

UNRAVELLED

Majd Abdel Hamid • Mounira Al Solh • Yto Barrada • Taysir Batniji
Alighiero e Boetti • Michele Cohen • Janna Dyk • Mona Hatoum
Sheila Hicks • Annette Messenger • Khalil Rabah • Karen Reimer
Nasri Sayegh • Laure Tixier • Raed Yassin

Curated by Rachel Dedman and Marie Muracciole

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Janna Dyk, *I'm not thinking right now*, 2013. Book (published 1960s) with embroidered thread, graphitea and needle.

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Beirut Art Center presents a second project on the first floor, in collaboration with the Palestinian Museum. *Unravelled* is a group exhibition that deals with embroidery in contemporary artistic practice. Co-curated by Rachel Dedman and Marie Muracciole, it brings together a number of widely-acclaimed international and regional artists: Majd Abdel Hamid, Mounira Al Solh, Yto Barrada, Taysir Batniji, Alighiero e Boetti, Michele Cohen, Janna Dyk, Mona Hatoum, Sheila Hicks, Annette Messenger, Khalil Rabah, Karen Reimer, Nasri Sayegh, Laure Tixier and Raed Yassin.

Unravelled emerged from Dedman's large-scale research project for the Palestinian Museum on the history and politics of Palestinian embroidery, which culminated in the exhibition *At the Seams* in Beirut in 2016. *Unravelled* encompasses the wider practice of embroidery, reflecting on the ways in which different artists, from the twentieth century until today, have dealt with embroidery's various significations as concealment, as narrative, as a marker of time and as a form of gendered labour. The exhibition explores these different positions and experiments with the generative exchanges embroidery can confront by virtue of its situation between masculine and feminine; art, craft and industry; the figurative and the abstract; concept and materiality; the decorative and the destructive; concealment and revelation.

Embroidery has always been a practice of the periphery, so when an artist includes it in his or her practice, it brings to the surface of art a critical dimension: it offers opportunity to engage with questions of labour and process, the gendered gesture, and dichotomies of construction and concealment. Vocabulary doesn't value this activity: to embroider is to bring deceitful elements to something, to embellish a story. Embroidering therefore means hiding a surface, playing with the authority of material, challenging its integrity.

The repetitive binding of thread to fabric brings physical structure to material; embroidery organises space and marks the passing of time, both of which have a relationship to contemporary economies. Embroidery is historically connected to elite leisure, yet simultaneously practiced for income by women with little social power. Paying attention to embroidery made by hand addresses the invisibility of craftswomen and men, and drives us to engage with the complexity of a practice with both a gentrified past and commodified present. Embroidery today is a mode through which such issues might be negotiated, subverted and unravelled.

The exhibition unravels in three different sections. The first deals with embroidery and language. Needlework is the organisation of lines, and as such organically associated with handwriting. Letters and writing can be a way of playing with flatness and abstraction while introducing meaning to a surface. The authority of text sits in contrast to the modesty of the stitch, yet embroidery represents a complex language of its own. The work in this first stage of the exhibition considers embroidery a form of translation, a mode of simultaneously constructing meaning and unravelling established values.

The second section explores embroidery's association with the domestic and low-tech as something artists are playing with in relation to the photograph and the digital. From family archive to media documentation, the modularity of the cross-stitch breaks pictures down into pixelled units; needlework becomes a way of rebuilding an image, and potentially intervening within it. The materiality of embroidery lends its final visual forms weight, yet also allows for a maker to challenge the authority of the image itself. Embroidery records the slow erosion of the embroiderer's eyes, and physicalizes the act of seeing.

The third section is concerned with showing the construction of embroidery as a two-faced structure: a conventionally neat exterior, and a disordered reverse – an opposition troubled by the pieces in this final section, which are deconstructing both process and material. It is the back that conventionally reveals embroidery's construction, its knots and errors, the accidental and strategic jumps of the needle, as the embroiderer pushes

of embroidery: the implication of fiction. To embroider a story is to embellish and elaborate; the relationship between language and ornament is materialized in its gesture, something artists are both using and subverting in Unravelled.

biographies

Majd Abdel Hamid (b. 1988, Damascus, Syria,) is a visual artist from Palestine. He was raised in Ramallah, and is currently based between Ramallah and Beirut. Abdel Hamid graduated with a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Malmö Art Academy in Sweden (2010) and attended the International Academy of Art in Palestine (2007–2009). His works negotiate symbols of national identity, depression, conflict analysis, and time and challenge the imagery of victimhood and cultural/social taboos. He uses a variety of media including embroidery/cross stitching, videos, public intervention, and sculptures. Selected exhibitions include *Vernissage Majd Abdel Hamid and Oscar Guermouche* Krognohuest Lund, Lund, Sweden (2016); *March Project*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE (2015); *The Rhetoric From Within*, Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, Palestine (2014); *Errors Allowed*, Mediternea 16, Ancona, Italy (2013); *Shubbak – A window into contemporary Arab culture*, Mosaic Rooms, London, United Kingdom (2013); *La Neumuller & Majd Abdel Hamid*, Norrlandsoperan, Norrland, Sweden (2013); *Qalanidya International/ YAYA*, French Cultural Center, Ramallah, Palestine (2012); *De Ramallah et Gaza*, Beaux-Arts de Toulouse, Toulouse, France (2011); *Escape*, Lund Konsthall, Lund, Sweden (2011). Abdel Hamid was a finalist in the Young Artist of the Year Award by A.M. Qattan foundation in 2008, 2010 and 2012. He has participated in several international artists residencies and workshops, including: *The March Project*, Sharjah Art Foundation (2015); *Former West*, Berlin, Germany (2013); "Truth is Concrete," Graz, Austria (2012), and was an artist in residence at Cite Internationale Des Arts, Paris, France (2009).

Mounira Al Solh (b. 1978, Beirut) studied painting at the Lebanese University in Beirut, and Fine Arts at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, where she was also resident at the Rijksakademie between 2006 and 2008. Al Solh's practices stretch across several mediums including videos, installations, photo-collages, paintings, and performances. Her work is set out to interrogate themes encompassing the social and the personal, where the autobiographical becomes universal. Drawing on various disciplines within the social sciences, Al Solh's art aspires to ask "large questions in small places", operating according to Ginzburg's notion of microhistory. While she tackles significant sociopolitical topics of extensive resonance, humor and playfulness are always an integral part of the artist's work, concealing trauma in laughter as a way to process it. In her videos, she privileges working with close friends and family members over working with professional actors, creating fictive or real situations. Al Solh's body appears in several of her works, standing before the camera unapologetically. As the editor of NOA magazine (with Fadi Tofeili, among others), and NOA language school (with Angela Serino), Al Solh examines and explores topics such as treason, arrest, language, and schizophrenia in dialogue with artists and writers.

Although formally trained as a painter in the Fine Arts department at the Lebanese University, her relationship with the medium proved to be contentious. She opposes its western tradition and gendered history, all the while being inexorably drawn to it: "Whether I like it or not, it is part of my art practice" she says. Her work has been displayed in solo exhibitions at Alt art space, Istanbul, Turkey (2016); Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut (2014); at Kunsthalle Lisbon, Portugal (2014); KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Kunst-Werke Berlin e. V., Berlin, Germany (2014); Art in General, New York (2012) as well as in group shows at Everything in Nature has a Lyrical Essence, a tragic fate, a comic existence, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna (2016); Venice Biennial, Venice, Italy (2015); Here and Elsewhere, New Museum, New York, USA The New Museum, New York (2014); Neighbors, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, Turkey (2013) Haus Der Kunst, Munich (2010); Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain (2010); The Guild Art Gallery, Mumbai (2010); Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2011); Al Riwaq Art Space, Manama, Bahrain (2010); the Galerie Nord, Kunstverein Tiergarten, Berlin; and the 11th International Istanbul Biennial in 2009. Her video *Rawane's Song* received the 2007 jury prize at VideoBrasil. Her video installation *As If I Don't Fit*

Yto Barrada (b. 1971 , Paris) grew up in Tangier, Morocco. She studied history and political science at the Sorbonne and photography in New York. Her work — ranging across photographs, films, publications, installations and sculptures — engages with the peculiar situation of her hometown Tangier. Exhibitions of her work have been shown at the Tate Modern, the Renaissance Society, Witte de With, MoMA, the Centre Pompidou, Whitechapel Gallery, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the 2007 and 2011 Venice Biennale. She was the Deutsche Bank Artist of the Year for 2011 after which her exhibit RIFFS toured widely. She is the 2013 recipient Robert Gardner Fellowship in Photography. Harvard University, and recently won The Abraaj Group Art Prize 2015 and has a nomination for the upcoming Prix Marcel Duchamp in Paris. Barrada is the founding director of Cinémathèque de Tanger and a member of the Arab Image Foundation, Beyrouth. Her first monograph was published by JRP Ringier in Summer 2013.

Taysir Batniji (b.Gaza,1966) studied art at Al-Najah University in Nablus, Palestine. In 1994, he was awarded a fellowship to study at the School of Fine Arts of Bourges in France. Since then, he has been dividing his time between France and Palestine. During this period spent between two countries and two cultures, Batniji has developed a multi-media practice, including drawing, installation, photography, video and performance. Taysir Batniji's work, often tinged with impermanence and fragility, draws its inspiration from his subjective story, but also from current events and history. His approach always distances, diverts, stretches, conceptualizes or simply plays with the initial subject, offering at the end, a poetic, sometimes acrid, point of view on reality. Already involved in the Palestinian art scene since the 1990s, he concentrated his participation, since 2002, in a number of exhibitions, biennials and residencies in Europe and across the world. Taysir was awarded the Abraaj Group Art Prize in 2012. His works can be found in the collections of many prestigious institutions of which the Centre Pompidou and the FNAC in France, the V&A and The Imperial War Museum in London, the Queensland Art Gallery in Australia and Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi.

Alighiero e Boetti (1940 – 1994) was a key outsider of the Arte Povera group of young Italian artists in the late 1960s which was working in radically new ways. Boetti used industrial materials associated with Turin's booming economy and later made works using postage stamps, biro pens, and magazine covers. His work engaged with the changing geopolitical situation of his time, much of it made on his travels to places such as Ethiopia and Guatemala and Afghanistan. Between 1971 and 1979 he set up a hotel in Kabul as an art project and created large colourful embroideries, the most famous of these were the Mappa, world maps in which each country features the design of its national flag.

Michele Cohen (b. 1950, Tunisia) worked initially at France Culture, where she produced radio programs on philosophers, language, as well as a consistent work of sound autobiography ("Jonas who never left. Family Portrait"). During this time, she received several international radio prizes. Following this, she worked as an advertising copywriter - Publicis, Saatchi – then became creative director at Betc Eurorscg. Fascinated by the relationship between sound, word, image and typography, regardless of the media in question (films, texts, photo books, exhibitions, applications), she began to embroider in 1993. Poet and writer Jean-François Goyet wrote around twenty monostiches for her, which she embroidered over a period of twenty years. Goyet's poems all deal with embroidery: the gestures, the thread, the needle, the fabric sitting in the lap of the embroiderer, the passing of time. Cohen also embroidered a monostich by English poet Christopher Middleton (1926-2015), which is presently on display in Beirut. Her embroideries were the subject of several solo exhibitions: at Bibliothèque Forney (Paris, 2015), as well as the Centre International de Poésie de Marseille (2016). She is the author of "Langue de Coton"; and Issue #250 of the journal "Cahier de Refuge" (which is available on the website of CIPM) is dedicated to her embroidery work.

Janna Dyk lives and works in New York City, where she is an artist and independent curator. In 2015 she received an MFA in Combined Media from Hunter College, prior to studying Photography at the School of Visual Arts (New York), and Literature and Spanish Linguistics in undergraduate. A 2015 nominee for the Rema Hort Foundation Artist Award, she has exhibited work and participated in residencies in the United States and China. Recent projects include *Shall We Talk or Will We Just Gaze* (2014) and *To Tell You* (2015), both at 205 Hudson Street (New York). She is a curatorial fellow at Booklyn Artist Alliance. Select curatorial projects include *Reverse* (2012) and *[ON SILENCE]* (2012) at the New York Center for Art & Media Studies, *OPEN CAGE: NEW YORK* (2012) at Eyebeam Center for Art + Technology; *Strange Labor* (2015), *Cottage Industry* (2015), *Hard to Place* (2016), and *Family Portraits* (2016) at Booklyn. She is editor of *A House Without a Roof*, a forthcoming trilingual artist book with Adam Golfer and Ghazaal Vojdani. Her art and curatorial projects have been reviewed in, among others, *The Curator*, *SEEN*, *ArtForum*, *Art in America*, and *Hyperallergic*.

Mona Hatoum (b. 1952, Beirut) was born into a Palestinian family in Beirut and has lived in London since 1975 when she was on a short visit to Britain and the outbreak of the the civil war in Lebanon prevented her returning home. She has worked in a diverse range of media including performance, video, photography, installation and sculpture. She has participated in numerous significant exhibitions including the Turner Prize, London (1995), The Venice Biennale (1995 and 2005), Documenta XI (2002), and the Biennale of Sydney (2006). Solo exhibitions include Centre Pompidou, Paris (1994), Tate Britain, London (2000) Hamburger Kunsthalle; Kunstmuseum Bonn ; Magasin 3, Stockholm (2004), Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2005) and Palazzo Querini Stampalia in the context of the Venice Biennale, 2009. As the winner of the 2011 Joan Miró Prize, she held a solo exhibition at Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona in 2012. In 2013-2014 she was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Kunstmuseum St Gallen and the largest survey of her work to be shown in the Arab world was held at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha in 2014. A survey exhibition of Hatoum's work organized by Centre Pompidou, opened in Paris in June 2015 and travels to Tate Modern, London and Kiasma, Helsinki in 2016.

Sheila Hicks was born in Hastings, Nebraska and received her BFA and MFA degrees from Yale University. She received a Fulbright scholarship in 1957-58 to paint in Chile. While in South America she developed her interest in working with fibers. After founding workshops in Mexico, Chile, and South Africa, and working in Morocco and India, she now divides her time between her Paris studio and New York. Hicks has exhibited internationally in both solo and group exhibitions. She was included in the 2014 Whitney Biennial in New York, the 2012 São Paulo Biennial in Brazil. Recent solo presentations include *Pêcher dans La Rivière* at the Alison Jacques Gallery, London (2013); A major retrospective *Sheila Hicks: 50 Years* debuted at the Addison Gallery of American Art and traveled to the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and the Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC. Hicks' work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York City; Museum of Fine Arts Boston; The Art Institute of Chicago; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; Museo de Bellas Artes, Santiago; solo exhibitions at the Seoul Art Center, Korea.

Annette Messenger was born in Berck-sur-Mer, France and currently lives and works in Malakoff, France. From the 1970s onward, Annette Messenger's work has been known for its heterogeneity of form and subject matter, ranging from the personal to the fictional, the social to the universal. Through an embrace of everyday materials, and principles of assemblage, collection and theatrical display, her diverse media has included construction, documents, language, objects, taxidermy, drawings, photographs, fabric, embroidery, image collections, albums, sculpture and installation. Recent solo exhibitions include *Musée des Beaux Arts de Calais* and *La Cite*

Australia (2014); K20 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf, Germany (2014) and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Strasbourg (2012). She represented France at the 51st Venice Biennial and was awarded the Golden Lion for her project in 2005. Other important solo exhibitions have been held at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Monterrey, Mexico (2010), Multimedia Complex of Actual Arts, Moscow (2010), Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2008), Centre Pompidou, Paris (2007), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2004), Palazzo Velasquez (1999), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Chicago Institute of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1995).

Khalil Rabah (b. 1961, Jerusalem) is a Palestinian conceptual artist who works in a wide variety of media. His method can be seen as a form of artistic science that focuses on questioning history and memory, specifically in the context of his native Palestine. Khalil Rabah was born in 1961 in Jerusalem and studied fine arts and architecture at the University of Texas. He has taught architecture at Birzeit University, and Fine Arts at Bezalel Academy, Jerusalem. He is co-founder of Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem and Art School Palestine in London and is the Director of the Riwaq Biennial, Palestine. Rabah also serves on the advisory boards of the Delfina Foundation and the Biennial Foundation and currently serves on the curricular committee of Ashkal Alwan Home Work Space Program in Beirut, Lebanon. He lives and works in Ramallah, Palestine.

Karen Reimer has a BA from Bethel College, Kansas, near where she grew up, and an MFA from the University of Chicago, the city where she now resides. Her work is rooted equally in the traditions of domestic craft and the traditions of conceptual art. It has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, Oregon; Wallspace, New York; Rochester Art Center, Rochester MN; School of Creative Arts, University of West England, Bristol; Owens Art Gallery, Mt. Allison University, New Brunswick; Gahlberg Gallery, College of DuPage, IL; Gallery 400, University of Illinois Chicago; and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago, which represents her work. She is a recipient of the Artadia and Driehaus Foundation Individual Artist awards, and the Women's Caucus for Art's President's Award. Her work is published in *Reprint: Appropriation (&) Literature*, (Luxbooks), *The Object of Labor* (MIT); *By Hand* (Princeton); *Contemporary Textiles* (Black Dog); *Exchanging Clothes: Habits of Being II* (University of Minnesota) and *Limited Language: Rewriting Design: Responding to a Feedback Culture* (Birkhauser). She is Instructor in the Fiber and Material Studies Department at the School of The Art Institute of Chicago, and Publications Director at The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.

Nasri Sayegh is based between Beirut and Berlin, Nasri – who started sewing at the age of 6 - is a watchman of words, images, and sounds. After graduating in French Literature from Université Saint Joseph in Beirut and Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, he pursued theatre studies at the Ecole Supérieure d'Art Dramatique de Paris. As an actor, he has most notably been directed by Christian Merlhiot, Jad Youssef, Roy Samaha, Jocelyne Saab, Georges Hachem and Wael Deeb. Nasri has been the guest performance artist of Ilya & Emilia Kabakov's "The Poet" for the Abu Dhabi Art Fair in 2013 and with Saâdane Afif's 'The Speakers Corner of Hamra Street' during Meeting Points 6. Also a journalist, as the former editor in chief of Radio Orient and current grand reporter at Elle Oriental, Nasri regularly mixes literary and cinematic icons with contemporary sounds and uninhibited Pop as a DJ. Having recently fallen into the world of images, with a debut solo exhibition entitled "Beyrouth, peut-être" at the gallery of Institut Français in Beirut (June 2016), Nasri's work originates from a desire to extract personal, often private, histories within the framework of fetishised memories.

Laure Tixier (b.1972, lives and works in Paris) questions the architecture, urban planning and the social organization, which they contain. Multiplying the practices - watercolor, cartoon, installation, ceramic, embroidery etc. She creates a universe between subtlety and radicality which associates sometimes opposed elements

villa Kujoyama in Kyoto in 2000, French winner of « Women to Watch » of the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington in 2012, she participated to the Yokohama Triennial in 2001, her last personal exhibitions took place at the RAM Foundation in Rotterdam, the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in Paris, at the Museum of Modern Art in Luxembourg. Polaris Galerie in Paris represents her work.

Raed Yassin (b. 1979, Beirut) graduated from the theatre department at the Institute of Fine Arts in Beirut in 2003. An artist and musician, Yassin's work often originates from an examination of his personal narratives and their workings within a collective history, through the lens of consumer culture and mass production. He has exhibited and performed his work in numerous museums, festivals and venues across Europe, the Middle East, the United States and Japan, Yassin was awarded the Fidus Prize (2009), the Abraaj Capital Art Prize (2012). Yassin is one of the organizers of IRTIJAL Festival, and has released several music albums and founded the production company Annihaya in 2009. He is also a founding member of "Atfal Ahdath" a Beirut based art collective. He currently lives and works in Beirut and represented by Kalfayan Galleries (Athens–Thessaloniki).