

# “MOBILITY” | Exposure 7

Yasmin Hage-Meany • Sandra Iché • Eshan Rafi • Mahmoud Safadi • Merve Ünsal

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with the support

Naming this year's edition of *Exposure Mobility* points to the possibility of movement, to displacement, and to processes of transformation. Operating within this rather extensive field, the members of the jury - Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Stefanie Baumann, Tony Chakar and Andrea Thal - have selected artists whose work deals with the instability and breaking-down of shapes, and who are furthermore involved in the evolution of definitions and categories. In their respective practices, the body is a condition and a site for activating artistic purpose, and for carrying out some transformations in symbolic orders and social life.

As part of Beirut Art Center's two-year program, *Mobility* seeks to explore, rather than demonstrate, how art can cross into our world, and produce unexpected occurrences in our lives. The aim of this program is to question the collective experience of "present time" and to bring forth different approaches toward recent history, through distinct voices. Previous exhibitions focused on time-based art, and the special sharing aspect of this practice. Films – by artists Penny Siopis, Zineb Sedira, Jumana Manna, La Ribot, John Akomfrah, and Kamal Aljafari - played an important part in the program, and shed the light on the dialectic of identification and disjunction articulated around the situation of projection. *Unfinished Conversations* was a film-based exhibition paying homage to Stuart Hall, which illustrated the way he defined identity as a constant move, and an endless conversation. *Aftercinema* provided a reflection on films as a raw medium from which to build history, to reconsider hierarchies of representation, and reverse backgrounds and foregrounds.

*Retrospective* by Xavier Le Roy brought forth the notion of "life" performance into the exhibition space, showing in the process the unexpected events of some continuous action, as well as the numerous reactions provoked by the latter. The result of a one-month workshop and collaboration between Le Roy and nine dancers from Beirut, the exhibition created a time and space where visitors were welcomed, addressed, and simultaneously presented with choreographic movements and narratives. Both audience and performers experienced and contributed with great intensity to the ideas, reversals and discussions engendered by the exhibition. This process of experimentation illustrated the fact that when confronted with other disciplines, the realm of visual arts is modified, and its possibilities extended.

This is one of the issues at stake in *Mobility*. Some of the artists, such as Merve Ünsal and Eshan Rafi, treat the exhibition as a medium and an instance of "being present." In their pieces, as well as in those of Sandra Iché, Yasmin Hage-Meany and Mahmoud Safadi, different media - image, gesture, text, and sound - interact and produce meaning. Alterations and transfers of properties come into play, as well as connections between their corresponding sensory systems.

The body is indeed the common thread connecting the different pieces presented in *Mobility*. As the intersection between the various conceptions of time we are confronted with in our present reality, the body often becomes the "set" on which to stage, embody or carry the contradictions of history, which the artist is attempting to provide with a

certain visual dimension. "The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and our sketch of our project" (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949).

In her practice, Yasmin Hage-Meany experiments with circulation, displacement, and the changes in relationship and framing offered by art, in order to articulate personal and political issues. At the core of her work is a highly energetic and mature practice of drawing, enlarged into a large range of scales and meanings, expanding from her own hand gestures to those performed by way of mechanical devices, and shifting from a bi-dimensional space to a tri-dimensional one. Here, drawing can adopt the different meanings of "project," "sketch" or "traces," in addition to actual inscriptions on paper. Furthermore, it can be performed using some very unusual material, such as magnets and metal dust: the magnets set the metal dust in motion, which produces a tracing system. In parallel, Hage-Meany has been investigating car-drifting practices, where displacement becomes drifting, and space is used in a manner that leads to loss of control and sensations of fear, floating, and escaping gravity.

The basis of Sandra Iché's practice is dance and history, but in the case of *Mobility*, she is working with image. She presents a three-screen montage consisting of excerpts from Syrian director Omar Amiralay's films, together with dialogue from an interview she conducted with the filmmaker shortly before his death, in February 2011. This interview is part of a series of meetings with artists and intellectuals in Beirut, intended as an "archive of the future" for a performance entitled *Wagons Libres*. Iché kept this interview aside, since its momentum is so significant: Amiralay's words anticipate and echo the revolution that occurred closely after his death, followed by repression and war. At the time of filming, Iché was a beginner in the domain of video, and was also unacquainted with Amiralay's work. The resulting film represents her attempt to adapt to this situation, by inventing a framework where the two of them could relate. The filmmaker responded accordingly, and somehow played a game of make-belief and seduction with his interviewee; in-so-doing, he brought a fictional situation to life in front of the camera, intuitively staging the dialogue that he and Iché were improvising. As a result we can feel the instability of their exchange, which translates into a kind of "dance" between the one asking questions and the one answering them, framed inside a playful conversation that brings to light Amiralay's discernment regarding the political situation in the Middle East.

Eshan Rafi's staging of precise conditions and visual setting enables them to create and explore a range of interactions with their audience. For *Mobility*, Rafi is exhibiting a series of photographs as well as *Set*, a ground-level space temporarily marked for performance. *Set* is activated by actors and visitors following indications, scores for improvisations, or games. The visitor is invited to step in and out of a diagram, a floor drawing, a choreographic score, or any other space that drives the body to produce movements and meanings. These movements in turn "produce a specific type of knowledge about the body and the experience of being in a body." In Rafi's words,

it is through the body that we can investigate our social constitution and ourselves: “My interest is in how gender transgressive bodies might destabilize institutions or be delineated by them. Lines, limits and pathways as social categories and markers shape our subjective and felt experience. So when we move through these lines, limits, pathways, there is possibility for disrupting this space, navigating it, or accepting it.”

For *Mobility*, Mahmoud Safadi is looking at a very specific ritual from everyday life in the context of the public space, a focus that transports us to a much larger political context. The artist interviewed, photographed and filmed the divers from the Dalieh beach in Raouché. The beautiful rocky seafront of Dalieh is presently the site of a project to build a private beach resort. This venture is raising strong protest and opposition from residents of the city, especially since Dalieh is one of the last un-developed, natural public spaces in Beirut. The sea appears to be an open space, yet it has always been the site for intense political and commercial struggles, which are now concentrated on this small spot. For Safadi, meeting, photographing and filming the divers, thus illustrating their “practice” of the sea, is a way to stress a-political and metaphysical resistance. In *Off The Coast There Was*, he develops different momenta: the waiting before the plunge, the plunge, and the contact with the water serve to awaken myths of death, birth and resurrection. These images join the sprawling stream of data and multi-faceted narrative presently carried by this same sea, namely the ever-growing and lethal waves of displacement and migration.

Merve Ünsal is a writer whose work draws on the different roles related to art practice: artist, curator, art critic... She borrows from these different positions and moves freely between them, in an attempt to explore some problematic points of history through texts, images, and representations. This attitude, which can be viewed as a kind of activism, leads to different ways of “publishing” facts. Ünsal’s intervention in *Mobility* relates to the treatment of workers on construction sites in Turkey. These workers are often migrants and, as is the case in most neighboring countries, lack the most elementary human rights and respect. Ünsal addresses this situation through an on-site performance, whose preparation and installation will occupy the exhibition space of Beirut Art Center.

The artists presented in *Mobility* come from a variety of contexts, and their practices are quite diverse. The common thread in their different approaches is the ability to shift from one medium to another, thus utilizing the body as a vehicle for sharing or integrating their work.

Marie Muracciole

## BIOGRAPHIES

**YASMIN HAGE-MEANY** (b. 1976) was born, lives and works in Guatemala. She took part in Daniel Schafer's workshop DSII, Guatemala (1995), and studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA), Boston, between 1996 and 1999.

Her works deal with the time and site-specific in urban and rural contexts, for the gallery space and away from it. Drawing constitutes the backbone of her undertakings, whether material, political or poetic.

Her works include *Whom Is Looking At Whom* (2002), *Where I Stand* (2003), *Soccer Game* (2003), *Tamarind – Pope* (2004), *Bullet - Wood* (2004-2011), *Cynicism* (2004), *A History Of Skin* (2005), *The Interpretation* (2006), *Model Village, Small History, 1984* (2007-2013), *Stolen Words / Immaterial Managua* (2010), *How Many Times Will We Have To Die To Always Be Us* (2014), and *The Forgetting That Does Not Know It Is Forgotten* (co-authorship with Alejandro Flores, 2015).

Hage-Meany's work was published in *Contemporary Languages from Central America*, by Luisa Fuentes Guaza (2013), and is featured in the collection of The Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas.

**SANDRA ICHÉ** studied History and Political Sciences at Université Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne and performing arts at *The Performing Art and Training Studios* (P.A.R.T.S.), Brussels, directed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. In September 2006, she joined the dance company Maguy Marin/National Choreographic Center of Rillieux-La-Pape and performed with the company internationally. Since 2010, she pursued her artistic research on the logic of naturalization of constructed social realities and the fabrication and writing of History, through performances, texts, interviews, publications, workshops and collaborations. She teaches at DOCH - University of Dance & Circus, Stockholm and at ALBA, Beirut. She manages *Mansion*, a cultural space co-founded with artist and architect Ghassan Maasri in Beirut and is also a co-founding member of *rodéo*, an interdisciplinary francophone magazine for academic and artistic research.

**ESHAN RAFI** born in Lahore, Pakistan, (are) presently based in the territories of the Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas of the New Credit Nation, - also known as Toronto (Canada)- They hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Bachelor of Education in Visual Arts from York University. From 2013-2015, They were a fellow in the Home Workspace Program at Ashkal Alwan, Beirut. They work with their body, analog cameras, moving images, text, and other individuals.

Rafi's work was exhibited in Art Metropole (Toronto), nGBK (Berlin), Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (Toronto) and Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture (Karachi). They were the national recipient of the Mark S. Bonham Scholarship for Queer Studies in Film & Video from the Inside Out LGBT Film & Video Festival (2011), and the regional winner of the BMO 1st Art Award from BMO Financial Group (2013).

**MAHMOUD SAFADI** (b. 1987) is a multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker who lives and works in Beirut. He graduated in 2010 from Toronto's York University where he studied film production, history and digital media. He participated in the 2014-2015 Homeworks Space Program at Ashkal Alwan, Beirut.

His projects include *Transitionary* (2009), *Missed In Connections* (2010), *6,000 Years Of Peaceful Contribution To Mankind* (2014), *There Is No Place To Move* (ongoing). His work has been exhibited in Toronto and Beirut.

**MERVE ÜNSAL** (b. 1985) is a visual artist based in Istanbul. She holds an MFA in Photography and Related Media from the Parsons The New School of Design, and a BA in Art and Archaeology from Princeton University. In her works, she employs text and photography, possibly beyond their conventional form(s).

Ünsal participated in the 2014-2015 Homeworks Space Program at Ashkal Alwan, Beirut. She has participated in artist residencies at the Delfina Foundation (UK) and the Banff Centre (Canada). She is the founding editor of the artist-driven online publishing initiative [m-est.org](http://m-est.org).

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