

Galerie Imane Farès

Alia Farid

Alia Farid

Video/ Installation

Born in Kuwait 1985. Lives and works in Kuwait and Puerto Rico

Alia Farid works between art and architecture operating spaces for critical thinking and action.

She holds a Bachelor in Fine Arts from La Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Rico (Viejo San Juan), a Master in Science in Visual Studies from the Visual Arts Program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology – MIT (Cambridge, MA), and a Master in Museum Studies and Critical Theory from the Programa d'Estudis Independents at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona – MACBA (Catalonia). She has completed residencies at Beta Local (San Juan), Casa Árabe (Córdoba), the Serpentine Galleries (London), and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Doha).

I began making work somewhere in between art, architecture, and urban anthropology. Today I am still interested in these areas, but with a much more focused point in telling how informal networks are forced to make up for lack of formal structure as one of the things I value most is the subversive quality of work that goes unnoticed.

Her most ambitious project to date has been curating the Pavilion of Kuwait at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition, which – despite its appearance at la Biennale di Venezia– placed emphasis on what participating could induce locally in an environment driven by ideologies incongruent with critical and aesthetic thought. In 2016, Alia Farid has been invited to create a new work for the Biennale of São Paulo.

Major exhibitions

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2016 | <i>Live Uncertainty</i> , 32nd São Paulo Biennale, curated by Jochen Volz, São Paulo, Brazil |
| 2015 | <i>Calibán</i> , curated by Marina Reyes Franco, National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (NMPRAC), Chicago, Illinois |
| 2014 | <i>Calibán</i> , curated by Marina Reyes Franco, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), San Juan, Puerto Rico |
| 2007 | Bienal Arte Nuevo Interactiva 07, curated by Raul Moarquench Ferrera-Blanquet, Mérida, Mexico |
| 2005 | New Voices in Video Art, curated by Nelson Rivera Rosario, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), San Juan, Puerto Rico |



Maarad Trablous, 2016
 HD, Single Channel, 14min 24 sec (loop)
 Commissioned by the Fundação Bial de

Video link : <https://vimeo.com/180325838>
 Password : 2016

Commissioned by the Fundação Bial de São Paulo, Alia Farid's film *Maarad Trablous* looks at the divergent outcomes of two sites designed by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer: Ibirapuera park in São Paulo (where the Biennial is held) and the Rashid Karami International Fairgrounds in Tripoli, Lebanon where the film is set. In the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli sits an urban park not unlike Ibirapuera. Comprised of 15 individual concrete forms, some more complete than others, the Rashid Karami International Fairgrounds was intended for hosting the world fair before construction stalled at the onset of the Lebanese civil war (1975)..

Synopsis :

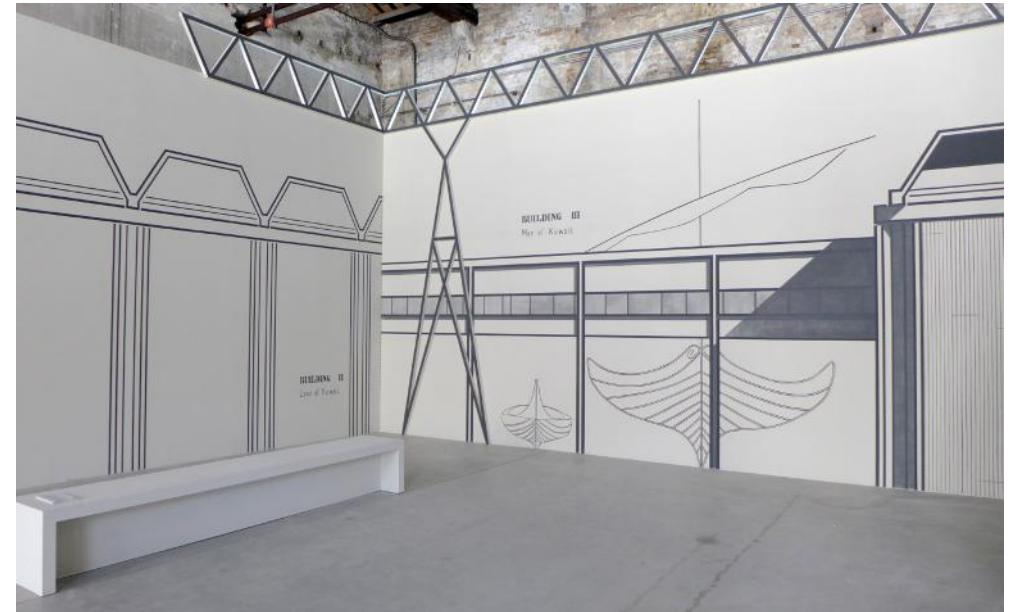
Alia Farid's film *Maarad Trablous* follows a figure on a journey of the vast and desolate urban park. Reoccurring images of the woman's movement through space are cut with images of people exercising and workers gathering tools for pruning the gardens— the only maintained for aspect of the park. Her condition as a hollow vessel is both a symbol of hope and defeat. Past and present dissolve, leaving views and subject alike stranded, waiting for the future.

A Stage for Any Revolution, 2015
Public intervention, Edgware Road, London, England
© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

A series of public readings and performances convened on Edgware Road in line with the Serpentine Galleries' Edgware Road Project, and based on constructivist set designer Viktor Shestakov's unrealized stage of the same name.

Performances and events held at the stage on Edgware Road include an hour-long Arabic-English recitation of Zoe Leonard's 'I want a president...', a performance by Kiani del Valle of 'Las Casas Invisibles', a talk-show by art collective diásporas críticas called '...not a luxury', a meeting place for the Seymour Art Collective, a group reading of the International Declaration of Human Rights convened by Sophia Al Maria under the name 'Acts of Memory – Tyburnia', a workshop led by Francis Rifkin and Amal Khalaf with members of Implicated Theatre, Sonnet 51 by Shakespeare performed in Arabic and English by Dalal Colette Tchantcho.

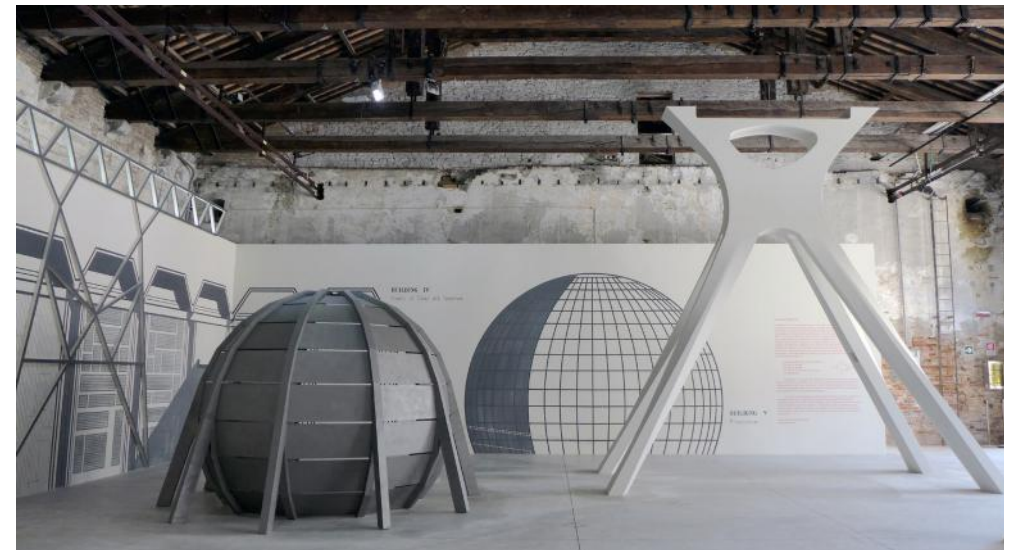




Acquiring Modernity, 2014
 2014 Pavilion of Kuwait at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia
 Commissioned by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL)

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

Acquiring Modernity is Kuwait's participation in the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale de Venezia. The investigation leading up to the installation examines the relationship between international style and local culture and notions of development through modernization. The 2014 Pavilion of Kuwait is an attempt to transcend the limits and duration of the exhibition format and encourage a sustainable environment for aesthetic and critical thinking and action.



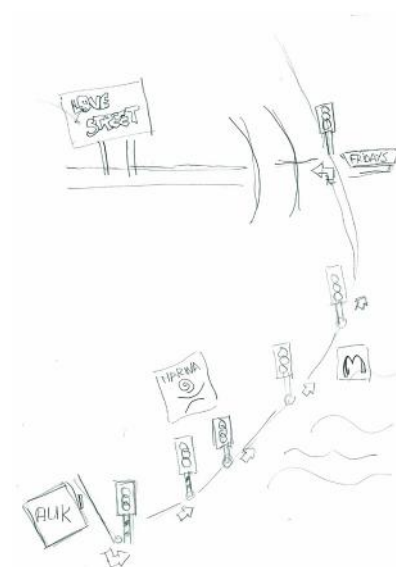
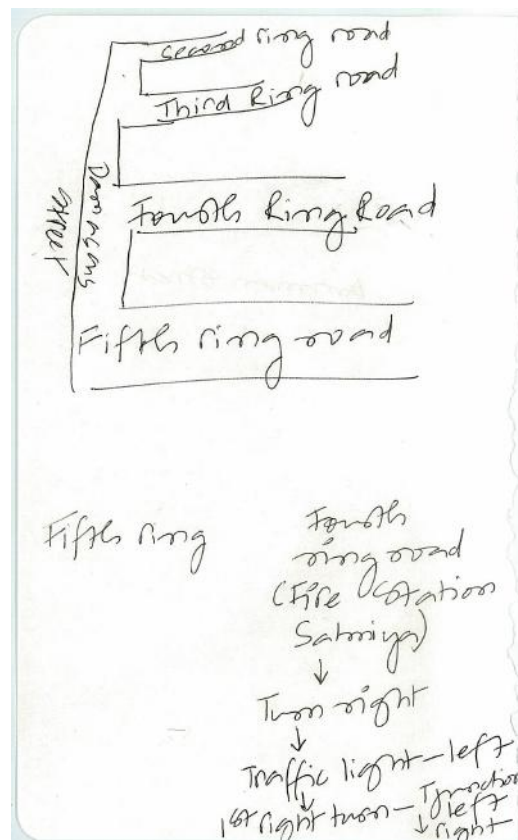
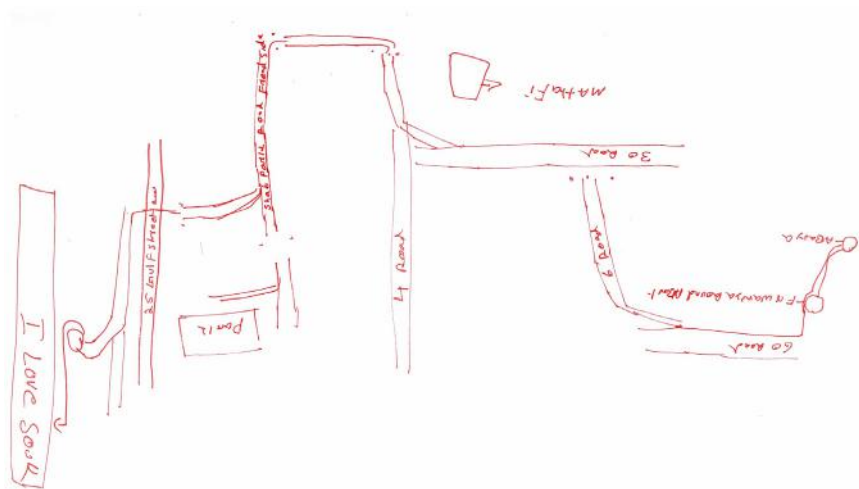


Mosntruo Marino, 2007
Public intervention, La Perla, Viejo San Juan, Puerto Rico

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

A floating structure resembling a sea monster assembled with residents of La Perla, an informal community and disputed territory adjacent to Old San Juan. The workshop was part of a program developed under El Coco de Oro, an artist-run organization led by Edgardo Larregui dedicated to socially engaged and community based projects.





How to get to Share3 il 7ub, 2008-ongoing
 Drawings , pencil and on paper
 © Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

A growing collection of map-drawing with instructions on how to get to a road in Kuwait popularly know as the 'road of love' (spelled 'Share3 il 7ub' on Anglo keyboards). The drawings, supplied by a range of people familiar to Kuwait's urban landscape, are portraits of the mind vis-à-vis the city.



Mezquitas de Puerto Rico (Fajardo), 2014
Pile and kilim prayer rug
140 x 80 cm

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

Mezquitas de Puerto Rico is part of an ongoing project between Alia Farid and Jesus 'Bubu' Negrón that involves documenting mosques in different parts of the Caribbean for later interpretation by weavers living and working in the Arab Muslim world.

The work looks at how traditional Islamic architecture is adapted to the context of the Caribbean through exaggerations of elements such as the dome and minaret, and issues related to the environment or jannah-like setting in which these structures are found.





Mezquitas de Puerto Rico (Ponce), 2014
 Pile and kilim prayer rug
 114 x 172 cm

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

Mezquitas de Puerto Rico is part of an ongoing project between Alia Farid and Jesus 'Bubu' Negrón that involves documenting mosques in different parts of the Caribbean for later interpretation by weavers living and working in the Arab Muslim world.





Mezquitas de Puerto Rico (Rio Piedras), 2014
 Pile and kilim prayer rug
 125 x 180 cm

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

Mezquitas de Puerto Rico is part of an ongoing project between Alia Farid and Jesus 'Bubu' Negrón that involves documenting mosques in different parts of the Caribbean for later interpretation by weavers living and working in the Arab Muslim world.





Mezquitas de Puerto Rico (Vega Alta), 2014
 Pile and kilim prayer rug
 111 x 168 cm

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

Mezquitas de Puerto Rico is part of an ongoing project between Alia Farid and Jesus 'Bubu' Negrón that involves documenting mosques in different parts of the Caribbean for later interpretation by weavers living and working in the Arab Muslim world.





Mezquitas de Puerto Rico (Hatillo), 2014
Pile and kilim prayer rug
84 x 140 cm

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

Mezquitas de Puerto Rico is part of an ongoing project between Alia Farid and Jesus 'Bubu' Negrón that involves documenting mosques in different parts of the Caribbean for later interpretation by weavers living and working in the Arab Muslim world.





Minaret for Multiple Voices, 2014 (incomplete)
Public intervention/sculpture

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

A free-standing minaret accessible from the ground and for encouraging fearless speech.
The minaret was meant for placement outside of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha.
However due to unforeseen circumstances, the work remains incomplete.





Monument to the Creative, Local, Informal Economy, 2008
Public intervention/sculpture

© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

An itinerant monument and kiosk designed in collaboration with residents of Villa Victoria, a 1960s sustainable housing project located in Boston's South End and praised for its grassroots history and outstanding design.



Public drinking fountain, 2014
2014 Pavilion of Kuwait at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia
© Alia Farid. Courtesy Galerie Imane Farès

A public drinking fountain provided by the Pavilion of Kuwait and installed in front of the Nordic Pavilion in the Giardini. The installation-intervention is an effort to diminish the barrier between countries represented permanently in the Giardini and countries with non-permanent representation in the Arsenale. The drinking fountain is a replica of the Kuwait Water Towers design by Swedish architect Sune Lindström, which is commonly seen on the streets in Kuwait.

Biography

Alia Farid

Video/ Installation

Born in Kuwait 1985. Lives and works in Kuwait and Puerto Rico.

Solo exhibitions

Forthcoming

Exhibition title TBD, Galerie Imane Farès, Paris, France

November 2016

Exhibition title TBD, Sultan Gallery, Sabhan, Kuwait

Selected group exhibitions

- 2016 *Incerteza viva (Live Uncertainty)* 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, curated by Jochen Volz, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2015 *Calibán*, curated by Marina Reyes Franco, National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (NMPRAC), Chicago, Illinois
Building Imaginary Bridges Over Hard Ground, curated by Luiza Teixeira de Freitas, Marker 2015, Art Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
- 2014 *Calibán*, curated by Marina Reyes Franco, Instituto de Cervantes, New York, New York
Calibán, curated by Marina Reyes Franco, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), San Juan, Puerto Rico
Micro-acciones de Emergencia, curated by Claudia Segura Campins and Inés Jover, ADN Platform, San Cugat de Valles, Spain
- 2013 *Cave 2*, curated by Mike Egan, Director at Ramiken Crucible Gallery, Barceloneta, Puerto Rico
- 2008 *Articularé*, MIT Visual Arts Program (Building N55), organized and convened by Ute Meta Bauer and Antoni Muntadas, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 2007 *Bienal Arte Nuevo Interactiva 07*, curated by Raul Moarquech Ferrera-Blanquet, Mérida, México
LAUNCH: New Work, New Space, MIT Visual Arts Program (Building N55), curated and convened by Ute Meta Bauer and Antoni Muntadas, Building N55, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Cortometrajes, curated by Quintín Rivera, AREA, Caguas, Puerto Rico
- 2006 *Wild Girls*, curated by Jeanette Ingerbaum and Papo Colo, Exit Art, New York, New York
Festival Internacional de Video/Arte/Electrónica (VAE11), curated by Alejandro Quinteros, Lima, Peru
- 2005 *New Voices in Video Art*, curated by Nelson Rivera Rosario, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (MAC), San Juan, Puerto Rico
Ninjas Killed My Family, Need Money For Kung Fu Lessons, curated by Luis Agosto-Leduc. Galería Comercial, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Public Interventions

- 2015 *A Stage for Any Revolution*, curated by Amal Khalaf under Centre for Possible Studies / Edgware Road Project, Serpentine Galleries, London, England
- 2014 *Public Drinking Fountain*, carried out in cooperation with the Nordic Pavilion at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (Nina Frang Høyum, Nina Berre, Gro Bonesmo, Jørgen Vidnes), Venice, Italy
Minaret for Multiple Voices, curated by Michelle Dezember under Neighborhood to Neighborhoods, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar
- 2007 *Monstruo Marino*, curated and convened by Edgardo Larregui under La Perla Habla, Viejo San Juan, Puerto Rico

Residencies, Grants, and Fellowships

- 2016 marra.tein, residency, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2015 Cité Internationale des Arts / Centre d'archives d'architecture du XXe siècle, ParisFrance
Nominee, Jameel Prize, London, England
Edgware Road Project, part II of residency with Centre For Possible Studies, Serpentine Galleries, London, England
Davidoff Art Initiative, residency at Altos de Chavón, La Romana, Dominican Republic
- 2014 From Neighborhood to Neighborhoods, residency at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar
- 2013 Edgware Road Project, part I of residency with Centre For Possible Studies, Serpentine Galleries, London, England
Casa Árabe, residency at Casa Árabe supported by Delfina Foundation, Córdoba, Spain
The Harbor, residency at Beta Local, Viejo San Juan, Puerto Rico
- 2012 Nominee, Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation (CIFO) Artist Fellowship, Miami, Florida

Talks and Workshops

- 2016 TransCultural Exchange, conference organized and convened by Mary Sherman, Boston / Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 2015 *Conciertos Ficticios (Interviniendo en el espacio público)*, a workshop created and led in collaboration with Nuria Montiel for students of Altos de Chavón, La Romana, Dominican Republic
Artist talk, Beta Local, Viejo San Juan, Puerto Rico
- 2013 *Future Cities*, series of talks convened by Michelle Dezember, Mathaf, Doha, Qatar

Texts and press

AGENDA

LEBANON

PERFORMANCE

Turn Off the Light
STATION rooftop, Sin al-Fil
Oct. 1, 8:30 p.m.
Reservations: artisticque.bey-rouths@t4-liban.com
Presented by La Folie journey
street art, French crew Turn Off the Light will present a show with elements of DJ, dance and light calligraphy. Tickets LL15,000.

FILM

'Despair'
Metropolis Empire, Soffil
Oct. 1, 10 p.m.
www.metropoliscinema.net
As Naitum rises in 1930s Germany, Russian emigre and chocolate magnate Hermann Hermann goes slowly mad. It begins by sitting himself in a chair to watch himself making love to his wife, who is also sleeping with her cousin. When he meets Felix, a laborer whom he believes looks exactly like himself, he hatches a plot to free himself of his worries. Part of the Fassbinder mini-retrospective.

THEATER

'Cages'
Metro al-Madina, Hamra St.
Sunday and Monday evenings through Oct. 31, 9:30 p.m.
Reservations: 01-217-606
Directed and adapted for the stage by Lina Abiad, "Qafas" is based on Juana Maria Hadad's play-like novel which satirizes the female condition in Lebanon and the Arab world through five types of women. In Arabic.

PHOTOGRAPHY

'Clashing Realities'
Galerie Tavit
Through Nov. 5
01-562-812
Asking women to wear military uniforms for this portrait series, Lania Maria Abillama has attempted to show the extent to which Lebanon's civil society has been affected by decades of brutal conflict.

TALK

'Making Movies Against the Odds'
Conf. A. Bldg. 37 (behind the Old Lee Observatory), AUB
Oct. 3, 5 p.m.
American filmmaker Alicia Dwyer interweaves clips from her films and media projects with the story of how she came to filmmaking, to explore the tensions and breakthroughs of developing a voice as a female filmmaker.

ART

'Unravelled'
Beirut Art Center, Jir al-Wat
Through Nov. 13
01-397-0118
This group show examines embroidery in contemporary artistic practice and how its artists have used it as a means of concealment, narrative, a marker of time and a form of gendered labor.

'It's a Mad World'
Ayyam Gallery, Beirut Towers, Zetounah St., BCD
Through Nov. 5
01-374-450
This solo show of work by Shurooq Amin features mixed media paintings exploring topics such as decorated cities and social issues that continue to affect entire populations.

JUST A THOUGHT

I am attracted to free-flowing, sensual curves, the curves that I find in the mountains of my country, in the sinuousness of its rivers, in the waves of the ocean. The sinuousness of the body of a beloved woman.

Oscar Niemeyer
(1907-2012)
Brazilian modernist architect

REVIEW

Niemeyer's Tripoli remains return

Farid's 'Maarad Trablous' debuts at the 32nd Sao Paulo Biennial

By Jim Quilty
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Are there casual conversations about modernist architecture? As they take their daily constitutional on Ain al-Mreissah's seaside Corniche, do Beirutis lament how the minimalist simplicity of the structure housing Artisanat du Liban came to be swathed in neo-orientalist kitsch? What does kitsch-swathed modernism mean?

"Maarad Trablous," the understated new work by Kuwaiti-Puerto Rican artist Ala Farid, can easily be read as a conversation with modernism, albeit without dialogue. Commissioned by the Fundacao Biennial de Sao Paulo, the piece is currently on show at the 32nd Sao Paulo Biennial, entitled "Live Uncertainty."

A few traces of Lebanon's brush with modernism still dot its landscape. The best-known agglomeration is Trablous' Permanent International Exhibition Center – later renamed the Rashid Karamé International Fair, Maarad Trablous.

Wedge into the urban fabric like a booby trap, this largely disused, 10,000-hectare precinct of Brazilian modernist architecture – was designed in 1966 by Oscar Niemeyer, a true icon in the field, while he was in self-imposed exile from Brazil's 1964-85 military junta.

The Maarad's principal construction was mostly completed by 1974, but Lebanon's Civil War pre-empted its opening.

By the time the war ended 15 years later, the project's political impetus had been pulverized, along with any sense of public service.

If the Maarad is an artifact of a past vision of urban development conditioned by the public good, it was abandoned, unfinished.

Since then, the sheer incongruity of the space has tempted artists to create or exhibit contemporary art there. In this, it's not unlike Beirut's City Center Cinema, a giant concrete core kernel elevated on a booby plinth, one of the few modernist traces to survive Downtown's post-war reconstruction. Like the cinema, the Maarad often beggars the art it is meant to house – or which presumes to incorporate it.

Shot on the grounds of the Maarad in 2016, "Maarad Trablous" combines elements of performance and documentary film. As it commences, the camera scrutinizes the site's "gateway arch," pausing right to left, up and down its length. The fixed camera finds an unnamed young woman



From "Maarad Trablous," 2016.



From "Maarad Trablous," 2016.

(Nowar Yusuf) standing alongside the structure, hands clasped and head above her head as if to underline how the curve of the arch emulates the feminine form.

As the work proceeds, this feminine figure sometimes wanders into landscape shots of the Maarad. Rolling over on her back, she gazes up at the sun, closing one eye then the other like a child.

In counterpoint to her perambulations are the piece's documentary-style interludes. Nadim Mshlawi's electronic score falls away and the camera observes the Maarad's mundane daytime goings-on.

Clusters of women gesture in conversation as they walk brisk laps around the grounds. A laborer navigates his riding mower over a patch of grass, whose well-maintained manicure contrasts with some of the structure's scuffed concrete and drained reflecting pool.

Replendent in a freshly laundered tracksuit, a senior citizen moves purposefully through the seating of the site's outdoor theater, the stiff soles of his running shoes sounding the beat of his progress.

As if to accentuate the contrast with these rituals of light exercise, Farid has her heroine repeat certain gestures – walking across the site, returning to the top of the theater's

domed roof, again skirting the concrete concourse's eye-shaped gash – creating the impression of a phantom haunting the forms.

In her notes to "Maarad Trablous," Farid has said that the work sets out to create a dialogue between two spaces. One is the physically resilient, yet derelict, Trablous fair-ground, whose structures echo several of Niemeyer's formal gestures.

The other is Beirut, which hosts the Sao Paulo Biennial, the bustling urban park whose public art includes Niemeyer pieces.

The notes suggest that the female protagonist's "condition as a hollow vessel is both a symbol of hope and defeat. Past and present dissolve, leaving views and subject alike stranded, waiting for the future."

Such characterization acquires considerable resonance if members of the public are aware that Yusuf, the actor portraying the heroine, studied theater in Damascus – setting the modernist project against the ongoing Syrian conflict and refugee crisis. The absence of such knowledge, however, does nothing to undermine the work.

Having established her formal affinity to the Maarad's architecture, the narrative she enacts – wandering about Niemeyer's modernist forms as if in search of something or someone – is one of listlessness.

Inhabiting a derelict, formally modern space, she is a universal figure awaiting a canceled appointment.

The Sao Paulo Biennial continues at Bixpa Park through Dec. 11; for more, see www.biennialofsaopaulo.org/biennial/saopaulobiennial/.

The son of Baghdad who fathered Iraqi Frankenstein

By Jean-Marc Mojon
Agence France Presse

BAGHDAD: When Ahmed Sadaawi finished writing "Frankenstein in Baghdad," a dark fantasy about the war that tore Iraq apart a decade ago, he thought his novel dealt with the past.

Just like the monster Mary Shelley first dreamed up exactly 200 years ago, Sadaawi's hero then took on a life of its own.

A fresh wave of violence in Iraq and the region has given renewed relevance to the novel, which was published in 2013, as the Arab Spring gave way to chaos and before a third of Sadaawi's country fell to jihadists.

Sadaawi won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014, and became one of the new stars of the regional literary world.

"Frankenstein in Baghdad" was released in Italian earlier this year, a French translation hit bookshops this month, and the English is due early next year.

In the novel, Hadi al-Attag, a rag-and-bone man from the old Baghdad neighborhood of Batween, sews together body parts scattered by bombings to form a full body.

A displaced soul then enters the figure, Hadi refers to it as the "she-ma" – Iraqi dialect that translates as "whatsthisname."

The creature starts killing, first to avenge bombing victims but then more randomly to get fresh parts to replace its own decomposing flesh.

"The she-ma is not an imaginary fantasy creature. The she-ma is real. All of us have done this in one way or another, by welcoming, endorsing or not objecting to crimes,



Sadaawi won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014.

The story begins in the spring of 2003 and ends a year later on the eve of the 2006 bomb attack on a Shiite shrine in the city of Samarra that quipped two years of sectarian-driven bloodletting.

Sadaawi's book – which includes earthy and often hilarious descriptions of Batween, a once-beautiful Jewish neighborhood now best known for prostitution and crime – has been something of a phenomenon on the Iraqi literary scene.

A genial character with salt-and-pepper stubble and a soaring forehead framing sparkling bespectacled eyes, the author is easily found at one of his favorite cafes and very accessible. "Some friends have removed me from Facebook," Sadaawi said, waving a copy of his novel. "Some have made me a god. Others sent me pictures of themselves burning my image."

The 43-year-old doesn't seem to entirely dislike the attention. Sadaawi is from a family with no artistic pedigree. He grew up in the humble neighborhood of Sadr City, learned to read and write by accompanying his mother to literacy classes.

"That got me writing earlier than other kids ... By the time I was seven, I was writing many stories about animals," he said. "I would read

them to my friends and they would listen to me. It made me feel famous. So at that time I already had this idea that fiction was part of real life."

Publishing giant Penguin is releasing "Frankenstein" in the U.S. soon, and a deal for a Hollywood adaptation is in the works.

Being a novelist in Baghdad, even a successful one, does not pay the rent. Sadaawi works as a journalist and makes documentary films to pay the bills and finance the next novel.

Shelley invented Frankenstein in 1816, during a holiday spent during the winter, which became known as "the year without a summer" because the ash from the eruption of Mount Tambora plunged much of the world into a long volcanic winter.

Sadaawi bases his writing on a thorough knowledge of the street in people and the Baghdadis slang they speak that shows at every turn of the page.

"Not every novelist is Hemingway, with extremely diverse life experiences," he said of the author he cites as a major influence. "The novelist should have the journalist's aptitude to look for stories first, venture into reality to capture details."

The idea for his book is rooted in what has been Iraq's grim reality for years. Sadaawi recounted two specific incidents that shocked him and inspired him to write "Frankenstein in Baghdad."

One was in the city of Baquba when Al-Qaida in Iraq – nowadays Daesh (IS) – kidnapped a man, killed him, and chopped his body into pieces. "They dropped each piece in a different part of Baquba ... When the city woke up, each neighborhood saw a different body part," he said. "They made the whole city see the body simultaneously. What criminal genius!"

The other moment that stuck with him was also at the height of last decade's civil war, when hospital wards were overwhelmed by the sheer volume of bodies being brought in after bombings.

"One day someone came asking about his brother ... they told him that all the bodies had already been collected by their families, except for these pieces," he said. "There were mismatched, unclaimed ... body parts and they told him to assemble a man from them and take it away."

INCERTEZA VIVA – Pavilhão da Biennial, São Paulo
Jusqu'au 11 décembre

La Biennale de São Paulo en prise avec les soubresauts du monde

Tournée autour des inquiétudes qui secouent notre monde, la 32^e édition de la Biennale de São Paulo, organisée jusqu'au 11 décembre, offre des pistes de réflexion et d'actions pour remettre notre planète d'équerre. *Par Roxana Azimi*



Jonathas de Andrade,
O Pêxe, 2016,
film 16 millimètres.



Alia Farid, Ma'arad
Trabouls, 2016.
Courtesy Galerie
Imane Farès, Paris.

**ROSA BARBA
S'EST ATTACHÉE
À TISSER LA
POLYPHONIE
QUI ANIME
LA VILLE DE
SÃO PAULO
EN PARTANT
D'UN PRINCIPE
SALUTAIRE :
« L'ART N'EXISTE
QUE LORSQUE
LES GENS LE
PRATIQUENT »**

En ces temps troublés, les biennales ne peuvent plus se contenter de dresser l'état des lieux de l'art. Elles doivent se faire le miroir du monde. La 32^e édition de la Biennale de São Paulo ne déroge pas à cette tâche en prenant un thème éloquent : « Vivre l'incertitude ». Qui sommes-nous, où allons-nous ? Quel sort réservons-nous à la planète ? Quel tour mutant donnons-nous à l'humanité ? Autant de questions qui agitent cette édition confiée au curateur allemand Jochen Volz. En vérité, agiter n'est pas le mot *ad hoc*. Car cette biennale crantée sur les questions anthropocènes se dérobe à l'agit-prop comme au pessimisme le plus bruyant. Ici, pas de roulements de tambour, pas de figure marxiste convoquée à la rescousse, nul slogan coup de massue. L'actualité brésilienne s'est certes invitée dans l'exposition, à travers les panneaux « Fora Temer » (dégage Temer), injonction adressée au président Michel Temer, successeur jugé illégitime de Dilma Rousseff. Pour autant, la Biennale ne succombe pas au danger de l'actualité à chaud ni aux bons sentiments. Les artistes conviés savent, pour la plupart, donner forme à leurs questionnements. Lauréate du Prix de la Fondation Prince Pierre de Monaco, Rosa Barba s'est attachée à tisser la polyphonie qui anime la ville de São Paulo en partant d'un principe salutaire : « L'art n'existe que lorsque les gens le pratiquent ». Autrement dit, lorsqu'il est ancré dans la vie, qu'il a le doigt sur le pouls du monde. Qu'il en dissèque le présent, sans ignorer le passé. Qu'il saute tisser des liens secrets, comme cette vidéo d'Alia Farid, qui dresse des parallèles tacites entre les ruines d'Oscar Niemeyer à Tripoli, au Liban, et celles de l'architecte brésilien qui parsème le grand parc d'Ibirapuera qui abrite le bâtiment de la Biennale. L'inventaire est l'une des formes de narration les plus prisées des artistes. On oubliera l'installation platement ethnographique de bâtons du Portoricain Michael Linares. Plus intéressante est la proposition de

/...



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Four artists to see at the São Paulo biennial

As the country faces political chaos, the long-running exhibition finds a patch of order with a garden theme

by SILAS MARTÍ | 8 September 2016

Alia Farid

Reminiscent of Rachel Rose's fusion with the surrounding environment, the Kuwaiti artist's film shows a woman wandering around Oscar Niemeyer's International Fair in Tripoli, Lebanon's northernmost city on the border with Syria. Those Modernist ruins, now caught in the tangles of yet another war, are brought back to São Paulo's Ibirapuera park, designed with a strikingly similar plan.



Alia Farid, Apoio/Support: Shrook Al Ghanim; Rana Sadik & Samer Younis; Galerie Imane Farès; marra.tein; Amer Huneidi; Mohammed Hafiz; Ziad Mikati

ilustrada



DESERTO DE NIEMEYER

Parque em ruínas construído pelo arquiteto no Líbano é cenário de filme sci-fi da artista Alia Farid, que vem à Bienal

SILAS MARTINS
DE SÃO PAULO

Nenhuma babá, criança, jardineiro ou skatista ali ainda se espanta com os buracos de bala ao longo das paredes, nem com os vergalhões retorcidos que pendem do teto de um dos prédios, como nervos que se movem numa fratura exposta. Do outro lado do mundo, uma espécie de Ibirapuera encontrou sua ruína antes mesmo de ser inaugurado.

Oscar Niemeyer, morto aos 104, há quatro anos, construiu entre os anos 1960 e 1970 na cidade de Trípoli, no norte do Líbano, um conjunto arquitetônico que lembra o parque paulistano, além de outras estruturas que ecoam os contornos de Brasília, como as arcadas do Itamaraty.

Mas a guerra que explodiu ali em 1975 abortou o sonho de modernidade e acabou condenando os espaços fantásticos do arquiteto ao esquecimento — em vez de centro de convenções ou espaço para o que seria uma feira internacional, esse Ibirapuera libanês chegou a funcionar como uma base militar ao longo do conflito.

Em raros tempos de paz, virou um cenário para caminhadas, pista de skate e até arena para shows de rock. É essa vida entre ruínas modernas que inspirou um filme da artista kuwaitiana Alia Farid.

Ela passou meses no Líbano rodando uma espécie de ficção científica entre as cur-

um arquiteto como esses nesse estado de devastação", diz Farid. "Mesmo assim, essa não é uma ruína total. A arquitetura se deteriorou com o tempo, mas existe uma vida que se mantém ali. Os jardins vêm sendo cuidados, e as pessoas não deixam de visitar esse lugar. Ele faz parte da vida."

Tanto que seu filme contrapõe a presença fantasmagórica de uma bela mulher solitária, dando corpo à ideia de arquitetura, a pessoas que passeiam pelo parque, de jardineiros podando arbustos entre prédios arruinados a velhinhos em suas caminhadas.

Nesse sentido, a paralisia estranha dessas formas, como uma arquitetura congelada no tempo e flutuando sobre espelhos d'água sempre estorricados, parece desafiar pelo movimento de uma população já indiferente aos

vestígios de brutalidade que se acumulam ali — das cadeiras empilhadas e em estado de putrefação nas salas vazias do centro de convenções às marcas dos fuzilamentos.

Mais impressionante dos espaços do filme, um anfiteatro com uma arquibancada de cadeiras brancas parece inverter o jogo na obra de Farid. Em vez de acomodar o público de algo a ser contemplado, ele mesmo se torna ob-

plado, elas mesmas viram objeto plástico, um elemento perturbador que está no centro de um espetáculo da destruição — são as sentinelas do que poderia ter sido e não foi.

vas de Niemeyer no deserto. Quando estrear na próxima Bienal de São Paulo, em setembro, sua obra será uma espécie de espelho distorcido do Ibirapuera de verdade, onde acontece a mostra.

Volz, também tem um pavilhão que serpenteia entre jardins, como a marquise do Ibirapuera, além de uma grande cúpula redonda, que lembra a Óca e serviu de caserna durante a guerra civil.

interessante na obra dele, que é sempre espetacular e sensual", diz Farid. "Não penso nele como um futurista. Ele é um vanguardista mais interessado no progresso que parte de um equilíbrio e da harmonia com esse terreno."

Mas essa ideia, tanto no Brasil quanto no Líbano, acabou se revelando um tanto frágil. Enquanto o golpe militar de 1964 levou ao exílio do arquiteto, a guerra civil no país árabe sepultou toda e qualquer promessa de vanguarda.

Niemeyer, no caso, é aqui um elo entre vontades distantes mas não distintas de um futuro calcado na ordem geométrica e no progresso mais que perfeito — e por isso mesmo um tanto impossível — vislumbrado pelo modernismo.

“É chocante ver a obra de

AVESSE DA UTOPIA
No fundo, a artista retrata o avesso da utopia. Quando Niemeyer foi escalado pelo governo libanês para construir o parque de exposições, ele havia acabado de terminar as obras de Brasília. Sua arquitetura modernista, de formas curvilíneas e agarra-

Há ainda um pórtico e estruturas mais escultóricas que remetem ao Memorial da América Latina, outra obra de Niemeyer em São Paulo. É como se no Oriente Médio o arquiteto se sentisse à vontade para experimentar os elementos de seu vocabulário.

“Nenhuma de suas estruturas é fechada ou isolada do entorno, é o que eu acho

“Minha ideia é confundir os dois lugares”, diz Farid. “Há muitos elementos repetidos nos dois, além do fato de serem parques urbanos com inclinações culturais e lembrarem momentos dos nossos países em que se buscou uma certa modernidade.”

Esse “irmão árabe” do parque paulistano, nas palavras do curador da Bienal, Jochen

[illegible]

Acquiring Modernity is Kuwait's official publication for its pavilion at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia.

Commissioned by the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters – State of Kuwait

Editor: Noura Alsager
Translation: Nancy Nassar and Berlitz Kuwait
Graphic design: Dexter Sinister
Printers: Grafiche Veneziane soc. coop /
Four Films Printing Group.
Printed in Venice, Italy and Kuwait City, Kuwait.

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ISBN 978-99906-0-423-8

Acquiring Modernity is proudly supported by the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs, and real estate partner, United Real Estate Company.



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Dexter Sinister (Graphic Design), Abdullah Al-Awadhi (Artist)

Acknowledgements (individuals):
Dana Abdal, Azra Aksamija, Mohammed Al Ajmi, Lulu Alawadhi,
Sulaiman Al Bader, Sulayman Al-Bassam, Dr. Abdullah
Al-Ghunaim, Manaf Al-Hamad, Janan Al Haroun, Ghaith Al Jebawi,
Wafaa Alkhudhuri, Abdulaziz Al Naham, Fajer Al Nasafi,
Adelah Alneseef, Khazal Al-Qafas, Samer Al Qallaf, Kays Al Rayes,
Sabah Al Rayes, Dalal Al Sayer, Sowsan Al Sha'er, Abdurraheem
Al-Taher, Fahad Al-Wohaibi, Zeina Arida, Giacomo Bardelli,
Mohamed Bin Reda, Malene Bjorn, Ricardo Caamacho,
Peter Cleven, Sultan Duwish, Mengyi Fan, Gustavo Ferrari,
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Jehan Rajab, Tareq Rajab, Ziad Rajab, Luz Bella Raposo,
Katrine Rosendal Hayden, Shehab Shehab, Tarek Shuaib,
Evangelia Simos Ali, Aruna Sultan, Farida Sultan, Jørgen Strüwing,
Gedeminas Urbonas

Acknowledgements (organisations):
Kuwait National Museum, Kuwait Oil Company, Pace,
Ministry of Communication, Center for Research Studies on Kuwait,
Al-Qabas Newspaper Information Centre & Studies,
Central Bank of Kuwait, Aga Khan Award for Architecture,
DISSING + WEITLING architecture a/s



Diwan of Sheikh Khaz'al destroyed after the Iraqi Invasion, 1991. Courtesy of Al-Qabas Newspaper Archives.

Commissioner's Statement

In line with our strategies of restoration and attempts to expand and revise the national list of historical buildings, we at the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters commissioned Kuwait's second participation at the International Architecture Exhibition at la Biennale di Venezia in parallel with Kuwait's first modern monument proposal to the UNESCO World Heritage List – soon to be the first modern monument nomination from the Gulf region and the Arab world. Located at the northeastern corner of Kuwait's metropolitan area, Abraaj Al Kuwait (Kuwait Towers) serve as monuments and symbols of our national identity. The Ministry of Electricity and Water commissioned the Swedish engineering firm to design a nation-wide infrastructural water supply system while Danish architect Malene Bjorn designed the Kuwait Towers, an integral part of that network. We anticipate the Towers joining the UNESCO World Heritage List.

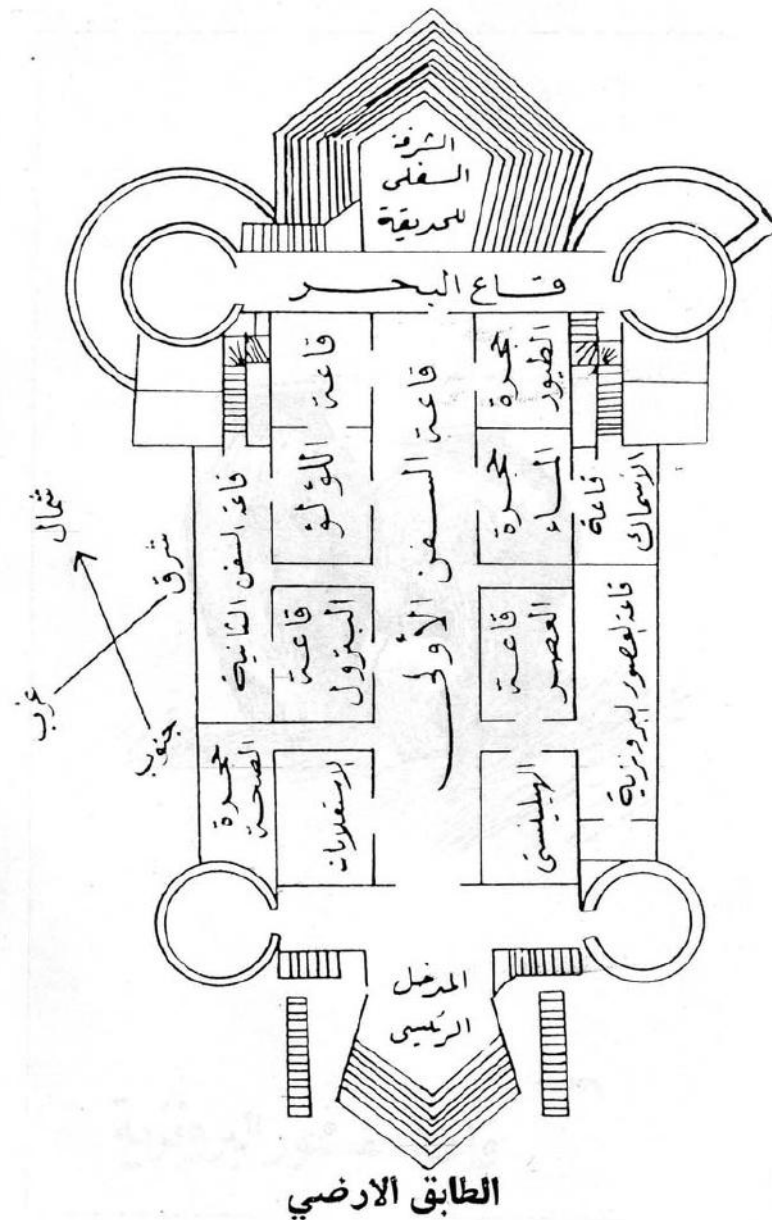
As the main public entity with legislative tools to conserve and restore a sense of history and locality, the Council is fully invested in rehabilitating the city through an assemblage of cultural, technical, and participatory projects that address the recognition and classification of the city's built heritage, and in spreading public and institutional awareness about the urgency of keeping alive evidences of Kuwait's early modern era expressed through the physical landscape.

Also, investigating the continuity of civic expression in Kuwait's urban evolution is perceived as an attempt to orientate the value of place-making, and provides the alternative perspective of the city as an asset – through which the dynamic process of identity production plays a crucial role in shaping how society affiliates with space and relates it to other communities beyond its immediate context.

The theme of the 14th International Architecture Exhibition Absorbing Modernity is one of the main reasons why the NCCAL decided to participate for the second time at the architecture exhibition of the Biennale. We expect to raise the level of awareness concerning the value of the modern city through the different projects initiated and supported by the NCCAL relating to modern movement heritage, which aims to further articulate how such heritage is recognized locally and read as a recent past.

The NCCAL continues to support a national representation resulting from interdisciplinary research groups, focusing on architects and architectures, and the wider social effects of spatial and political decisions that are adopted on the institutional level, yet reformed by civic participation and urban cultures.

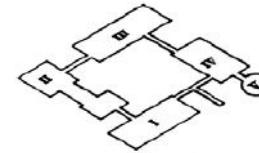
Zahra Ali Baba,
On behalf of the National Council for
Culture, Arts and Letters



Ground-floor plan of the Kuwait National Museum, established in 1957 by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in the former Diwan of Sheikh Khaz'al. Courtesy of NCCAL Archives.

Curator's Statement: Acquiring Modernity, Acquiring Meaning

In response to the overarching theme of the 14th International Architecture Exhibition, *Absorbing Modernity*, the 2014 Kuwait Pavilion has been working under the reciprocal headline, *Acquiring Modernity*, with the objective of investigating the repercussions of commissioning architectural works towards the formation of the State. To help articulate the nation's history of modernization, our team has chosen to focus its participation on the establishment of the Kuwait National Museum in 1957;¹ and through the envisaged program of its second, more modern iteration of 1960/1983² address a series of projects that were commissioned to function primarily as symbols of progress. The information gathered and compiled since the start of this project – presented through our website and in this publication – has been arranged in connection with the themes proposed for each of the buildings of the latter Museum compound:



Ambiguous in what they are meant to convey, the themes are testament that any attempt to establish order without the involvement of the communities being served can only ever succeed as a folly. The reclamation of the themes is an effort to generate meaning and restore a sense of ownership and feelings of responsibility over Kuwait's built environment. It is about questioning direction from those positioned

1. The first Kuwait National Museum was established in 1957 by Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in what used to be the Diwan of Sheikh Khaz'al, the former ruler of Muhammerah (now Iran), and a friend of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah. In 2008, the Diwan and its sister building, the Palace, were acquired by the State of Kuwait in ruinous form after they were listed under the Kuwait Heritage Building Registrar as two of the nation's most outstanding monuments. Leading their restoration up until March 2014 – when the project was handed over to the Amiri Diwan – was architect Evangelia Simos Ali. The plan is to turn the spaces into a cultural center, although what that actually entails is yet to be discovered.

2. In 1960, Kuwait launched an architectural competition for the design of its second National Museum. In 1961, French architect Michel Ecochard won, but his design was never completed until 1983. The design, though is internationally recognized as his masterpiece, is however, locally stigmatized and perceived as faulty. According to former Museum Director Dr. Fahad Al-Wohaibi, there were too many disputes as to what the role of the museum should be. Unresolved to this day, the Country has plans to build seven new museums and cultural centers in the coming years. Meanwhile, the Kuwait National Museum remains largely vacant and untended.

above us – not out of rebellion, but in conversations halfway towards the production of healthy, functioning spaces.

Kuwait's 2014 participation at la Biennale di Venezia is artist-curated and researcher-informed. Comprised of various elements beyond the physical exhibition space, it includes a joint installation with the Nordic Pavilion and a film being produced inside of the Kuwait Pavilion, the Biennale, and in different locations around Kuwait and Venice throughout the duration of the show. It is an exercise at creating connections and exchanging representation. Convened to inform the project from multiple perspectives, our researchers hail from a range of disciplines including architecture, visual and performing arts, history, literature, theology, and filmmaking. The project is obsessively local and utterly informal despite its appearance at la Biennale; its highest aspiration is to influence authorities so that when the project returns from Venice, it will have found a place inside of the Kuwait National Museum as a sort of 'Special Projects' program, or research and documentation center.

At the inauguration of *Acquiring Modernity*, the 2014 Kuwait Pavilion team will restage the celebratory opening of the Kuwait National Museum. During the rest of the six-month exhibition, the team will continue developing their investigations concerning the role of the institution towards a more meaningful definition of its program(s), preferably in unison with the renovation efforts that began in April 2014 between the NCCAL and Pace³ to resuscitate the currently underused building. Encouraging an expanded understanding of architectural heritage that is inclusive of modernist structures is also an important objective of this project. We ask ourselves, what is the future of heritage in Kuwait?

Acquiring Modernity is, on the one hand, an examination of the devastating side of affluence: it is a critical commentary on how, with the advent of oil, sensitivity and all sense of urgency was lost. On the other hand, it suggests a learning curve: "acquiring modernity" as in, acquiring an *understanding*. Kuwait's participation in Venice is only one moment of visibility in what is a larger project that aims to help restore rigorous cultural involvement in the country. Since its inception in the Fall of 2013, the project has grown to encompass 21 individuals engaged in diverse areas of research, fabrication and image-making: Aisha Alsager, Dana Aljoudier, Sara Saragoga Soares, Hassan Hayat, Neseef Al Neseef, Noora Al Musallam, Amara Abdul Figueroa, Grainne Hebler, Abdullah AlHarmi, Samer

3. Pace is an architecture, engineering, design, and planning practice co-founded in Kuwait City in 1968 by Hamid Abdulsalam Shuaib and Sabah Al Rayes. Its portfolio includes over a thousand commercial, governmental, residential, recreational, and educational projects across the world and in collaboration with architects of international standing including TAC and Rifaat Chadirji.



Alia Farid. *Princess Diana's anticipated visit to the Kuwait National Museum* (2014). Courtesy of the artist.

Mohammed, Nima Algooneh, Liane Al-Ghusain, Adel Al-Qattan, Wafa'a Al Fraheen, Dalal Al Sane, Noura Alsager, Maysaa Almumin, Ghazi Al-Mulaifi, Cherihaan Nasr, Fatema Alqabandi, and Alaa Alawadhi.

The pavilion also features collaborations with filmmakers Shakir Abal and Oscar Boyson, graphic design duo Dexter Sinister, and artist Abdullah Al-Awadhi. It has welcomed visits and guest critiques by artists Azra Aksamija, Antoni Muntadas, and Gedeminas Urbanas, as well as students from the college of Architecture in Kuwait University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard University, and continues to engage with local and international communities regarding the politicized subjects of representation, and critical and aesthetic thought and expression in our part of the world.

The team expresses deep gratitude to Ali Al-Youha, Shehab Shehab, Evangelia Simos Ali, Aruna Sultan, Sulayman Al-Bassam, Tareq and Ziad Rajab, and Tarek Shuaib for their unbridled support and faith in its endeavors.

Alia Farid

Introduction: Kuwait's Modern Era Between Memory and Forgetting

The three decades between the advent of oil in 1946 and Kuwait's *Souq Al-Manakh* stock market crash in 1982 are commonly referred to in popular discourse as Kuwait's "Golden Era" (*al-'asr al-thahaby*); government publications from the period also referred to it as Kuwait's "modern era" (*al-'asr al-hadeeth*). Within the first decade of oil urbanization (which officially began in 1950) the former port town once encircled by a mudbrick wall became a sprawling metropolis with modern suburbs, while new state-controlled social services like education, healthcare, and housing were among the best in the Middle East. The buzzwords of the time among state and society alike were *nahda* (awakening), *taqaddum* (progress), and *almustaqbal* (the future). In 1961, the ruler, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem, terminated the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement that had bound Kuwait as a protectorate of Great Britain since 1899. With constantly increasing oil revenues at its disposal, Kuwait was ready to prove to the world that it was capable of doing it on its own. Within a year of independence Kuwait had a Constitution, and in 1963, elections were held for the country's new National Assembly. In 1965 the government made a commitment to weed out corruption, maladministration, and the lack of productivity in state institutions after the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development found these hindrances to development to be widespread within the country's fledgling bureaucracy and planning apparatus.¹ The first rounds of young Kuwaiti men and women graduating from universities in the United States and United Kingdom on government scholarships were coming back to the country to work as pioneer doctors, lawyers, engineers, artists, and university professors – all new professions for Kuwaitis. Culturally the country was at its artistic apex: its burgeoning theater industry was renowned in the Arab world, the Sultan Gallery opened in 1969 as one of the region's first modern art spaces promoting the work of young Arab artists alongside famous international ones like Andy Warhol, and 1972 saw the production of Kuwait's first feature film, *Bas Ya Bahar* (*The Cruel Sea*).

The built environment that a society produces at particular moments in history, especially at times of major upheaval, often reflects in spatial form the social and cultural experiences it is going through. This was certainly true of Kuwait's Golden Era, as the excitement of the period was vividly captured in the country's dramatically changing urban landscape. In 1952, the state commissioned a master plan to replace the old mudbrick port town of the pre-oil era with a new city to serve as the ultimate symbol of Kuwait's newfound

prosperity. Throughout the next three decades Kuwaitis demonstrated what one contemporary observer at the time described as, "an unquenchable zeal for development."² As the architect Huda Al-Bahar wrote in 1985: "Kuwaitis began to experience a sense of freedom from the constraints of the traditional way of life and a sense of affluence toward a modern living environment."³ This was reflected in the way they designed their new spatial surroundings. Villas, apartment complexes, offices, and government buildings were designed borrowing international architectural influences as diverse as California space-age Google, Art Deco, Brutalism, and Bauhaus modernism, and mixing these with stylistic features like the colonial verandah and Arab *mashrabiyya*. Such eclectic architectural experimentation reveals the excitement and flux of a country rapidly transforming and eagerly searching.

To make way for this new modern cityscape, the vast majority of the pre-oil urban landscape was demolished throughout the fifties and sixties. Though something that is widely regretted today, this process of "out with the old and in with the new" was common to universal experiences of modernity around the world; as Andreas Huyssen argues: "The price paid for progress was the destruction of past ways of living and being in the world ... And the destruction of the past brought forgetting."⁴ When Zahra Freeth, a British woman who grew up in Kuwait in the 1930s, told a group of Kuwaiti women in 1956 that she had been taking photographs of some of the older houses in the town, the women grew "... impatient at my interest in the Kuwait of the past, and asked why I wasted time on the old and outmoded when there was so much in Kuwait that was new and fine." When Freeth mentioned that many of the old buildings were due to be demolished one young woman exclaimed: "Let them be demolished! Who wants them now? It is the new Kuwait and not the old which is worthy of admiration."⁵ The mass demolition of the pre-oil landscape was not simply a means of clearing space for something new; it was a conscious act of erasure, of deliberately shedding Kuwait's past while dreaming of a better future.

In his analysis of cities in modernity, Richard Dennis convincingly argues that even such a determination to replace the old with the new in modern cities reveals a constant dialogue between past and present in this process. On the one hand,

2. Saba George Shilber, *The Kuwait Urbanization: Being an Urbanistic Case-Study of a Developing Country – Documentation, Analysis, Critique* (Kuwait: 1964), 152.

3. Huda Al-Bahar, "Contemporary Kuwait Houses," *MIMAR* 15 (January/March 1985), 63.

4. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

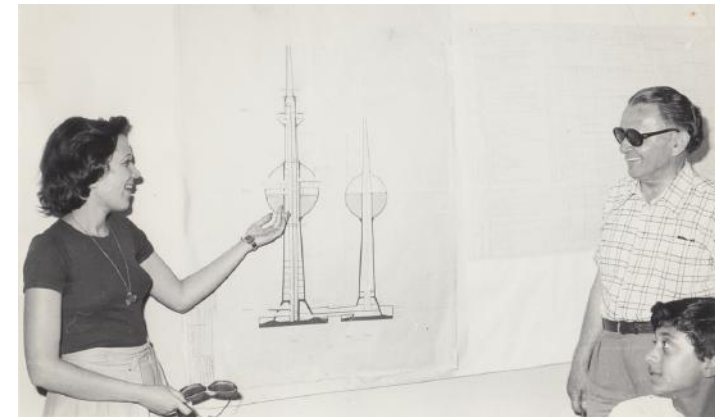
5. Zahra Freeth, *Kuwait Was My Home* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956), 83.

1. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "The Economic Development of Kuwait" (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).

ACQUIRING MODERNITY: KUWAIT AT THE 14TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION

Text / Desi Gonzalez

A national pavilion curated by a group of young creatives takes Kuwait City to the Venice Biennale, but the project doesn't end there. The Pavilion of Kuwait is an ever-growing, multi-disciplinary entity for research, experiment, and practice that transcends the limits and duration of its installation—and sets an international example for the potential of collaboration.



Unveiling a drawing of the Kuwait Towers designed by Swedish architect Malene Björn

The Kuwait National Museum is a site many Kuwaitis know about but few visit. Described as "a shadow of its former self" on Lonely Planet's online travel guide, the museum—a cluster of buildings united by a central courtyard that features camel saddle-inspired columns and a gridded canopy—is underused and overlooked. Only one exhibition remains: an antiquated diorama display of life before the discovery of oil that catapulted the tiny country into modernity in the years after World War II.

Within the museum complex, however, are reminders of a larger Kuwaiti history. The aforementioned exhibition recounts the pre-oil life of Kuwait's pearl divers and desert nomads. A quick walk across the museum's courtyard fast-forwards visitors 70 years into the future: once home to the renowned Al-Sabah collection of Islamic art, this building has been empty since the Iraqi invasion of 1990, its floors covered in debris, dust, and pigeon excrement. The Michel Écochard-designed complex hints at the midcentury utopianism that followed the discovery of oil, in the wake of which Kuwait hoped to compete on a global scale, borrowing the architectural visions of Europe and North America. This particular vision of Kuwaiti modernity has since been forgotten, however. As artist-curator Alia Farid explained in conversation, "Among different architectural communities, the Kuwait National Museum is regarded as Écochard's masterpiece, and yet in the local architectural scene he's practically unheard of."

Last year, 29-year-old Farid was selected to curate the Kuwaiti pavilion for the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale. She assembled a scrappy team of 23 researchers, architects, artists, filmmakers, and writers to design *Acquiring Modernity*, which opened in Venice in June and runs through November 23, 2014. The exhibition's title refers to the overarching theme

Art papers, Nov/Dec 2014

read the full article : http://www.artpapers.org/feature_articles/feature3_2014_1112.html

The Problem With Display
IN THE RIGHT CONTEXT, ARTIST MUSEUMS ARE TELLING NEW HISTORIES
BY REBECCA CLOSE

The recent two-part exhibition “The Museum Show,” deftly curated by Nav Haq at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, United Kingdom, displayed a collection of approximately 40 “artist museums” that, as the press release states, presented “museums that employ a classic ‘museumological’ approach through to broader, more conceptual understandings of a museum’s infrastructure.” Many of the projects hijack the authoritative rhetoric of museum display and present their own fabricated “primary sources.” The resulting installations apotheosize fictional narratives, personal histories and mystical origin stories as valid historical documents. Notable examples include Susan Hiller’s *From the Freud Museum* (1991-96), Walid Raad’s *A History of Art in the Arab World: Part 1_Volume 1_Section 39: The Atlas Group 1989-2004* (2008), Simon Fujiwara’s *Museum of Incest* (2007-) and Khalil Rabah’s *Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind* (2006-). By allowing content to undermine form, these projects challenge a colonial “logic of transparency” that underlies the traditional notion of connoisseurship, whereby displaying objects and documents removed from their contexts can render a history, a culture and a people transparent and understood.

It was somewhat disheartening, however, seeing the work of these guerilla archivists and nomadic historiographers as self contained pseudo-institutions, collected, curated and displayed beside each other, like objects. Is it not also possible to interrogate form, to combine the holy trinity of museum practice— collect, curate, display?

Monument to the Creative, Local, Informal Economy (2008) is the product of a collaboration between artist and researcher Alia Farid and young artists and musicians from the Villa Victoria area of Boston. Both monolithic and kiosk, the architectural intervention is a model for an independent museum practice, in which the traditional dynamics of museum display are entirely subverted. The work is a 12-foot-high wooden obelisk, with over a dozen small wheels fixed to its base and a grey painted carapace that elides a traditional marble makeup. One opens the obelisk by unhinging a latch at the front, such that it turns out horizontally to reveal shelves lined with local products: books, CDs, photographs, artworks, and a display of cheap offers enticing customers to get their nails painted, or corn-rows plaited. In May 2008, Farid and her collaborators took to the streets as vendors, using their monument-kiosk.

Monument shifts the colonial significance of the obelisk, reclaiming it on behalf of Villa Victoria, home to the largest migrant Puerto Rican population in Boston. In the 1950s, faced with the proposed demolition of their homes as part of a local “urban renewal” project, local residents collaborated to propose a development plan for new housing. In 1969, they won the right for tenants to stay in the area. Farid explains: “Many of the younger residents of Villa Victoria have a hard time imagining the neighbourhood’s history of struggle, it’s inconceivable what their grandparents went through in order to secure the place where they now live. The obelisk is a vessel for revisiting this history through an exposition of new things developed by the younger generation. It is about questioning and incorporating different forms of commemoration.”

The resulting structure succeeds in not only commemorating an under-told story of territory retained, it also allows this represented history to act as a forum for the production of current social relations, economies, skills and knowledge. In Farid’s project, the context of production and reception are mediated neither by an institution or a label, nor by distance, recontextualization or translation. Knowledge of both contexts belonged to all who “participated.” In this museum practice, “collect” means to locate, “curate” to demonstrate and “display” to participate.



ALIA FARID, *Monument to the Creative, Local, Informal Economy*, 2008. Site-specific installation in Villa Victoria, Boston, 2008. Courtesy the artist.

"Museum of Non Participation" (MNP), conceived by London-based artists Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, similarly sources alternative forms of distribution and display of work through context-based research and localized collaboration. In 2009, after two years of research with artists, politicians, lawyers, architects, students, professors and language teachers across Pakistan and the UK, the duo produced a month-long MNP festival in the back of a Pakistani barber shop in Bethnal Green, East London, and published a supplement in English and Urdu to go with *The Daily Jang London*, a local Pakistani newspaper. The project revealed alternative representations of Pakistani, British and British-Pakistani identity, at a time when Pakistan was being portrayed by the Western media almost exclusively as a rouge state, suffering from extremism, natural disasters and martial law. First articulated in September 2008 in Karachi with the support of Artangel Interaction, the project now consists of spatial interventions, magazine and newspaper publications, performances, radio programming, seminars, exhibitions, films and language exchanges taking place across Pakistan, the UK and more recently Egypt.

However, how does one display a project that privileges context, outside of that context? While Farid's *Monument* now stands reformatted as a bookshelf at Axiom Center for New and Experimental Media gallery, Boston, the inclusion of Mirza and Butler's MNP in the "Museum Show: Part 2" is more complicated. At the Arnolfini Gallery, MNP consisted of four United Nations resolutions printed and fixed to the wall— including two stating policy decisions regarding Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and the resulting US and UK occupation of Iraq, and two from 1990 concerning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the decision to impose severe sanctions on Iraq— along with additional notes revealing various contradictions and hypocrisies. Whereas this was an act of exposure, an intentionally effaced pamphlet from a recent government art collection exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, by contrast, was an act of concealment. Also present was a neon sign bearing the project's title in English and Urdu and concrete sculptures made by artist-collaborators Pavilion, used to mount an audio work, along with two photographs and three-monitor film. A chalkboard with handwritten excerpts from Peterr Weiss' three-volume novel *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (1975-81) channelled the installation's emphasis on self-education and self-study, and on recognizing and reading contexts of visibility and obscurity, opacity and clarity, audibility and silence. The only label was a booklet of texts pertaining to each "act" (or artwork) and a list of all those who contributed to the exhibition.

Containing no documentation of previous collaborative interventions, Mirza and Butler's installation was less an exhibition than an exposition demonstrating the existence of participation, collaboration and representation— not just within artistic production, where these

Acquiring Modernity
Kuwait Pavilion
14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia
June 07–November 23, 2014
by cheyanne turions

Working against universalizing impulses, the Kuwait pavilion at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia reinterpreted the biennale's theme of Absorbing Modernity as Acquiring Modernity. The biennale's curator, Rem Koolhaas, bracketed modernity's period of absorption from 1914 to 2014. Kuwait's project, under the creative direction of artist-curator Alia Farid, circumscribed modernity's frame of acquisition differently, beginning in 1961 when the British protectorate ended and the state of Kuwait became properly independent. In line with the nation-building exercises of modernity, the state commissioned a national museum, which should have signaled the democratization of culture as it exited the guarded access of universities and private collections into the public access of museums and galleries[1]. Instead, since its seriously delayed completion in 1983, more than 20 years after its design by French architect Michel Ecochard, the museum has sat mostly devoid of visitors[2]. If the museum speaks, it speaks to few, not at all the grand narrativizing provocation once hoped for.

In its rented space at the Arsenale (unlike the permanent pavilions of the Giardini, the biennale's other main venue, which are mostly owned by the represented countries), Kuwait's pavilion conjured its national museum as an image of itself. Image is not an object, at least not as far as architecture is concerned, and so the five buildings of the museum's built environment became line drawings distributed amongst the pavilion's walls. In Kuwait City, the museum has always only been an image, a symbol of progress manifesting the state's desire for national identification and international recognition, not a place tied to the life of Kuwait's citizens. In the pavilion, the desire for "ownership and feelings of responsibility over Kuwait's built environment" can be read in the expanse from two dimensions to three, where the line drawings rupture and structural elements of the museum are repeated, not to scale and not with concerns of fidelity, but rather as a stage[3]. At the opening of the pavilion, the opening of the museum was re-performed. And the few architectural objects in the space – reproductions of columns from the museum's central garden, and a replica of the museum's planetarium shrunken to the size of a small office – will be used as a set for a film by Farid and Oscar Boyson, returning the project to Kuwait as something richer than documentation. The pavilion proposes palimpsest as rehabilitation, inviting visitors to imagine what an animation of those places, when expanded into space, could be.



View of the Pavilion of Kuwait installation at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2014, Venice. Image courtesy of Alia Farid

In this requiring though, deliberate concern for "the repercussions of commissioning architectural works towards the formation of the state" is taken[4]. If the museum were to be invigorated, then it would be in relationship to the lifeblood of the country's citizens and not the fantasies of the state. At the centre of the pavilion's project is a publication designed by American artist duo Dexter Sinister. The chapbook uses five buildings of the museum (entitled Administration and Cultural Section, Land of Kuwait, Man of Kuwait, Kuwait of Today and Tomorrow and Planetarium) as a means for organizing a series of essays that reflect on the history of modern architecture in Kuwait, offering careful critique of the many grand projects that have reconfigured and now define the country. Architect and Deputy Commissioner of the project Zahra Ali Baba suggests that "the

wider social effects of spatial and political decisions that are adopted on the institutional level, yet reformed by civic participation and urban cultures"[5] can serve to reorient the value of place-making to Kuwaiti people, rather than Kuwait's historical displacement to foreign architects who, as architect Dana Aljoudar claims elsewhere in the publication, have used the country "as an asylum... to resurrect their architectural fantasies"[6]. Even the state's watersupply system was designed by foreigners, in this case Swedish engineering company VBB, dramatically shifting Kuwait's relationship to water from one of scarcity to one of plenty, recasting the desert as comfortably habitable if not lush. Here, design did generate new, profound relationships between people and land, between citizens and place. In reference to this history, and as the finale element of Kuwait's Venice project, Farid and the Kuwait team partnered with the Nordic pavilion to construct a water fountain in the Giardini, providing drinking water for visitors from a structure in the shape and palate of Kuwait's water towers. The water towers, which have become monuments of modernity in Kuwait, are returned to Swedish by way of their participation in the Nordic pavilion, impacting the nationalized articulation of both countries in turn.



Joint installation between Kuwait and Nordic Pavilions at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. Set in front of the Nordic Pavilion, the drinking fountain installation (or *sabil* in Arabic) serves as a charitable donation to weary biennale visitors, 2014, Venice. Image courtesy of Alia Farid

Yet, if design is to publication what architecture is to the built environment, then the move so often discussed in the essays –of bringing in plans and structures from abroad– is replicated in the publication and website design by Dexter Sinister (and in the directorial collaboration for the film – Farid is Kuwaiti but Boyson is American). Cynically, the Kuwait pavilion re-performs a central critique offered in the publication through the publication itself. Generously, this re-performance of the state of monumental architecture in Kuwait points to a reclamation of the gesture, suggesting ways of co-existence authored through dialogue. Probably though, the decision was practical, contemporary, and deeply reflective of the art and architecture worlds. In situating Kuwaiti architecture and theory within modernity, these are simultaneously placed within an art-historical narrative that is dominated by Western ideals, preferences and language[7]. By collaborating with American artists, the Kuwait pavilion translates its ideas into forms recognizable throughout the art world to its very particular audiences. Against modernity as a historical concept, and instead properly of this moment, voices converge, shape is given, things are made.

In a strange way, Kuwait's rebuff of the frame of the biennale becomes their embrace of the new terms of globalization so that Farid's claim that "any attempt to establish order without the involvement of the communities being served can only ever succeed as a folly" banks on cross-disciplinary influence and cultural translation as antidote[8]. Place is made differently now than it was in the '60s when Kuwait's landscape and built environment began to transform, before the heyday of globalization, before the connective tissue of the Internet. The cross-cultural gesture resonates differently today, this time as a repatriation and self-identification. It remains to be seen if the recuperative optimism toward the Kuwait National Museum embedded in the pavilion's project will be given an opportunity to take hold within the museum itself.

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