of the 1960s and 1970s has been replaced by corporate and state-run infrastructures.

<https://inspireafricaconnect.com/assets/files/FESTAC-2022Brochure.pdf>

⁹⁵ Aimé Césaire, *Return to My Native Land*. (Haemendsworth: Penguin, 1969) 85.

⁹⁶ Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument', *The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Coloniality's Persistence (Michigan State University Press, fall 2003) 263.

⁹⁷ Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument', *The New Centennial Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Coloniality's Persistence (Michigan State University Press, fall 2003) 257-33.

⁹⁸ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London: Routledge, 1994) 2.

⁹⁹ Taken from Marshall Berman's "a unity of disunity"; Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) 15.

¹⁰⁰ At Shiraz-Persepolis, over one-fifth of all performances across the eleven years were solely dedicated to Iranian classical, traditional, folk, and contemporary compositions. The largest number of foreign artists to perform hailed from the Indian sub-continent. The festival is credited for creating modern Iranian audiences for musical forms that were otherwise geographically or culturally side-lined. Iranian musicians shared the stage with the likes of Bismillah Khan, Vilayat Khan, *mizmar* players of the Nile Valley, Munir Bashir, Iannis Xenakis, Bruno Maderna, John Cage, Max Roach, Abbey Lincoln, Tran Van Khe, and Krzysztof Penderecki. Critical evaluations of local modes encompassed a wide archaic/contemporary genealogical spectrum of performance, ranging from indigenous Iranian *ta'zieh* ritual performances and *commedia dell'arte* style *ru-howzi* chamber pieces in 1967 to the promotion of a new wave of culturally unconventional contemporary theatrical expressions, which saw the premiering of two seminal pieces in 1968 – Abbas Nalbandian's *Pazhouheshi* (*Research...*) and Bijan Mofid's *Šahr-e Qesseh* (*City of Tales*).

¹⁰¹ Stephan Käufer, "Authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*)", *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 71 – 77.

¹⁰² Rabindranath Tagore, "What is Art?", *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1917) 11. Wikisource, "What is Art?", *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America*, 9.

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Personality_\(Lectures_delivered_in_America\)/What_is_Art%3F](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Personality_(Lectures_delivered_in_America)/What_is_Art%3F)

The sentence is part of the following segment: "This is the reason why, of all creatures, only man knows himself, because his impulse of knowledge comes back to him in its excess. He feels his personality more intensely than other creatures, because his power of feeling is more than can be exhausted by his objects. This efflux of the consciousness of his personality requires

an outlet of expression. Therefore, in Art, man reveals himself and not his objects. His objects have their place in books of information and science, where he has completely to conceal himself.”

¹⁰³ Daryush Shayegan, “Le Miroir de L’Ame d’un Peuple,” *Le Regard Persan*, (Paris: Espace Electra, Les Musées de la Ville de Paris, 2001).

¹⁰⁴ Daryush Shayegan, “Le Miroir de L’Ame d’un Peuple,” *Le Regard Persan*, (Paris: Espace Electra, Les Musées de la Ville de Paris, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ Kuki Shūzō, *On Time* [Propos sur le temps] (Paris: Philippe Renouard, 1928). Kuki Shūzō (1888-1941) was a Japanese philosopher who theorized the Oriental notion of time (cyclical time) as a way of escaping inauthentic temporal models. He further discussed intellectual negation of time, found in “nirvana,” associated with Buddhism and the voluntarist innate rejection of time, as “bushido,” which follows an unconcern with temporal structures.

¹⁰⁶ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Trans. Adrian del Caro, ed. Robert Pippin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ Adrian del Caro, “Dionysian Classicism, or Nietzsche’s Appropriation of an Aesthetic Norm”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, Oct. - Dec. 1989) 589-605.

¹⁰⁸ Original catalogue of the Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis: 1974; Archaeology of the Final Decade Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Japanese Noh (making its first appearance outside Japan), numerous Indian *kathakali* performances, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski, Joseph Chaikin, Andrei Serban, Shuji Terayama, Ravi Shankar and classical Indian dance by Yamini Krishnamurti, Olivier Messiaen, Tran Van Khe & Tran Quang Hai Duo and Tran Van Khe (from war-torn Vietnam), composers John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen (who had a retrospective in 1972), Bismillah Khan, Vilayat Khan, *mizmar* players of the Nile Valley, Munir Bashir, Bread and Fire, controversial Squat Theatre from Hungary, Polish Teatr STU with a world première, and Núria Espert (who remarked in her interview to the author that she found relative freedom in Shiraz from the dictatorial constraints of Francoist Spain) Robert Serumaga staged the Ugandan contemporary dance-drama *Renga Moi* which returned to the legend of *Acoli*. Le Ballet National du Sénégal participated with traditional dances and music in the 4th Festival in 1970, followed by L’Ensemble Lyrique du Senegal in 1976. Sardono Kusumo presented Indonesian dance-drama *Kechak* with the people of the village of Teges. Duro Ladipo’s famous opera *Oba Ko So*, a dramatization of the Nigerian Yoruba story of *Shango* the King of Thunder, was staged in 1973. Site-specific commissions were a particular contribution of Shiraz-Persepolis to international performance arts, including works by Iannis Xenakis, Bruno Maderna, Peter Brook, Kerala Kalamandalam Kathakali Troupe, Merce Cunningham, Robert Wilson (with his early epic *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia Terrace* which ran continuously for seven days and nights in the landscape), Maurice Béjart. Many seminal experimental works were commissioned, at a time when most of the artists (from both “south” and “north”) remained marginal in their own countries. Iranian artists, such as, to name a few, Arby Ovanessian, Bijan Mofid, Parviz Sayyad, Mohammad Bagher Ghaffari and Sussan Taslimi communed with the broadest spectrum of creators. New Iranian cinema by the likes of filmmakers Parviz Kimiavi, Nasser Taghvai, Fereydoon Rahnama and Dariush Mehrjui gained visibility alongside auteurs, such as, Yasujiro Ozu, Ingmar Bergman, Luis Bunuel, Sergei Paradjanov, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Satyajit Ray and Marguerite Duras, to name a few.

¹¹⁰ The festival actively engaged artists and performers crossing over from both sides of the European iron curtain and the American spheres who were keen to shed the constrictions of their own traditions, and in doing so, would turn to Asia and Africa for inspiration just as the early modernists had done at the turn of the previous century. In 1972, the festival recruited several distinctive European and American experimental practitioners into proximity with the Asian traditions to which they were indebted. John Cage had studied with Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, a theologian of Zen Buddhism. With Merce Cunningham they drew inspiration from *I Ching* (*Book of Change*) to explore notions of chance and indeterminacy. Karlheinz Stockhausen’s compositions aimed at reaching a state of inner asceticism and spirituality correlating with philosophies of Hinduism. Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930) lived for twenty-five years in China and translated Lao-tze’s *Tao Te Ching* (*Book of the Way*) and *I Ching* (*Book of Change*) in 1925. His translations influenced European/American thinkers, philosophers, and artists.

¹¹¹ Original catalogue of the Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis: 1974; Archaeology of the Final Decade Archives.

¹¹² Under the theme of *Theatre and Ritual* in 1970 a wide range of expressions included: influential Polish creator Jerzy Grotowski with Calderon’s *The Constant Prince*; adaptation of Gorgani’s Persian verse *Vis-o-Ramin*, by Mahin Tajadod and director Arby Ovanessian; le Ballet National du Sénégal on its first visit to Asia; Jean Genet’s *Les Bonnes* by director Victor Garcia and Compañía Núria Espert; *Fire*, by Bread & Puppet Theatre directed by Peter Schumann; Iranian ritual performance *ta’zieh* of *Moslem ibn Aqeel*; classical sitar by Ravi Shankar and classical Indian dance by Yamini Krishnamurti. Once text is bypassed as the carrier of symbolic meaning, the audience may transcend the need for rational discourse and arrive at alternate modes of consciousness. See Vali Mahlouji MAMVP.

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- ¹¹³ Michal Kobińska, "The Writings of Tadeusz Kantor 1956-1985", *The Drama Review: TDR*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Autumn, 1986), 145. The full phrase reads: "It is necessary to recover the primeval force of the shock taking place at the moment when opposite a man (the viewer) there stood for the first time a man (the actor) deceptively similar to us yet at the same time infinitely foreign, beyond an impassable barrier."
- Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990), Polish theatre director renowned for revolutionary theatrical performances, founder of "Cricot 2" theatre company. His troupe performed twice at Shiraz-Persepolis.
- ¹¹⁴ Ted Hughes quoted in Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves, *Peter Brook (Directors in Perspective)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 157. His comment was in relation to his collaborative creation called "Orghast", performed at Shiraz-Persepolis in 1971. The comment in full was: "The point was to create a precise but open and inviting language, inviting to a lost world we wanted to explore. Music is one such language – mathematically precise, but completely mysterious and open, giving access to a deeper world, closed to direct analysis.... If you imagine music buried in the earth for a few thousand years, decayed back to its sources, not the perfectly structured thing we know as music, then that is what we tried to unearth. A language belonging below the levels where differences appear, close to the inner life of what we've chosen as our material, but expressive to all people, powerfully, truly, precisely."
- ¹¹⁵ Thomas Morell, libretto of *Theodora*, an oratorio, composed by Georg Friedrich Händel, sung by the character Didymus, a Roman soldier (alto), 1750.
- ¹¹⁶ Max Roach, full quote: "My point is that we much decolonise our minds and re-name and re-define ourselves . . . In all respects, culturally, politically, socially, we must re-define ourselves and our lives, in our own terms." Cited <https://www.inspirationalstories.com/quotes/t/max-roach/>; and <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1241888>.
- ¹¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1958) 186-7.
- ¹¹⁸ The Cultural Atlas remains heavily animated around South Asia, especially Bengal, because of the intense interest of Bangladeshi audiences and the fact that it was first composed for the Dhaka Art Summit of 2018.
- ¹¹⁹ Pier Vittorio Aureli, "The Theology of Tabula Rasa: Walter Benjamin And Architecture In The Age of Precarity", *The City as a Project*, 9 May 2015; <http://thecityasaproject.org/2015/05/the-theology-of-tabula-rasa-walter-benjamin-and-architecture-in-the-age-of-precarity/> Accessed July 2023.
- ¹²⁰ Cited in Pier Vittorio Aureli, "The Theology of Tabula Rasa: Walter Benjamin and Architecture in the Age of Precarity", 2015.
- ¹²¹ Pier Vittorio Aureli, "The Theology of Tabula Rasa: Walter Benjamin and Architecture in the Age of Precarity", 2015.
- ¹²² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1958), 186-7.
- ¹²³ Henri Lefebvre cited in Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Joe Kerr, and Alicia Pivaro, *The Unknown City Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, Ed. Iain Borden, Jane Rendell, Joe Kerr, and Alicia Pivaro (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000) vi.
- ¹²⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have Been to the Mountaintop", Speech delivered at the Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, 3 April 1968. The speech was delivered by King to the striking sanitation workers of Memphis on the day before his assassination.
- ¹²⁵ Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have Been to the Mountaintop".
- ¹²⁶ Mohammad Iqbal, *Discourses of Iqbal*, 1st ed. (Sh. Ghulam Ali: Lahore, 1979).
- ¹²⁷ Jerzy Grotowski in *Quien Es Grotowski*, documentary directed by Mercedes Gregory, 1980.
- ¹²⁸ Antonin Artaud was a French radical dramatist, poet, essayist, actor, and theatre director, who strove to "liberate the human subconscious and reveal man to himself."
- ¹²⁹ Narration from the film *First World Festival of Negro Arts* by African American filmmaker William Greaves, which was officially commissioned to document the Dakar festival, Spring 1966.
- ¹³⁰ Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- ¹³¹ Letter of French Prime Minister Alexandre Millerand to Archbishop Khoury, dated 24 August 1920, stated: "Your country's claims on the Beqaa, that you have recalled for me, have been granted. On instructions from the French government, General Gouraud has proclaimed at Zahle's Grand Kadri Hotel, the incorporation into Lebanon of the territory that extends up to the summit of the Anti-Lebanon range and of Hermon. This is the Greater Lebanon that France wishes to form to assure your country of its natural borders."

The creation and delimitation of the State of Greater Lebanon took place by Order No. 318 of 31 August 1920 - Arrêté no 318 Delimitat du Grand Liban Beqaa and Baalbek are declared as part of the Lebanon Mutasarrifate (in force on September 1, 1920). The Mutasarrifate includes the coastal towns of Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre and their respective hinterlands, all of which belonged to the Beirut Vilayet, together with the adoption of the decree no. 299 of 3 August 1920 stipulating the attachment of four Kazas of the Syria Vilayet (Baalbek, Maalaka, the Bekaa, Rashaya and Hasbaya) according to the mutassarifiyya established in 1861. On 1 September 1920 - *Dawlat Lubnān al-Kabīr*; État du Grand Liban was declared following the Decree 318 of 31 August 1920 by General Henri Gouraud, the first French High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon under the French Mandate.

¹³² *Baalbek: Image & Monument, 1898-1998*, edited by Hélène Sader, Thomas Scheffler, and Angelika Neuwirth, (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1998) 17.

The archives of Baalbek became a platform to discuss the paradoxical pairing of romanticism and empiricism and their institutionalisation through the disciplines of archaeology and linguistics. Both disciplines were utilised in ordering and deciphering history through scientific innovation of pure origins. Through them, nineteenth-century Europe scientifically organised knowledge beyond romanticism and auratic symbolism. Systematised archaeological investigations and breakthroughs in linguistic discoveries of interconnected Indo-European language systems consolidated a European scientific discourse of origins and, in line with expansionist and imperialistic means and aspirations, incorporated the lands and their invaluable sites into Europe's own lineage, origin, and ownership. The political symbolism of 'archaeology' was designed to set up an imbalanced hierarchy of cultures. That was confronted didactically. That hierarchy paved the way for a European claim to the custodianship of civilisation, and the ingestion of its sites and origins into its own. The complex was scientifically consolidated and rationalised, and politically supported. For the most part, the canonisation of the others into the history of classicism and western (universal) antiquity ignores and bypasses local exigencies/realities (life, peoples, histories). In textual and visual depictions, locals become subordinated to the European civilising mission, only marginally mentioned, and deployed, enhancing a little colour and exotic texture. The impulse to discover, protect, recreate, depict, exhibit, consume, and ultimately claim that which was civilised – the universal heritage of man – was constructed as a mission and a right in the face of decay and neglect on the part of the indifferent local, and the corrupting effect of the "non-enlightened." Lamentation of the noble past, by design and by default, embedded itself within discourses of purity versus pollution and dichotomies of Other/East/barbarianism versus self/West/civilization. (See Hamilakis for ; see Helen Sader). The European-organised complex around civilisational lineage, and its custodianship, and exposed visual and textual materials that explicitly render or depict the local as obsolete, impure, uncivilised.

¹³³ Mikhail M. Alouf, *History of Baalbek*, Lebanon: 1890 [original copy held at American University of Beirut], was the first text written by a modern local historian, published and available in French, English, German, and Arabic. It became the standard guidebook, sold in Grand Hotel de Palmyre, Hotel Victoria, Hotel d'Europe. Alouf's perspective is rooted in and inspired by European knowledge and embraces the European romanticised mythology of ancient origins. For a discussion of Mikhail Alouf's ruminations see *Baalbek: Image & Monument, 1898-1998*, edited by Hélène Sader, Thomas Scheffler, and Angelika Neuwirth, (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1998) 155.

¹³⁴ The archaeological missions of returning to pure, ideal origins came concurrent with the development of photography, an essential tool in the visual creation and dissemination of cultural value, recording and disseminating photogenic images of those discovered origins for popular consumption. Photography, as the new industry of visual commodities, takes advantage of the growing public demand and the dream of a connection to a monumental past. Photography and archaeology become paired as the two decisive tools of modernity in linking the modern to an idealised past. As archaeologists prepared and staged the ground, photographers visually framed and recorded them for circulation. And as with archaeology, it is the stones themselves that are the pure embodiments of culture. Photographers purified the sites in their own framing to dissociate them from contemporary signifiers. In those, any sign of the local and the contemporary was to be eliminated and avoided. The two operated in parallel to exalt an idealised version of classicism – sanitised, immortalised. Audiences – viewers and consumers – followed suit, demanding an association with the ideals of culture and a piece of the unadulterated, clinical, stereotypical image of antiquity. They played a dual and intimate role in constructing national histories and nation-states. As nationalism became the dominant ideology of the modern state, the monumentalisation of an idealised past played a decisive role in the construction of national history and the modern nation. Refer to Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹³⁵ A sensitive issue was cutting through the national myth that Baalbek was originally Phoenician. It is, in fact, Aramean in origin, a fact less known in Lebanon and in direct opposition to the national narrative of the nation's direct line of origins and heritage. Another contentious historical realisation was that Christianity itself had intentionally destroyed the pagan Roman temples, not later Arab or Ottoman occupations.

¹³⁶ Objective History, 10,000 years was detailed for the audience (see <https://sursock.museum/content/baalbek-archives-eternity>). The audience were able to delve in and out as they wished. Below is a condensed chronological guide: The ancient *tell* (mound) of Baalbek first appears as a small settlement around 10,000 years ago in the northern half and the eastern edge of the plain of the Beqaa, perched on an idyllic summit, in a cool spot near its highest point at an altitude of 1,142 meters, amongst numerous springs and abundant water sources – the spring of Ras al-Ain and al-Juj. From its privileged spot overlooking the plain, Baalbek commands the waters that flow down the slopes to the two great rivers of the Beqaa – the Litani river, flowing south, and the Assi river, flowing north.

Excavations in Baalbek have revealed a layered and continuous settlement history located at its summit, directly underneath the Great Court of the Roman sanctuary of Jupiter. For much of its early history, Baalbek remains a relatively small and inconspicuous settlement, unmentioned in ancient sources and historical accounts. There is evidence that Baalbek, from early times, is associated with cultic and sacred rituals linked to its resourceful natural settings and its proximity to abundant waters. However, conclusive archaeological evidence for organised sacred functions can be dated back to the Seleucid times in the 1st century BCE, when it was called Heliopolis. Its meteoric rise to ritual and political prominence happened with the arrival of the Romans. By the end of the 2nd century, Baalbek-Heliopolis is granted the status of a Roman colony. Major logistical difficulties must be surmounted for the monumentalisation of the site by the Romans, who insisted on embarking on their largest sacred architectural landmark as an imperial marker of Rome's arrival in the East. To do so, the settlement is cleared, and the city is pushed further afield beyond its original summit, which is absorbed into the expanded sanctuary. A massive engineering plan is undertaken to consolidate the loose ground between the natural solid rock base formations to create a foundation that would uphold the unprecedented monumental building project from ever sinking.

Baalbek-Heliopolis became one of the most prominent sacred sites, attracting the largest numbers of religious pilgrims to its temple dedicated to the god Jupiter Heliopolitanus, which rises to the status of an oracle guiding Roman emperors in their quests. Various Roman constructions are erected at R'as al-A'in, Bustan al-Khan, Sheikh Abd'allah hill and further afield. These include various other temples, avenues, markets, baths, nymphaea, banqueting halls, theatres, and necropoli.

The advent of Christianity marks a turning point in the city's history and the purposeful iconoclastic destruction of the Temple of Jupiter and its altar by the end of the 4th century. For centuries, the new religion struggles to impose itself on the people of Baalbek, who passionately retained a sacred connection to their ancient pre-Christian social and ritual practices. Arabs conquered the city in the 7th century, and its name Baalbek (which is believed to have been its ancient Aramaic appellation before Heliopolis) reappeared in the 7th century. For much of its Arab and medieval period, the Baalbek summit, with its Roman structures, acted as a fortified citadel known as the *Qalaa*, further altering its architecture and purpose. The city is mentioned in various sources, which comment on its natural, verdant beauty. From the 17th century onwards, Baalbek was absorbed into European discourses of origins and civilisation. The projects of European expansionism conflated with a project of tracing Europe's historical origins and its self-proclaimed heritage—the footsteps of Alexander of Macedon, the medieval crusader routes, and ultimately those of the Biblical prophets. It was fundamentally construed as an encounter with Europe's own past, a narrative that claimed and absorbed desired assets and facets of the “orient” and the other into its own canon, reacquainting the European with his or her own ancient and sacred history, as the rightful keeper and inheritor of civilisation. European interest seized on Baalbek, one of the largest monuments of the Roman period, with an abundance of sacred symbolic capital and material potential, sited precisely on the route beyond “the glory that was Greece, and the grandeur that was Rome” (Edgar Allen Poe) to the ancient and Biblical near east. [See Robert Wood, *The Ruins of Balbec, Otherwise Heliopolis in Coelosyria*, (1757) [original engraving in book]]. A plethora of European written accounts exalted Baalbek - romanticised it and represented it as an emblematic reminder of great cultural achievements transcendent of man but built by his own hand - always ignoring and bypassing local exigencies/realities (life, peoples, histories).

By the Ottoman period, the site of the *Qalaa* included small dwellings, which were cleared out by the excavations carried out by the Germans in the first years of the 20th century. German and subsequent French archaeological missions cleared out and purified the site to its Roman vestiges (and stopped at that). The scale and purpose of the unprecedented German intervention in Baalbek under Kaiser Wilhelm II exemplified a total project – intended to trace origins beyond Europe; romanticise the aura of historical linkage to the most ancient roots of European civilisation; to link the person of the Kaiser with the greatness of the emperors of Rome, as manifested in the grandeur of Baalbek; and to boost German political and economic influence within Ottoman territories. Specifically, it was time for German archaeology to catch up with its British and French counterparts and to collect its share of material cultural wealth to match the nascent museums of the world at home. As latecomers, the Germans were afforded little access to the cultural assets of Italy and Greece, already in the collections of the Louvre and the British Museum. The Near East became a German project.

¹³⁷ Sigmund Freud, “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896) SE, 3: 192.

¹³⁸ Vali Mahlouji, “From Image to National monument. The Rise of Lebanese Baalbek”, *Baalbek, Archives of an Eternity*, Beirut: Sursock Museum, 2019). https://sursock.museum/sites/default/files/pdf/baalbek-exhibition_guide-en-web.pdf Accessed July 2023.

I write: “A national pedagogy is permeated through Baalbek, where it is singled out to play an exceptionally prominent role as the material signifier of continuity between the classical world (civilization) and the new nation state. Officiated as an emblem of national identity, Lebanese Baalbek rises as the most powerful endorsement that the modern nation state is a contemporary seat of civilization and power, the successor and inheritor of the timeless glory of authentic ancient greatness and originality. The idea is extended to the notion of a unified, timeless, national body.”

¹³⁹ Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, (Chicago | London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).196-7

¹⁴⁰ Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, (Chicago | London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).198

¹⁴¹ Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, (Chicago | London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) 197.

¹⁴² Donald W. Winnicott, “Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self”, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (The International Psycho-Analytical Library, 64:1-276. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965) 140-152.

¹⁴³ The title is taken from a compilation of Heinz Kohut’s correspondence. *The Curve of Life. Correspondence of Heinz Kohut, 1923-1981*, Ed. Geoffrey Cocks, (Chicago | London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁴⁴ The Beqaa Valley is situated between the Lebanon Mountains to the west and Anti-Lebanon Mountains to the east. Beirut is situated to the west of the Lebanon Mountains on the Mediterranean coast. Due to the geographical condition Baalbek has been closer to the Syrian sphere.

¹⁴⁵ Calls for the demarcation and management of archaeological sites and the saving those “sites of decay” had a reciprocal relationship with hegemonic political and imperialist aspirations of domination over the Near East. The Near East became the locus for imperialist rivalries of domination, grounded in Napoleon’s expansionist ambitions and successful invasion of Egypt (1798-1801) and the battle of Navarino (1827) in support of Greek liberation from Ottoman rule – both key markers of Europe’s growing power *vis-à-vis* the diminishment of Ottoman might.

¹⁴⁶ The title alluded to the famous film “Battle of Algiers” (1966), directed by Gillo Pontecorvo.

¹⁴⁷ The city’s long history was not entirely chronological. The first archive of 10,000 years included important material about the natural importance of the site, its water sources, affiliated rites and rituals of fertility, sexual practices of the people and social and spiritual dimensions.

¹⁴⁸ I organised unofficial trips to Baalbek, against the will, advice and knowledge of the museum and conducted meetings with the governor, city officials and ordinary citizens. I was warned against kidnappings and all manner of dangerous outcomes. However, I was bent on the inclusion of the citizens.

¹⁴⁹ Olúfemi O. Táíwò, “Identity Politics and Elite Capture.” *Boston Review*, May 7, 2020. <https://bostonreview.net/race/olufemi-o-taiwo-identity-politics-and-elite-capture>.

¹⁵⁰ Diya Dutta, “Elite Capture and Corruption: Concepts and Definitions,” *National Council of Applied Economic Research* (2009) 1–16.

¹⁵¹ Donald W. Winnicott, “Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self”, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (The International Psycho-Analytical Library, 64:1-276. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1965) 143.

¹⁵² Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self*, (Chicago | London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) 197.