



HYUNDAI TATE RESEARCH CENTRE: TRANSNATIONAL



In partnership with



TEMPORARY SPACES

Exchanges in Art, Architecture and Photography in the UAE, South Asia and Beyond

Symposium organised by Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational and Alserkal Arts Foundation in collaboration with Ishara Art Foundation

This symposium brings together scholars and practitioners to discuss critical perspectives on shared histories, ongoing exchanges and rich interconnections across cities in South Asia, the Gulf and the wider region. We will look at the rapid growth of the city and its impact on artistic practice through the work of artists, architects, photographers, filmmakers and scholars whose research encompasses urban development from the 20th century to the present. Participants will share perspectives on cities and the representation of urban space, particularly in the visual arts, and how these contribute to and reflect on the complex and on-going making of place and identity.

Friday, 1 November 2019

09.30 – 10.00 Registration at Alserkal Arts Foundation Project Space
Warehouse 50/51, Alserkal Avenue

10.10 – 10.30 Welcome and Introductions
Vilma Jurkute, Director, Alserkal Avenue
Sook-Kyung Lee, Senior Curator, International Art (Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational), Tate
Nada Raza, Artistic Director, Ishara Art Foundation

Panel One – Temporal Traces and Translocal Exchanges

10.30 – 10.40 Introduction
Devika Singh, Curator, International Art, Tate

10.40 – 11.00 Michele Bambling
Structures of Memory

Structures of Memory in the UAE, exhibited in the National Pavilion UAE at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition in La Biennale di Venezia in 2014 and at the Qasr Al Hosn Fort Festival in Abu Dhabi in 2015, explored intersections of professional records pertaining to built environments with vernacular memories of occupying those spaces. Reflecting upon the exhibition and archival project, this talk considers the notion of 'temporality' within the tangible and intangible layers of urban growth in the UAE.

11.00 – 11.20 Rohan Shivkumar

Nostalgia for the Future: A meditation on Indian citizenship, modernity and the architecture of the Home
The talk will elaborate on some of the concerns that shaped the film *Nostalgia for the Future* an experimental film essay directed by Rohan Shivkumar with Avijit Mukul Kishore. The film explores the conception of the body of the citizen, the nation and the home in modern India through a journey through 4 distinct imaginations of homes and of bodies across 4 examples of buildings built over a century - the Laxmi Vilas Palace in Baroda; the Villa Shodhan and the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad; and public housing in post-independence Delhi. The film explores these spaces and the bodies that were meant to inhabit them through the evocation of the cinematic and aural collective memory of the nation trying to reinvent itself.

11.20 – 11.40 Ricardo Camacho

Architecture without the City: Pan-Arab Movement and Translocal Practice

The development of the Middle East region during the last seventy years has been defined by the phenomenon of urban modernisation in cities such as Dubai today, and Kuwait in the decades following the establishment of OPEC in 1960. Such rapid urbanisation led to the movement of professionals throughout the region and to the establishment of translocal architecture practices like the Pan-Arab Consulting Engineers (PACE), established in 1968. On its fiftieth anniversary, the publication *Pan-Arab Modernism, 1968-2018: A History of Architectural Practice in the Middle East* (Actar, New York) was organised. By focusing on how these Arab architects and engineers mediated between their foreign education, their strong Arab identity, and their interactions with foreign firms, this intervention presents the authors' attempts to understand the methodology and framework in which firms like PACE developed. Through archival material and multiple interviews, this presentation will attempt to determine not only the regional context, but also how global urbanisation affected the practice of architecture.

11.40 – 12.00 Alia Farid

Acquiring Modernity

In 2014 Alia Farid curated *Acquiring Modernity*, Kuwait's participation at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia. During this time she led a collective investigation focusing on the arrival of modernity in Kuwait and concurrent effects on cultural productivity during this accelerated period of urban transformation propelled by the discovery of oil. Exceeding the limits and duration of the pavilion, she set up a temporary research center inside one of the many abandoned schools designed by Swiss architect Alfred Roth during the 1960s. The idea was to reactivate some of the buildings from the modernist period that had fallen into disuse concurrently with the research; by being and thinking in the spaces themselves. Here, and on various other sites including the Kuwait Towers (Malene Bjørn), the Water Towers (Sune Lindström) and the Kuwait National Museum (Michel Écochard), people from different disciplines were convened to discuss correlations between attitudes, perception and the various aspirations of urbanized Kuwait.

12.00 – 12.30 Discussion and Q&A

12.30 – 14.00 LUNCH BREAK

(Recommended lunch options are highlighted in the accompanying map of Alserkal Avenue)

Panel Two – Mapping the City

14.00 – 14.10 Introduction

Nabila Abdel Nabi, Curator, International Art, Tate

14.10 – 14.30 Mohamed Somji

Documenting the City

This paper will reflect upon a number of photography projects by artists and photographers exploring urban spaces and phenomenon in the Gulf. These projects uncover multiple layers of urban life and practices owing to the unique demographics and social dynamics of everyday life in this region. By showing these myriad practices of documentation of public and private urban spaces, the author intends to deepen our understanding of the cities and the people who live there.

14.30 – 14.50 Nazgol Ansarinia

Tehran: the view at an altitude of 1,743 m

Citizens of Tehran have become used to the sound of sledge hammers smashing into the walls of their neighbouring buildings during the day, and the sound of metal crashing, as trucks of girders unload during the night. The transformation of the cityscape is not a quiet or subtle one and the rapid changes are

affecting the lifestyle of its inhabitants. While at first glance, Tehran – with its rising structures and overall growing height of its dwellings – appears to be in a process of construction, often these new buildings replace something that was there before. They contain within their existence the annihilation of what was extant. Nazgol's work for the past 15 years has revolved around Tehran as I have been a keen observer of its changes. I have attempted to reveal the relationship between the things that happen on the surface of the city, to what happens deeper inside.

14.50 – 15.10 Randhir Singh

Modernity, Architecture and the Role of the Photographer

The symbiotic relationship between architecture and photography has been well documented. Buildings and urban landscapes were the subject matter of the first photographs ever made. The photograph allowed the ideas of modernism to travel around the globe with ease, radically transforming the profession and the urban landscape. Implicit in this relationship is the crucial role of the photographer in creating the photographs through which we understand, analyse and teach architecture. In India, many modernist buildings were initially photographed by Madan Mahatta, creating a rich visual archive of modernist architecture in the subcontinent. These photographs have been the foundation upon which India's modern architectural history is written. In this context, what is the role of the contemporary photographer in revisiting the buildings and presenting an alternate narrative?

15.10 – 15.30 Marwan Rechmaoui

The Distinction Between the Municipal City and its sensorial and civic bodies

Blazon emerged from the intense research that Rechmaoui had started ten years prior for *Beirut Caoutchouc* by reading the records of every neighborhood in order to understand how they developed, referencing details of their geographical locations. After gathering all the research about Beirut, Rechmaoui created a game-like work in which every neighbourhood represents an armed battalion with its own set of attributes. Deconstructing the city into its main resources and histories, Rechmaoui used the origin and meaning of the fifty-nine names of areas in Beirut to constitute the basis for the formation of these armies. The presentation will share this process in detail.

15.30 – 16.00 Discussion and Q&A

16.00 – 16.30 TEA/COFFEE BREAK

Panel Three – Negotiations in and Beyond the City

16.30 – 16.40 Introduction

Maya Alison, Chief Curator and Executive Director, NYUAD Art Gallery

16.40 – 17.00 Tausif Noor

Liquid Futures: Artistic Interventions, Urbanism, and Environmental Planning in South Asia

With the looming forces of catastrophic climate change and its attendant impacts on population on the horizon, urban planning in South Asia must account for the environment as a fluid, shifting actor in its own right. Within this matrix of forces, what might be the role of the artist? Taking into consideration both historical and contemporary projects, this presentation considers artistic interventions and *liquidity* as a conceptual organizing principle for current and future understandings of urban planning.

17.00 – 17.20 Abdul Halik Azeez

Becoming a World Class City: Impressions from Post-War Colombo

The end of the civil war in 2009 saw Colombo captivated by the idea of becoming a 'world class city'. The dream was bought into, even by the urban poor who were displaced (often violently) to make way for malls, high rise apartments and office buildings. The aspiration expressed itself in the conception of the Lotus Tower, a structure meant to be a 'Sri Lankan' monument worthy of an emerging global metropolis. After being unveiled in 2019, South Asia's tallest 'self-supported' structure now finds itself greeted by a

city far removed from the blind optimism of a decade ago. The intervening time has seen intense economic and political turmoil and fresh waves of ethnic conflict, with the city still reeling from this year's Easter Sunday Bombings. The talk will discuss Colombo's post-war life through the work of a journalist and visual artist living and working in the city.

17.20 – 17.40 Ali Karimi (Civil Architecture)

Shared Waters

The presentation will look at the Gulf as a shared body of water. As opposed to using the Gulf as the dividing line between countries in the region, this presentation will look at the islands, coastline and water politics of the Gulf that define the region and its identity. Hundreds of islands dot the waters between the Arabian and Persian shores of the Gulf. An afterthought in the political maneuverings of their respective coasts, these islands tell an alternative narrative to the one which drives conceptions of the region. They represent a possibility greater than spaces of political contestation and hesitant demarcation. These islands are the sites of identity in formation, places of experimentation and architectural invention. The island is an entity both isolated and connected by the waters of the Gulf, not an exception to the national but the rule which defines it. By presenting the untold history of the Gulf and its islands, this presentation reflects on the hydrography as an entity of neither East, nor West, but as a singular body that defined the region and offers the greatest hope for its reconciliation.

17:40 – 18.10 Discussion and Q&A

18.30 – 19:15 Tour of the exhibition *Body Building* at Ishara Art Foundation
with Nada Raza, Artistic Director and exhibition curator
Warehouse A3, Alserkal Avenue

Biographies

Nabila Abdel Nabi

Nabila Abdel Nabi is a curator and art historian based in London. She is currently Curator, International Art at Tate and was previously Associate Curator at The Power Plant, Toronto. Prior to this she was Gallery Manager (Exhibitions) in The Third Line, Dubai. Nabila has worked on solo exhibitions and facilitated new commissions by artists including Abbas Akhavan, Kader Attia, Omar Ba, Yto Barrada, Karla Black, Kapwani Kiwanga, Amalia Pica and Vivian Suter among others. She has curated the forthcoming Hajra Waheed exhibition *Hold Everything Dear* at The Power Plant, Toronto and was previously Art Editor at literary magazine *The Point*. Nabila holds an MA History of Art from The Courtauld Institute of Art.

Maya Allison

Maya Allison is the Chief Curator at NYU Abu Dhabi and founding Executive Director of the NYUAD Art Gallery and Project Space. She curated exhibitions at The RISD Museum (Rhode Island School of Design), and served as curator of the Bell Gallery (Brown University). She holds an MFA from Columbia University, a BA in art history from Reed College, and was awarded a fellowship at Brown University's Center for Public Humanities. She has curated exhibitions across these institutions including *Diana Al-Hadid: Phantom Limb*, NYUAD, (2016); *Slavs and Tatars: Mirrors for Princes*, NYUAD, (2015); *Nostalgia Machines*, Brown University, (2011), and *Music Video/Silent Film: Innovations in the Moving Image*, RISD Museum, (2007). Her most recent projects include *But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Art Community, 1988-2008*, NYUAD, (2017) and *Artists and the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years* (2018, with publication) for the Cultural Foundation Abu Dhabi, a 30-year survey of 18 UAE artists.

Nazgol Ansarinia

Nazgol Ansarinia examines the systems and networks that underwrite her daily life. Born and raised in Tehran, she dissects, interrogates and recasts everyday objects and events to draw out their relationships to the contemporary Iranian experience. She reveals the inner workings of a social system by taking apart its components before reassembling them to uncover collective assumptions and their underlying rules of

engagement. Ansarinia was selected for the first MOP/Parasol unit Research Residency in 2014; included in National Pavilion of Iran at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015); 10th & 12th Istanbul Biennial (2007 and 2011), and was a recipient of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize in 2009. Her work is in the collections of Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Australia; the British Museum and Tate Modern, London, UK; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, USA; the Devi Art Foundation, Delhi, India.

Abdul Halik Azeez

Abdul Halik Azeez is a visual artist based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. His approach to image making embraces the public realms of media and print technology. An abiding quality across his practice is his ability to work with the pedestrian and mundane, making images that tell stories about poetic yet moving instances of the violence and truths of the everyday. Halik has worked as a journalist, economist and in the development-sector. He holds an MA in linguistics from the University of Granada and is known for his Instagram account (@colombedouin). Recently his work has been featured at Colomboscope 2019, Verzasca Foto Festival, 52 Artists 52 Actions, The Serendipity Arts Festival and Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Michele Bambling

Dr. Michele Bambling is Visiting Associate Professor Art and Art History at New York University Abu Dhabi. She was the founder and creative director of Lest We Forget, an Emirati vernacular photograph and oral history initiative under the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation. She was editor-in-chief and curator of the series of Lest We Forget books and exhibitions from 2015-2018. Bambling was appointed as curator of the exhibition, *Structures of Memory in the UAE*, shown in the National Pavilion UAE at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition in La Biennale di Venezia in 2014 and at the Qasr Al Hosn Fort Festival in Abu Dhabi in 2015. Bambling holds PhD, M.Phil. and M.A. degrees from Columbia University in art history. She received a post-doctorate Jane and Morgan Whitney Fellowship from The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Ricardo Camacho

Ricardo Camacho is an architect with practice based in Lisbon, Kuwait and Tehran, and a visiting professor at Kuwait University and Northeastern Univ. in Boston. Received his architecture degree from the Technical University of Lisbon (FAUTL), studied at Politecnico di Milano, MArchII from HarvardGSD and is a PhD candidate at University of Coimbra, Portugal. Ricardo was co-author of the projects *CasaGranturismo* for the Algarve, *Resilient Coastal Environments* focused on the coastal territories in Portugal and Croatia, and *Habitar Portugal 2006/2009*, a survey of Portuguese contemporary architecture. In the last two years Ricardo co-authored two volumes on *Modern Architecture Kuwait* published by Niggli and is presently working on a future publication by Actar on *Pan-Arab Modern Architecture* to be launched in 2019.

Alia Farid

Alia Farid (b. 1985) lives and works in Kuwait and Puerto Rico, countries she is both from and whose complex colonial histories she reveals through drawings, objects, spatial installations and film. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from la Escuela de Arts Plasticas de Puerto Rico (San Juan), a Master of Science in Visual Studies from the Visual Arts Program at MIT (Cambridge, MA), and a Master of Arts in Museum Studies and Critical Theory from the Programa d'Estudis Independents at MACBA (Barcelona). She curated *Acquiring Modernity*, Kuwait's participation at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia. She led a collective investigation that analyzed the arrival of modernity in Kuwait during an accelerated period of urban transformation propelled by the discovery of oil, and set up a yearlong "temporary school" that drew people in from different disciplines to discuss correlations between perception and the shaping of environments.

Ali Karimi

Ali Ismail Karimi is a Bahraini architect whose work explores social housing, public space, and the urban landscape of the GCC countries. Ali received his Master in Architecture from the Harvard Graduate School of Design (M.Arch I, 16). He is, along with Hamed Bukhamseen, the co-founder of Civil Architecture, an architecture office based in Manama and Kuwait City. Together they curated the Kuwait Pavilion titled "Between East and West: A Gulf" at the 2016 Venice Biennale. Ali previously worked in Belgium with OFFICE KGDVS, and in Chile with Elemental. His work and writings have been published in various journals including Architectural Record, San Rocco, and CLOG.

Tausif Noor

Tausif Noor is a writer and curator based in Philadelphia, where he is the Spiegel-Wilks Curatorial Fellow at the ICA Philadelphia. His writing can be found in publications such as *Artforum*, *frieze*, *ArtAsiaPacific*, and *The White Review*, and his research interests include comparative modernisms, Marxism in South Asia, postcolonial thought, and the intersections of contemporary art and politics.

Marwan Rechmaoui

Created from industrial materials such as concrete, metal, rubber, tar, textile, and glass, Marwan Rechmaoui's work reflects his methodical study of cartography, demographics and urbanisation. Focusing on sociogeographics, architecture and cultural histories of cities and mirroring the socio-political structure and complex multi-cultural history of the Arab world; he has produced a variety of works, some of which incorporate maps of city streets, objects with references to urban domestic life and landmarks and histories of Beirut, where he lives and works. His work can be found in the collections of the Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Guggenheim, Abu Dhabi; Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah and Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid. Rechmaoui was the recipient of the Bonnefantenmuseum Award for Contemporary Art, Maastricht, the Netherlands (2019).

Rohan Shivkumar

Rohan Shivkumar is an architect, urban designer and filmmaker practicing in Mumbai. He is the Dean of Research and Academic Development at the Kamla Raheja Vidyani Institute for Architecture and Environmental Studies. His work ranges from architecture, urban research and consultancy projects to works in film and visual art. Rohan is the co-editor of the publication on an interdisciplinary research and art collaboration- 'Project Cinema City'. He also curates film programmes and writes on cinema, architecture and urban issues. He has also made films on art, architecture and urbanism including *Nostalgia for the Future*, *Lovely Villa*, and *Squeeze Lime in Your Eye*.

Devika Singh

Devika Singh is currently Curator, International Art at Tate, specializing in modern and contemporary art and architecture in South Asia and the global history of modernism. She has curated exhibitions including *Planetary Planning*, Dhaka Art Summit, (2018) and *Gedney in India*, CSMVS, Mumbai (2017). She has also curated the forthcoming exhibition *Homelands: Art from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan* at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. Devika has written widely on modern and contemporary art for publications including *Third Text*, *Art History*, *frieze* and *MARG*. Devika holds an MA from The Courtauld Institute of Art and a PhD from the University of Cambridge and has held fellowships with DFK, Paris, and the Smuts Research Fellowship at the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

Randhir Singh

Born 1976 in New Delhi, Randhir Singh received his BArch degree from the RPI in New York in 1999 and subsequently worked as an architect for the next fifteen years. His photographing practice draws in his education as an architect with a focus on issues related to architecture, history and the built environment. The series *Water Towers* was shown at the Pondy Photo Festival in 2016. His *Yamuna River Project* book was recently awarded the Deutsches Architekturmuseum Architecture Book award for 2018. A selection of photographs from the ongoing project *CPWD (Central Public Works Department)* was exhibited as a part of *When is Space?* at the Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur in 2018. He also collaborates with the artist Seher Shah. Their recent project, *Studies in Form* was shown as a part of Bearing Points at the Dhaka Art Summit 2018 and at the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai in 2019.

Mohamed Somji

Mohamed Somji was born in Tanzania in 1976, moved to Dubai a month later, and has lived here since, with a short interlude in the US to pursue a degree in Business Administration and Marketing. He quit his corporate career in 2006 to take up photography professionally and his current practice focuses on documenting architectural projects in and around the MENA region. His work aims to provide a critical commentary on social issues and challenge established forms of visual representation of people and places. Mohamed is also at the helm of Gulf Photo Plus, a Dubai-based photography gallery and community organization. In addition to offering a wide range of photography educational and art programs, the organization hosts, GPP Photo Week, an annual event that draws the world's preeminent talent in photography and hosts events and activities aimed at fostering new practices locally.