Previous Page:
The Devil's Garden: Marseille's Pyramid, 2019
Mixed media: pyramid replica
240 x 370 x 370 cm

HEBA Y. AMIN

WHEN I SEE THE FUTURE, I CLOSE MY EYES: CHAPTER II

CURATED BY ANTHONY DOWNEY

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Previous Page and pp. 12–13:
Atom Elegy, 2022
12 miniature dummies
Dummies: ca. 30 cm (height); table: 90 x 160 x 210 cm

CONTENTS

THERE IS NO CESSATION

Introduction by Lotte Laub

A historical photograph gives a lateral view of two rows of human figures. They are wearing different uniforms and are unusually detailed, kitted out with accessories, including satchels and water bottles. They are propped up, if not impaled, by rods that appear to be wooden or metal poles. The mood is apocalyptic, as if the figures were waiting for something overpoweringly destructive to occur. The scene is desolate and empty, while the sandy ground conveys the idea of an 'end-time' that will threaten human existence. Presented for the first time in *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter II*, an exhibition curated by Anthony Downey, this is the mise-en-scene that forms the photograph-cum-diaroma that constitutes Heba Y. Amin's latest work, *Atom Elegy* (2022). The diorama of this tableau has been positioned in front of the original photographic image so that the figures are looking at the projected image of imminent destruction. Viewed from the side, the arrangement of mannequins corresponds to the perspectives they assume in the photograph: both mannequins and figures in the image stare in the same direction.

Named after a poem written by Yvan Goll, in 1942, in which he glorified nuclear power as a technological achievement, *Atom Elegy* confronts the utopian promise of an 'age of nuclear power' and its legacies. Following the detonation of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on 6th and 9th of August 1945, Goll turned his laudatory poem into a lament that was later published in 1946.[1] The manuscript, which is discussed in this volume by Jürgen Kaumkötter, is housed in the literary archive at the Center for Persecuted Arts in Solingen, and the distinctions between the 1942 and 1946 texts became, in part, one of the starting points for Amin's installation. Scrutinising the promise of emerging and new technologies, alongside their transformation into tools that demonstrate power, *Atom Elegy* investigates the historical events surrounding how, in the early 1960s, France carried out nuclear tests in the Algerian desert south of the Reggane Oasis. Corresponding to the colours of the national flag of France, the experiments were called 'Gerboise Bleue,' 'Blanche,' and 'Rouge.' The first test is said to have been four times more powerful than the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, and the figures in the historical photograph outlined above are the dummies that were used to test its impact. More specifically, the image shows the moment before the catastrophe of a nuclear detonation; the moment of anticipation and alertness. By creating doppelgangers of these figures in miniature, Heba Y. Amin retrospectively encourages a participative approach to the events, one that brings together the exhibition space, the work in question, and sense of anticipation. We are encouraged to look again at this scene, but, crucially, through a gaze that is retrospectively recuperating the original act of 'looking.'

Photography, as it does throughout Amin's practice, has a clear military role in the exercise of power, a point made all the more pertinent in *Atom Elegy*. Not only is photography used as an instrument to document destruction, it is part of the destruction. The image, which is accessible through the context of a three-dimensional diorama, ensures that the figures can be viewed from several angles. In positioning these figures so that they look towards

the projection, their role is changed: they are no longer merely objects of observation, as in the photograph, but assume agency in their own act of 'looking.' This draws our attention to how such acts are often ignored in official discourses. Survivors of the original nuclear tests, for example, have not been compensated by France and remain unheard as witnesses of this "surpassing disaster." This latter phrase draws upon the work of the artist and thinker Jalal Toufic, when he speaks of "the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster," that is, destruction resulting from war, genocide, colonial occupation and other violent interventions.[2] For Toufic, these processes not only involve material destruction but immaterial destruction, too: even if books, paintings, libraries, and museums survive or are reproduced or reconstructed, their immaterial value – their future potential as artefact and ideas – remains withdrawn under the conditions of disaster. The difficulty of reconnecting with one's own tradition in such circumstances is not only related to the fact of immaterial withdrawal but also the lineage of tradition which is at risk of being lost to obscurity.

According to Toufic, it is artists and thinkers who address this difficult challenge of resurrecting tradition, and it is not something that can be achieved by means of a direct access to reality but by describing the withdrawal and what is no longer tangible. In part, Amin's practice engages with this withdrawal and focuses on the often less than transparent command that was exercised by colonial power. By translating a two-dimensional photograph into a three-dimensional diorama, the *mise-en-abyme* of *Atom Elegy* revisits an image that was once at risk of losing its reference, historical or otherwise. Through approaching the trauma of nuclear weapons testing in Algeria, to take but one example, Amin unearths an event that cannot be elided if we are to address its legacy in the present and future.

Amin approaches her works with an investigative zeal so that they develop over long periods of time. They remain in motion, with her focus being more on process than the end product, so to speak. Throughout *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter II* here at Zilberman that research process is in evidence throughout *Atom Elegy* (2022), *The Devil's Garden: Marseille's Pyramid* (2019) and *Windows on the West* (2019), all of which are discussed at length in conversation between Heba Y. Amin and Anthony Downey. Exploring how their respective practices – artistic and academic – contribute to the development of digital methodologies, Amin and Downey highlight how apparatuses of image production – be they based on photographs, the weaving of an image, or a digital process – imply a violence that was an all-too-apparent factor in forms of colonial domination. These issues are likewise addressed in *The Devil's Garden: Marseille's Pyramid*, where the artist recreated a life-size replica of a pyramid. Through her research and fieldwork in what remains one of the most landmine-infested regions in the world, Amin came across a peculiar pyramid built by the Luftwaffe to commemorate the WWII German fighter pilot Hans-Joachim Marseille. In transposing it to a gallery, a series of questions are foregrounded: Why was a memorial, in the iconic shape of a pyramid, erected by the Gemeinschaft der Jagdflieger e.V. for a Nazi fighter pilot in the German Afrika Corps after World War II? What does such a legacy – or, to use, Amin's phrase, 'techno-fossil' – mean for future generations? Why was the film *Der Stern von Afrika* (The Star of Africa) made about the fighter pilot at the end of the 1950s? And, as Amin and Downey discuss in one of the many paradoxes of this narrative, how do we explore the ongoing legacies of such 'techno-fossils' and understand their contexts in historical events?

The third part of this exhibition involves Amin's work *Windows on the West*, a woven reconstruction of the first daguerreotype taken in Egypt and on the African continent. As with her diorama, the woven textile creates a shift in the visual hierarchy, insofar as the recipient's gaze is drawn to the surface of the material and the fact of its surface. This image, produced by Horace Vernet and Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet in 1839, catered to Orientalist fantasies when it was shown in 19th-century Paris, despite the fact that it depicted nothing salacious. Its precedents were explored in Amin's previous exhibition at Zilberman, where *A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought* presented the motif as a slide projection juxtaposed with text. In *Windows on the West*, a contemporary woven take on the Oriental rug, Amin has adopted the jacquard technique. Anticipating the discursive economies of image-making technologies and models of representation, the broader implications of this in our post-digital age is pursued by Downey in his essay, included here, and in the conversation between the artist and Dominique Routhier.

Finally, *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter II*, continues with Heba Y. Amin's concerns about how we deconstruct and productively engage with one-sided forms of historiography. By linking practice-based research and working across many disciplines, we can further understand how Amin's practice continues to propose speculative, often satirical, approaches to understanding the enduring impact that technology has on political and territorial realities.

[1] Yvan Goll: *Fruit from Saturn. Poems*, New York: Hemispheres editions, 1946. Heba Y. Amin's eponymous exhibition, curated by Jürgen Kaumkötter, took place at the Center for Persecuted Arts in Solingen from 15 November 2019 until 02 February 2020.

[2] Jalal Toufic: *The Withdrawal of Tradition Past a Surpassing Desaster*, 2009: http://www.jalaltoufic.com/downloads/Jalal_Toufic,_The_Withdrawal_of_Tradition_Past_a_Surpassing_Disaster.pdf, last accessed 12 June 2022.

PROGRAMMED VISIONS AND TECHNO-FOSSILS

Heba Y. Amin and
Anthony Downey in Conversation

Broadening conversations about the future of images, this conversation discusses the histories of image-making technologies and how they define post-digital models of representation. Amin and Downey explore the interdisciplinary relationship that exists between art practices and models of academic and critical research, neo-colonial violence, machinic vision, photography and colonial exploitation, data extraction, France's nuclear experiments in Algeria, and a pyramid built by the Luftwaffe in El-Alamein, Egypt, to commemorate a WWII German fighter pilot.

Anthony Downey: I want to begin by reflecting upon the nature of interdisciplinary practice – how, specifically, Heba and I bring together our research to develop methodologies for thinking about image production. We both think from within the apparatus of image production rather than merely reflect upon it, that is to observe. For Heba's practice-based research this usually involves producing work that is actively engaged in *thinking through* colonial processes of image production and their legacies; for me, likewise, it tends to involve developing strategies for understanding the violence of colonial representation (the extraction of data from images, for example) and the increasingly prevalent role of digital images in this process. The element that seems constant is how our interdisciplinary research and its relationship to practice can produce methodologies for deconstructing digital images from within the infrastructures of their production.

So, let's start with one of your recent projects, *Windows on the West,* and see how this works. The project is basically a tapestry that touches upon a number of areas – data extraction, the violence of colonial representation, image production – that remain crucial in our ongoing discussion, but could you talk us through the image you have referenced, specifically what it is, and then what it represents in the context of this project?

Heba Y. Amin: This is an image I've been working with for quite a few years now. It portrays the first documented photograph taken on the African continent, three months after the Daguerreotype was gifted to the world by the French in 1839. The image was taken at a moment when French artists, and particularly Orientalist painters, were rushing to all corners of the world to capture the first photographs. The image itself is not necessarily the most striking aspect per se, but more compelling to me is what it represents and how that is still relevant to us today. The photograph depicts Mohamed Ali Pasha's palace in Alexandria, with focus on the architectural wing of the harem. It was taken by Orientalist painter Horace Vernet and his nephew Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet while on an expedition in Egypt. When it was exhibited in Paris for the first time, it supposedly created excitement due to the sexual implications elicited in the European imagination. I find the story of this image intriguing because it speaks to broader issues that I would like to touch upon. I was fascinated by what it means to have this predatory gaze inscribed in the image and what tools one could use to extract that male gaze. Up to this point I had been working with the photograph in various ways, and settled on its reconstruction as a woven tapestry. It is important to note here that the image I've used for reference is an engraving of the original photograph, as it was common for 19th century painters to utilize photographic documentation for art production, namely painting. The original glass plate, however, no longer exists but the engraving remains. For this work, I utilized a jacquard weaving loom, which is essentially one of the first machines to perform automated tasks through a punch card system. It is considered an important technological development towards modern computing – of course, today we can use computers to help reconstruct the image but, in this case, the tapestry is still created through an analogue

or hand-made process, which was important for me as I wanted to intervene personally in the process of production. This approach to image production is obviously different from taking a photograph or a snapshot which captures the entirety of the image at once through a lens. The image, broken down line by line, is only visible once the final tapestry is completed. While the embedded predatory gaze may not ever be eliminated, at the very least I can attempt to shift the perspective.

AD: Could you talk us through this further, specifically the tapestry element that was woven on a Jacquard loom, a device invented by Joseph-Marie Jacquard, a French weaver and merchant, who revolutionised how patterned cloth could be woven. The Jacquard machine used punch-cards, which inspired the development of early computers, to produce detailed patterns. One of the first anti-industrial protests came out of that production process, when low-skilled weavers took their sabots, a wooden shoe or clog, and threw them into the looms (thus gifting us the word 'saboteurs.') For this project, we have a connection between the original weaving and a digital component. Could you talk us through the digital component of this image?

HYA: As the first machine to follow algorithmic instruction, I would be curious to try the original punch-card system. However, the Textile Prototyping Lab in Berlin, who helped me produce this textile, have a mechanized loom which uses software that distils the image into various degrees of grey. The software determines which threads move up and down with black and white but also determines the weave structure to obtain gradation. The actual weaving is done manually.

During our test trials, I was intrigued by the way the test strips helped visualize the mechanism at play by revealing the process of production through the different weaving patterns and gradation variations. These remained as the 'ends' of the tapestry, the stripes at either side. It helped me think through the idea of digitization with what is often considered a traditional art form.

AD: Your version of the original image, here woven from a photograph, is also a reflection on the history of photography as a mechanism for 'fixing' or producing realities. By which I mean, in the colonial context, out of which the original photograph originated, the act of photographing an object or scene operated as a means to fix that present moment of colonial power and domination.[1] Could you talk a little bit more about that?

HYA: This is essentially what drew me to the image: the idea that these first photographs were taken in Africa in particular, and that the manner in which the French had sexualized North African women was merely an extension of territorial domination. When they first arrived with their cameras, however, they didn't find their imagined fantasy, it was completely contrived.

Windows on the West, 2019
Made in collaboration with Textile Prototyping Lab, Berlin

In part, it is what is alluded to in the photograph that became the focus. This was also part of the orientalist tradition, of course: the staging of a reality or its contrivance. Some orientalists would pay or force women who had no agency to pose nude in the ways that they had imagined. It is interesting how the French are still obsessed with undressing Arab women.

AD: The one thing that has changed is the technologies of representation. The original photographs were circulated as material objects, and the display and circulation of the image would have had a physical context. As we move forward into our post digital age, such images today are less material and more networked as digital images. The pixelated image also becomes data for use in machine learning systems and for training algorithms, so it has lost some of its symbolic context and has become more of instrumentalised image. The pixelated image, in a neo-colonial context, is both a way of mapping realities and a means from extracting and extruding data. We have both the violence of mapping and extraction concentrated in the pixelated image, in sum.

HYA: I think it would be interesting to also talk about the duplication and the dissemination of these kinds of images before the digital age, because a lot of these images were actually produced as postcards in order to disseminate them cheaply and quickly. It is also about thinking through how images were used as a form of propaganda and a form of power, how one dominates territory through image production. I don't think this is dissimilar to how digital images are disseminated and data extraction is used to propagate propaganda for territorial domination today. I think it is a continuation of the same system.

The Devil's Garden: Marseille's Pyramid, 2019
Exhibition view from *Fruit from Saturn*, Center for Persecuted Arts, Solingen

AD: Yes, I agree, so let's move to that issue of mapping and look at *The Devil's Garden*, which is an ongoing work that looks at how colonial violence is engendered through material artefact and their legacies. This work relates to the German Afrika Korps and their presence in northern Egypt, specifically the presence of a pyramid built by the Luftwaffe to commemorate the WWII German fighter pilot Hans-Joachim Marseille.

HYA: I've been doing research and field work in northern Egypt for many years now. I was specifically interested in techno-fossils, or remnants of technologies of warfare embedded in the earth.[2] More specifically, I was investigating landmines implanted by the German Africa Corps during World War II in what Erwin Rommel dubbed 'The Devil's Garden.' What most people don't know is that more Egyptians have been killed by these landmines since the war ended than soldiers during the war itself. World War II was a European endeavour where locals were forced to battle on behalf of their colonizers and are still paying the consequences today. Where is the lasting legacy of responsibility in that narrative? That is what I was interested in exploring. For several years now, I have been working with residents from El-Alamein to better understand their historical role in the war and why history and memorials have not valued their lives on their own lands as much as the lives of Germans, Italians, British and other Western nations who caused the devastation in the first place.

During one of my trips, I was taken to a pyramid in the middle of nowhere. I was appalled to discover that it was in fact a memorial for a German fighter pilot named Hans-Joachim Marseille, also known as 'der Stern von Afrika' ('the Star of Africa') due to the large number of planes he shot down during the war. Imagine: an appropriated local cultural symbol used to

commemorate a Nazi-era fighter pilot. I was shocked! An inscription on the memorial's plaque further states that Marseille died undefeated: his death was the result of a crash due to engine failure. It seems that his colleagues from the German Luftwaffe Fighter Pilots' Association commemorated the site of his death through a memorial that has become permanent over time. I have been told that the current version of the pyramid that stands today was built in 1990. If this is true, it is a huge scandal. Who is maintaining it? Why are we not discussing how problematic this is? My interest became about how memorials like this have helped crystalize the narrative of the German Africa Corps as being separate from the dominant World War II narrative. The heroization of Hans-Joachim Marseille and others through books, film, and other narratives have helped perpetuate this narrative of the 'good' Nazi. And what about the colonial context in which Germans were fighting alongside the Italian Fascists to colonize North Africa? That seems to be of no concern to German historical discourse. The pyramid became a symbol for me, a tool to confront this narrative. Today, millions of landmines remain embedded in Egypt. When is the time to discuss this?

AD: Just to recap: Hans-Joachim Marseille successfully ejected from his aeroplane but the tail fin of his aeroplane sliced his top part almost in half, according to records, and then he fatally plummets to the ground. So this memorial is built in honour of his death but there is also a reference in this work to *Der Stern von Afrika*, or *The Star of Africa*, a 1957 film about Hans-Joachim Marseille. This film is also fascinating because it brings us to the story of Mathew Letuku. Could you talk a little about that?

HYA: *Der Stern von Afrika* was considered, at the time it was produced in 1957, to be an anti-war film. It is anything but an anti-war film. In fact, quite the opposite! Because it heroizes the German Africa Corps, the film was integral in the white-washing of the German-Nazi-colonial context that unfolded outside of mainland Europe. In fact, the film makes no mention of the Nazis. Hans-Joachim Marseille is portrayed as a young, attractive, athletic, star fighter pilot who everybody aspires to be like. The story, of course, is removed from any German political context. More intriguing to me, however, is a secondary character in the film: Marseille's 'sidekick.' The character is a young African man. He sings and dances, often without his shirt, he has a beautiful smile. This actor is a young Roberto Blanco, and the role that launches his career. It turns out, however, that his character is based on a real person: a prisoner of war from South Africa named Mathew Letuku, fighting on behalf of the British. He was captured in Libya, handpicked by Hans-Joachim Marseille as his captive. It turns out, Marseille was a fan of jazz and wanted a black man. So, this is the narrative used to perpetuate the ways in which the 'good' Nazis were not actually racist.

Interestingly, when I first exhibited this pyramid in Solingen at the Center for Persecuted Arts, we invited Roberto Blanco to the exhibition on a whim not realising that he would actually show up! Roberto Blanco, as you might know, is a black Schlager musician with

Live Reading of *Atom Elegy, Yvon Goll*, 2019, 4'58"
Literaturhaus Berlin, Germany

enormous success in Germany. In getting to know him, I discovered many parallels in Blanco's and Letuku's roles as black figures instrumentalized by the German discourse. I conducted an interview with Roberto Blanco in front of my replica pyramid and we discussed his personal story as well as his character in the film.

AD: Roberto Blanco plays a character called Mathias based upon a real character, Mathew Letuku, who was adopted by Hans-Joachim Marseille and becomes his domestic help. There's obviously a racial politics around that, but can you remind me: did Blanco know any of this history around Letuku at the time he made the film?

HYA: He, in fact, knew very little about the person he supposedly portrayed. Why would he? He was an eighteen year old med-student playing the role of his life. He was discovered by chance on an aeroplane when visiting his father in Germany from Spain. The director, Alfred Wiedenmann, witnessed his charisma and immediately hired him to play this role in the film. Indeed, Roberto Blanco came from a family of entertainers. Originally from Cuba, his parents were singers, and were performing predominantly in the Middle East during the golden era of cinema and music in the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, Roberto Blanco himself grew up in Lebanon, which is also why it is interesting to connect him back to the character that he plays in the film with Egypt as the backdrop. Blanco was very quick to adopt the story I revealed to him about Mathew Letuku when addressing the public.

AD: It is interesting that a memorialization of someone's death (that is, the demise of Hans-Joachim Marseille) could potentially become the means to reconstruct the facts of someone else's life, namely, that of Mathew Letuku. That which was supplemental, or in surplus, or the element that is needed to complete something, is the very element (in this Letuku's story) that returns to reveal a lacuna, or absence in the original narrative. The apparently supplemental aspect of Mathew Letuku's story and biography haunts, so to speak, the narrative of Hans-Joachim Marseille. On the subject of haunting, I want to turn to *Atom Elegy*, which you produced in 2022. The basis of this project is a photograph but you have obviously expanded on that with the installation.

HYA: This project came about a few years ago when preparing for my exhibition in Solingen, where I first met Roberto Blanco. In the museum's collection, I came across a book of poems called *Fruit from Saturn* by the French-German writer Yvan Goll. In the book is a poem called "Atom Elegy," a sort of love poem to the atomic bomb. In fact, the museum had two versions of the poem: the first unpublished version of the poem which was a kind of confession of love to technological progress and a second, published version, which was a highly revised version of the first after the atomic bomb was first dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Yvan Goll witnessed the devastation it caused. I was interested in this shift of perception and how quickly we deem technological developments as progress. These two versions of the same poem inspired further research when I came across an incredibly haunting image that you see in the exhibition here. This photograph from 1960, taken in the Algerian Sahara, depicts the site of French atomic bomb experiments. In the 60s, the French government conducted a series of nuclear tests, including an atomic bomb said to be three to four-times as powerful as the one dropped on Hiroshima. They later discovered that the nuclear fallout was detected to have travelled as far as Sudan – you can imagine the vast amount of territory that it affected. We're not only talking about environmental devastation, but also all the long-lasting ailments that come with that, and a local population who is suffering the devastating effects of that. The French government continued these nuclear

tests until 1966, even after Algeria had already gained independence. Here in Leipzig, there was a group of students from Mali who organised protests because of the vicinity of the testing sites to their villages back home. Of course, they understood the devastation at that time, everyone did. The French government has recently declassified these files, yet no public apologies have been issued.

I kept going back to this uncanny image. It captures the moment before the bomb is dropped, the pending violence of bodies being blown into pieces. The viewer is suspended in that moment where devastation is about to happen, but we never see the aftermath, we are only left to imagine it. Like Vernet's image of the harem palace, this photograph is about what you don't see and what it conjures in your imagination.

AD: Each of the figures is very heavily stylised in the photograph which would suggest that whoever produced them went through a lot of trouble. Some of the original mannequins have pockets sewn in, buttons, proper buttons, proper shoes; they've been effectively aestheticized, but all of this energy seems slightly sadistic – they are about to be annihilated – and over-determined, is that part of the thinking or part of what attracted you to it?

HYA: Yes, to a certain extent. I saw many other images of the explosion from distant perspectives, but this image was about something else. I tried to understand it better through a reconstruction that borrows from archaeological strategies, by re-building the site to extract further narratives. I began to notice the sadistic nature in which these figures were made to look realistically human, fully dressed and accessorised. It really disturbed me. What is this image actually doing?

AD: Going back to our earlier discussion, including how my own research-based practice and your practice-based research relate to one another, I was thinking about the apparatus of image production in relation to both the newest work here, *Atom Elegy*, and the earlier work, *Windows on the West*. One thing occurred to me: since the 1950s, there have been numerous treaties to legislate for (and against) the use of nuclear weapons. Today most nuclear 'detonations' are virtual. They exist as computer-based and algorithmic modellings of what happens to fissile material after the event of detonation. To this end, virtual modelling has effectively taken over from the actual explosion or the nuclear detonation itself. I think this is a great metaphor for thinking through the inscription of violence into the digital. How does the digital inscribe violence, how does it contain violence, how does it let violence erupt? Which brings us right back to the inscription of violence into the image we see in *Windows on the West*. Violence is there from the outset; the violence of the gaze inscribed in the realisation of an image of otherness. There is also the violence of extraction – what was being extracted, fixed, repurposed, and perpetuated in that photographic moment.

This returns us, by way of a provisional end, to matters that you and I have discussed at length, specifically, how colonial violence has been re-inscribed through digital technologies in order to occupy future realities. The question, as we have been discussing in relation to your practice and my research, is how do you disrupt that transmission of information? What methodologies do you use and what forms of digital methodology can you use to think from *within* these apparatuses of image production, be they based on photographs, the weaving of an image, or a digital process?

HYA: Indeed, not only what methodologies can one use to think from within the apparatus of image production, but also how does one critically confront that inscription of violence through formal and informal visual investigation and practice?

[1] For a further discussion of these issues in relation to colonisation and drone warfare, see: Heba Y. Amin and Anthony Downey: "Contesting Post-Digital Futures: Drone Warfare and The Geo-Politics of Aerial Surveillance in the Middle East," in: *Digital War* 1 (2020), pp. 65–73. Available here: https://www.wheniseethefuture.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/01_-Amin-Downey2020_Article_ContestingPost-digitalFuturesD-2.pd, last accessed 17 June 2022.

[2] For an extended discussion of the historical application of technologies to the Egyptian landscape, see "Avian Prophecies and the Techno-Aesthetics of Drone Warfare: Heba Y. Amin in Conversation with Anthony Downey," in: *(W)archives: Archival Imaginaries, War and Contemporary Art*, ed. by Daniela Agostinho, Solveig Gade, Nanna Thylstrup and Kristin Veel, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020, pp. 143–161.

Windows on the West, 2019

Hand-woven Jacquard textile, recycled yarn
135 x 250 cm

Made in collaboration with Textile Prototyping Lab, Berlin

The first documented photograph taken on the African continent dates from November 7, 1839; merely three months after France introduced the daguerreotype camera to the world. The photograph was taken in Alexandria by the French painter Horace Vernet who, along with his nephew Frédéric Goupil-Fesque, captured the exterior of Muhammad Ali Pasha's harem palace. Although there was nothing erotic about the image as such, its contrived sexual implications excited audiences in Paris at the time. Due to the inaccessibility of the North African female subject, European artists invented an ideal of romance by photographing native women to fit their phantasmatic projections and fabricated illusions of the other.

These images, which were also produced through the *mise-en-scène* of orientalist painting, became a propaganda tool for the colonial project. The original photograph, alongside countless others, came to represent France's domination over a territory through the subjugation of North African women. *Windows on the West*, a woven reconstruction of Vernet's original photograph, restages this historical event through the technologies of automated labour and machine vision. More specifically, the project explores how the extractive techniques of colonial vision can be critically reconsidered from within their structural and phantasmagorical logic.

Horace Vernet, Frédéric Goupil-Fesquet, Harem de Méhémet-Ali, 1839, lithograph.

This and previous pages:
Windows on the West, 2019
Hand-woven Jacquard textile, recycled yarn
135 x 250 cm

THE ALGORITHMIC APPARATUS OF NEO-COLONIALISM

Anthony Downey

"What do I have against images? Perhaps it is that they all have the same flaw: euphoric amnesia. They no longer remember what they signify, where they come from, who they are related to, and yet none of this bothers them."[1]

Images made by machines for machines are void of an aesthetic context. They are part of a machine-based operative logic and do not, in the words of Harun Farocki, "portray a process but are themselves part of a process."[2] Defined by the operation in question, rather than their referential logic, such images – following Farocki's formulation – are commonly referred to as 'operational images.' Structurally, they are not propagandistic (they do not try to convince), nor are they instructive (they are not interested in directing our attention). Inasmuch as they exist as abstract binary code rather than pictograms, they are not, furthermore, content-based. Void of anthropological or aesthetic intention, the practical process-based functionality of 'operational images' effectively anticipates the obsolescence of 'perception' as a human-defined activity and, conterminously, the ascendancy of 'machine vision.'[3]

Although 'operational images' would seem to be largely understood in negative terms (largely due to their insular and closed procedures), their purposiveness is readily revealed in their real-world impact – the way they are deployed, for example, in surveillance technologies and the establishment of autonomous models of warfare. This recursive and yet purposive function of 'operational images' foreshadows the opaque architectural logic of 'black box' technologies and the artificial intelligence (AI) systems that underwrite aerial-bound forms of drone warfare and other contemporary apparatuses of data extraction. Needless to say, the technologies that commandeer and exploit airspace – both surveillance- and drone-based – are demonstrably detrimental to those who are subject to their apparatuses, all of which raises a crucial question: how do we conceptualize the threat associated with the all-too-real impact of air-bound technologies that, to a large extent, remain beyond the purview, control, and grasp of the vast majority of the world's population?

In order to more fully frame this question, and in doing so further understand the logic of apparatuses that produce present-day realities (through, for example, cartographic, photographic, and digital means), we need to observe the degree to which 'operational images' and surveillance systems – in terms of their organisational structures, taxonomic methods, and conceptual foundations – found historical purchase in the racially deterministic discourses of colonization. The will to calculate, measure, and qualify the other – the ambition to 'fix' the other as an objectified, calculable and thereafter commodifiable entity – is the link between the deterministic ambitions of colonial discourse in the 18th and 19th centuries and, through

the algorithmic re-inscription of the biopolitical and racialised other, the contemporary technologies of neo-colonial surveillance. The neo-colonial history of drone warfare and satellite surveillance – predicated upon and thereafter powered through 'operational images' and AI systems – is, in sum, irredeemably linked with the technologies of colonization.

The extractive logistics of data extraction, not to mention the violence involved in the summoning forth and exploitation of resources, was all too amply captured in Aimé Césaire's succinct phrase: "colonisation = thingification." Through this resonant formulation, Césaire highlighted both the inherent processes of dehumanisation practised by colonial powers and how, in turn, this produced the docile and productive – that is, commodified and commodifiable – body of the colonized. As befits his time, Césaire understood these methods primarily in terms of wealth extraction (raw materials) and the exploitation of physical, indentured labour: "I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out."[4]

The exploitation of raw materials, labour and people, effected through the violent proficiencies of western knowledge and power, was a process of dehumanization that deferred, if not truncated, the quantum possibilities of future realities – that much is evident throughoutCésaire's perspicacious analysis of colonialism. However, this colonial ambition towards biopolitical control and the reductive, calculating determination of life and death has, in our post-digital era, become algorithmically codified into autonomous surveillance and weapons systems that reveal the present-day and future-oriented calculations of (neo) colonisation. Whereas colonisation was first and foremost preoccupied with wealth and labour extraction through occupation, neo-colonisation, while furthering such ambitions, is indelibly implicated with forms of data extraction through surveillance that establishes and, increasingly, seeks to pre-determine if not predict the future. This is to remind ourselves that the statistical and predictive analysis of future events is one of the foundational elements of machine learning and AI, if not the singular function of algorithms.

I would draw attention here, albeit in passing, to one of the cornerstones in the development of AI systems and their predictive logic – namely, cybernetics. Largely associated with the work of Norbert Wiener 1894–1964, specifically his research on the statistical and stochastic – that is, random variable patterns that can be statistically analyzed but not definitively anticipated – properties of 'feedback' in machinic and neurophysiological processes, cybernetics was developed with one goal in mind: ever more effective prediction and forecasting. During the Blitz in World War II in the 1940s, which regularly saw devastating German air raids being carried out over Britain, Wiener developed the so-called 'anti-aircraft (AA) predictor,' a computational device that was designed to aid ground gunners to more effectively predict the flight paths of enemy aircraft at given points *in the future*.[5] Notably, given our discussion here of 'operational images,' to more efficiently predict the arcs and courses of an aircraft's flight entailed the strategic obfuscation of the boundaries between

human operators (pilots, gunners) and machines (airplanes and anti-aircraft weapons) so that they could be rendered as a self-enclosed system that was, in turn, susceptible to approximate statistical calculation. Calculative thinking, the predicate if not ontological foundation of technology, conceptualises the behaviour of human operators as a function of machinic logistics, in sum.

An elemental precursor to ideas that later became critical to self-organizing systems of machine learning in the algorithmic modelling of realities, the predictive and machinic context of the cybernetic function is crucial to understanding how AI is deployed today as a means to pre-empt, occupy and, indeed, annex the future. The historical line connecting colonial and neo-colonial practices involves the epistemological violence of applied knowledge and the actual violence of data extraction that is now realized through the calculative logic of predictive algorithms and their ambition to forecast and control the future. Through locating the historical, epistemological and actual violence that impacts upon communities and individuals through such technologies, we can, in part at least, begin to reveal the precise forms of extraction that we have come to associate with the increasingly algorithmic logic of (neo)colonial imperialism.

If 'operational images' are wholly disinterested in human agency, apart from the initial programming process and the occasional (re)calibration of their operative status, then our input into these forms of 'image' production and their real-world impact – consider how drones use algorithmically trained 'data sets' to pre-emptively target and eliminate subjects – remains circumstantial at best.[6] Realized through machine-led forms of image-production, interpretation and empirical deduction, this apparatus of machine vision – given its often binary and exponential algorithmic functioning – advances the historically deterministic reasoning, if not racial determinism, of the imperial strategies we associate with the rationalizing procedures of colonization: reality (the actual) must be fixed if it is to be exploited (extruded) in the name of exercising dominion over a region and its people. The machinic rationalisation of our corporeal, proprioceptive relationship to air-bound systems of domination and command further elides, moreover, our responsiveness to their impact.

All of which returns us to our original question, with a supplementary twist: what are the real-world implications of 'operational images' in an age where we have devolved responsibility for, and our responsiveness to, their impact on communities who have long lived under the objectifying, calculating realities of unaccountable (neo)colonial power. Has the 'black box' logic of 'operational images' – specifically, their role in substantiating and corroborating the predictive logic of AI – given additional licence to the racially determined parameters of what legally, ethically and politically redefines human *being* (ontology) in the world? Thereafter, we must consider that any ontological crisis in the production and reception of images is likewise an existential crisis in what constitutes the value of being and, perhaps more profoundly, the significance of *not being* in the world. We might want to probe further here and enquire into whether the moment of critically engaging with these

activities effects a form of encounter that can re-conceptualize the military-industrial-corporate entanglements of airspace and, in so doing, productively hold such technologies to account. What would a counter-operational image look like? Can the mise-en-abyme of black-box-like technologies be negotiated with or, indeed, modulated by methods of envisioning/engaging their operative logic – and, if so, how might this be achieved? How can we, in short, hold 'operational images' to account?

If Berkeley's historical adage – *esse est percipi*; or, to be is to be perceived – has any leverage in our post-digital age, then we must ask a parting question: what forms of being are brought forth if the event of 'perception,' if not the formal actualization of humanness *(being)*, is performed by a machine? What forms of being are eradicated or rendered null and void (value-less) by such calculations? Have we disavowed our responsibility for and responsiveness to the work of 'operational images' and machine vision precisely because they autonomize (and render abstract) the rationalizations of neo-colonial exploitation?[7] Finally, do these affordances of image production and digital technology convert extractive forces into relatively palatable practices while also, more cynically, placing them beyond the purview and oversight of political and ethical considerations regarding the human right to life?

This essay is a revised and extended version of "The Algorithmic Apparatus of Neo-Colonialism. Or, Can We Hold 'Operational Images' to Account?," first published in *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 61–62 (2021). The author would like to thank the editor of that volume, Jacob Lund, for the permission to republish it here.

[1] Maria Stepanova: *In Memory of Memory*, transl. by Sasha Dugdale, London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021, p. 71.

[2] Farocki used the phrase 'operational images' to describe images made by machines for machines, the full implications of which he explored throughout his three-part film *Eye/Machine I, II, III* (2000–3). These machine-oriented images are not produced in relation to representing either subjects or objects; rather, they are part of an operation.

[3] In the context of military robotics, Paul Virilio predicted the use of 'vision machines' as an inevitable outcome of technologies that are driven by conflict. Cf. Paul Virilio: *The Vision Machine*, transl. by Julie Rose, London: British Film Institute, 1994, p. 59.

[4] Aimé Césaire: "Discourse on Colonisation," in: *Monthly Review Press* (2000) [orig. 1950], pp. 42–43 [emphasis in original].

[5] Wiener, it has been observed, "came to see the predictor as a prototype [of the] the vast array of human proprioceptive and electrophysiological feedback systems. The model then expanded to become a new science known after the war as 'cybernetics.'" Cf. Peter Galison: "The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision," in: *Critical Enquiry* 21, 1 (1994), pp. 228–266, p. 229. Cf. also, as cited in Galison, P. Masani and R.S. Phillips: "Antiaircraft Fire-Control and the Emergence of Cybernetics," in: *Norbert Wiener: Collected Works with Commentaries*, ed. by Masani, vol. 4, Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 1985, pp. 141–79.

[6] A recent United Nations Security Council Report, published on 8 March 2021, observed that a Turkish-made Kargu-2 drone may have acted autonomously in selecting, targeting, and possibly killing, militia fighters in Libya's civil war. Cf. https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2047327/S_2021_229_E.pdf. If this is proven to be the case, it would be the first acknowledged use of a lethal weapon with artificial intelligence capability operating autonomously to find, attack, and kill humans – that is a true "fire, forget and find" system. For a fuller account, cf. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/03/world/africa/libya-drone.html?referringSource=articleShare, last accessed 11 June 2022.

[7] For a fuller discussion of these issues, cf. Anthony Downey: "The Future of Death. Algorithmic Design, Predictive Analysis, and Drone Warfare," in: *The Aesthetics Of War. Art, Technology, Time,* Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, forthcoming 2023, ed. by Jens Bjering, Anders Engberg-Pedersen, Solveig Gade, and Christine Strandmose Toft. Cf. also Anthony Downey: "The Algorithmic Apparatus of Neo-colonialism. Counter-Operational Practices and the Future of Aerial Surveillance," in: *Shona Illingworth: Topologies of Air*, ed. by Anthony Downey, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2022, pp. 275–283.

The Devil's Garden
Marseille's Pyramid, 2019

Mixed media: pyramid replica
240 x 370 x 370 cm

HD video with English/German subtitles
6'18"

Made in collaboration with Mountain Studios Berlin, Rafat Alkotaini, Karina Chada, Daniel Kovacs, Zoe Lambez, Lena Meginsky, Ryan Miller, Joon Park, Evangelia Pipila, Elana Scott, Liana Vilhanova, Will Taylar

The Devil's Garden: Marseille's Pyramid explores how colonial violence is engendered through both the material and immaterial occupation of future realities. Examining narratives relating to the German Africa Corps and their lingering presence in northern Egypt, this project observes how – during the WWII campaign in al-Alamein – millions of landmines were planted by Erwin Rommel's army. Through her research and fieldwork in what remains one of the most landmine-infested regions in the world, Amin came across a peculiar pyramid built by the Luftwaffe to commemorate the WWII German fighter pilot Hans-Joachim Marseille. By creating a replica of the Nazi-era memorial and bringing it back to Germany, the artist inverts the historical framing of these events and focuses on how European propaganda – perpetuated by mainstream films, in particular – continues to disavow responsibility for the techno-fossils that remain in the aftermath of colonial violence.

The Devil's Garden: Marseille's Pyramid, 2019
Exhibition view from *Fruit from Saturn*, Center for Persecuted Arts, Solingen


HIER STARB UNBESIEGT
HPTM. H.J. MARSEILLE
CAP. PILOTA - M.O.V.M
QUI CADDE - INVITTO
30.9.1942

The Devil's Garden: Marseille's Pyramid, 2019
HD video with English/German subtitles, 6'18"

Mathew Letuku and Der Stern von Afrika:
Interview with Roberto Blanco, 2019
HD video, subtitles
20’48”

Camera: Markus Rack, Maurice Egen

Shot in front of Heba Y. Amin’s replica of a WWII German fighter pilot’s memorial in Northern Egypt, this interview with Cuban-German celebrity Roberto Blanco addresses his role in *Der Stern von Afrika*, a controversial biopic about Hans-Joachim Marseille for whom the monument is built. While mostly recognized for his success in Schlager music in Germany, Blanco’s film career began as the apparently fun-loving butler to Marseille in this 1957 film. In reality, his character Mathias was an actual person, Corporal Mathew Letuku, who was a prisoner of war from South Africa fighting for the British army. Unsurprisingly, Letuku’s reports differ greatly from those in the German media at the time and how he came to be represented in the film was, likewise, at odds with his personal recollections. In a further act of epistemological violence, Letuku’s experience of the years spent in captivity until 1945, alongside that of 14,583 other South African soldiers taken as prisoners of war in Germany and Italy in 1942, were effectively written out of the film’s narrative.

Yvan Goll: Atom Elegy

Jürgen Kaumkötter

“Atom Elegy” is the opening poem of the book *Fruit from Saturn* by Yvan Goll, first published in 1946 by Hemisphere Editions, Brooklyn (USA).

The manuscript for Goll’s “Atom Elegy,” reproduced here, is partly typed, partly handwritten. The first fair copy of it, produced in 1942, was revised following the detonation, by US air forces, of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – or, as Goll put it: “The blue gas globe […]/ Bearing God’s corpse.”

The manuscript is accompanied by a letter dated November 27, 1945, from Cyril Connolly, the then editor of the literary magazine Horizon. Connolly thanks Goll for sending the manuscript, but rejects it as “too inaccurate” for printing.

The Literature Collection of the Civic Foundation at the Center for Persecuted Arts is based on the research of the author and journalist Jürgen Serke. In *Die verbrannten Dichter* (The Burned Poets), published in 1979, Serke memorialized Yvan and his wife Claire Goll. The collection and the museum are dedicated exclusively to artists whose opportunities for development and works were blocked, prevented, or annihilated by the dictatorships of the last century and totalitarian regimes up to the present day.

The Center for Persecuted Arts is a cross-genre museum and its Collection of Art and Literature tells of lost, forgotten, and rarely considered works of art, stories, and historical fates.

A set of dummies propped up in the Sahara Desert awaiting an atomic bomb explosion during the French nuclear testing, 1960. The French Reggane nuclear test series was a group of 4 nuclear tests conducted in 1960-1961 during the Algerian War. Science History Images / Alamy Stock Photo

ATOM ELEGY

I.

Thus the promethean spark returns
To its dismantled fount

In pitchblende orchards grew the holy fruit
Sweet atom fissioned in its foetal center
To fate's twin death-birth

High frequency of wrath
Has made rock run like oil
Steel boil to vapor

Atom deity
Bombard my heart at will
With neutrons of your truth
Transform my eyes to yellow nitric stars
I secretly accept with wisdom of the dove
My death and resurrection

II.

The ray of rays shatters my insane soul
And feeds me with inhuman energy

O new nativity in the protean cradle
O death festival for the old sore thighs of earth
Unlocking the concentric love

The Tree of Science Saturn-blossoming
Enhances the real trinity

Spiritual rose from aged centuries
The master wheel among the world of wheels
This rose was light

This rose was round
As is the rose of the universe
As is my eye in which all eyes are hidden
Round as the dew
Round as my head
In which the stars of million atoms ripen

III.

In the beginning was the word
In the beginning was the number

The word: prime essence out of which
Through seven thousand nights of labor
The Kabbalist compounded seventy names of God

The word: the Guide to the Perplexed
Out of the coal of memory

The element of elements
Poured in the mental furnace

O to the music of the withering stars
To the delirium of pregnant gongs
Out of my algebraic dreams
And old old fears
Dance: my beloved atom
Transfigured carnotite

IV.

The Divine Garment clothed my blandished thighs
Against the holy beasts and the mad angels

And the 10 numbers sprang from Adam's forehead
The spheric fruit of the Sephiroth
Became the emblems of his crown

The cipher: birthplace of the sphinx
Memorial of prenatal dawns

Past Delphi's tripod and cathedral domes
Pythagoras' revolving harmonies
Past Bruno's pyre and Einstein's time

Riding the wheel
The 10 again in sweet uranium 235
The seven-colored ray
Bursting from dying Self
The Infinite raped in Alamogordo

V.

Substance and Emanation One: Ibn Arabi
God in Us We in Him: Santa Teresa
One in All All in One: Zosimus

The ancient rock of contemplation
Now mined with energy of edelweiss

Beloved molecule
Shot from the past into the future
Straight through my heart

The blue gas globe above my fontanelled skull
Abruptly void
Void as a rusty rivet atom-laden
Bearing God's corpse

And man alone alone

ATOM ELEGY

by

YVAN GOLL

to Lukas Foss

I.

Thus the promethean spark returns
To his dismantled fount

In pitchblende orchards grew the holy fruit
Sweet atom fissioned in its foetal center
To fate's twin death-birth

High frequency of wrath
Has made rock run like oil
Steel boil to vapor

Atomic deity
Bombard my heart at will
With neutrons of thy truth
Transform my eyes to yellow nitric stars
I secretly accept with wisdom of the dove
My death and resurrection

II.

The ray of rays shatters my insane sould
And feeds me with inhuman energy

O new nativity in the protean cradle
O death festival for the old sore thighs of earth
Unlocking the concentric love

The Tree of Science saturn blossoming
Enhances the real trinity

Spiritual Rose from aged centuries
The master wheel among the world of wheels
This Rose was light

This rose was round
As is the rose of universe
As is my eye in which all eyes are hidden
Round as the dew
Round as my head
In which the stars of billion atoms ripen

III.

In the beginning was the Word
In the beginning was the Number

The Word: prime essence out of which
Through seven thousand nights of labor
The kabbalist compounded seventy names of God

The Word; the Guide of the Perplexed
Out of the coal of memory
Of the quaternal forest of our flesh

The element of elements
Poured in the mental furnace

O to the music of the withering stars
To the delirium of pregnant gongs
Out of my algebraic dreams
And old old fears
Dance: my beloved atom
Transfigured carnotite

IV.

The Divine Garment clothed my blandished thighs
Unites the holy beats and the mad angels

And the 10 Numbers sprung from forehead
The spheric fruit of the Sephirot
Became the emblems of the human

The cipher 10: the birthplace [illegible] *phinx*
Where the winged virgin of pre [illegible] *dawns*
Conceived the motion of the wh[illegible]

Past Delphi's tripod and cathedral domes
Pythagoras' revolving harmonies
Past Bruno's pyre and Einstein's time

The 10 is found in hot Uranium 235

V

The ancient rock of contemplation
Now mined with energy of edelweiss

Substance and emanation one: said Ibn Arabi!
For whom thy vain song: black souled cricket?

Beloved molecule of mine
Shot from the past into the future
Straight through my heart!

The blue gas globe above my fontanellèd skull
Abruptly void
Void as a rusty rivet atom-laden
Bearing God's corpse

And man alone alone

Italics
12 p.

ATOM ELEGY

by

Yvan Goll

I.

Thus the promethean spark returns
To its dismantled fount

swelled
In beryl orchards ripped the holy fruit
Sweet atom fissioned in his foetal center
To fate's encircling birth

Almighty weft of dispossessed suns
High frequency of wrath
Which makes rock run like syrup sap
Steel boil to vapor

Atomic deity
Bombard my heart at will
With neutrons of Thy truth
Transform my eyes in yellow nitric stars
I secretly accept with wisdom of the dove
My death and resurrection

All form returns to the original circle
The core of atom dwarfs the core of sun

IV.

And the 10 numbers sprang from Adom's forehead
The spheric fruit of the Sephirot
The golden emblems of the crown
Rotating as the wheel of fate

The cipher 10: the palace of the sphinx
Where the winged virgin of prenatal dawns
Conceives the title of the Magnum Opus

Past Delphi's tripod and cathedral domes
Pythagoras' revolving harmonies
Past Bruno's pyre and Einstein's time

The 10 again in sweet Uranium 235
Rayed off the sky
Swept off the sun

Brother beseech thy utter recollection
Quaternal soul
The eye of eyes split by the ray of knowledge

IV.

The Divine Garment clothed my blandished thighs
Unites the holy beasts and the mad angels

And the 10 numbers sprung from my forehead
The spheric fruit of the sephirot
Became the emblems of the human crown

The cipher 10 : the birthplace of the Sphinx
Where the winged virgin of prenatal dawns
Conceived the motion of the wheel

Past Delphi's tripod and cathedral domes
Pythagoras' revolving harmonies
Past Bruno's pyre and Einstein's time

The 10 again in hot Uranium 235

V.

But what: if 10 were just the I plus Zero
Eye-window into nothingness
Marrxiage to death

The molecule shot from the past through me into
the future
A bullet of the hunter Energy

The blue gaz globe above my fontanelled skull
Abruptly void and empty as
A rusty rivet atom-laden
Bearing God's corpse?

Alas the very planetary system
The sperm of nebulae
Exploding in the gray cloud of my brain

And man alone alone

Horizon

V. W. WATSON, C. V. CONNOLLY

Edited by Cyril Connolly

6 SELWYN HOUSE, 2 LANSDOWNE TERRACE, W.C.1

TERMINUS 4898

27th November, 1945.

Dear Yvan Goll,

Thank you very much for your letter, and your kind remarks about my book. I look forward to receiving the copy of Hemispheres with the article by Calas. Please send him my Com!

We hope to be able to work in your advertisment shortly.

Thank you, also, for sending me your poem. I liked it and think it has some admirable things in it, but I felt that it was too imprecise as a whole in spite of some lovely imagery.

Yours very sincerely,

Cyril Connolly

Yvan Goll,
Hemispheres.

Atom Elegy, 2022

12 miniature dummies, mixed media
Dummies: ca. 30 cm (height); table: 90 x 160 x 210 cm

Made in collaboration with Jacqueline Silva

Atom Elegy (2022) confronts France's nuclear experiments in Algeria and the far-reaching impact of radioactive fallout. A haunting photograph from 1960 depicts two rows of human-like figures awaiting the detonation of an atomic bomb in the Algerian desert. Through a miniature model and live photo reconstruction of the photograph, *Atom Elegy* captures the anticipation of nuclear violence as an imminent event occurring in real-time. The catastrophic vision of nuclear destruction, a potent symbol of hubristic modernity, is both sublimated and foregrounded as a testimony to the colonial legacies of territorial destruction and, crucially, the neocolonial will to occupy future realities.

The title *Atom Elegy* refers to the poem, published in 1946, of the same name by the German-French poet Yvan Goll. The poem was composed with the utopian promises of an 'age of nuclear power' and attendant ideals of modernism in mind. However, after the detonation of the first atomic bomb, and the destructive violence it unleashed, Goll substantially revised the poem.

The original manuscript is in the collection of the civic foundation of the Center for Persecuted Arts in Solingen, Germany.

Previous pages:
Atom Elegy, 2022
12 miniature dummies, mixed media

pp. 50–58: Yvan Goll: *Fruit from Saturn*. *Poems*, New York: Hemispheres editions, 1946, pp. 11–20.

pp. 60–70: Original manuscript; Bürgerstiftung im Zentrum für verfolgte Künste | Center for Persecuted Arts.

p. 72: Letter from Cyril Connolly to Yvan Goll, 27 November 1945; Bürgerstiftung im Zentrum für verfolgte Künste | Center for Persecuted Arts.

BRINGING COLONIALISM INTO THE FRAME: A CONVERSATION WITH HEBA Y. AMIN

Dominique Routhier

In 2013, Egyptian authorities detained a stork on suspicions of espionage. The stork was equipped with an electronic tracking device that was mistakenly assumed to be a piece of hostile surveillance equipment. To the entertainment of a then recently booming social media public, the story of the overly paranoid Egyptian authorities soon went viral. To the Egyptian artist Heba Amin, whose art project *The General's Stork* (2016–ongoing) critically mines this incident, the story of the captive bird reveals something less amusing about how visual technologies leading up to automated drone surveillance have been developed and deployed in a colonial context. Amin's art thus prompts us to fundamentally reconsider the 'automation of visuality' by bringing colonialism into the frame.

Previous pages:
Atom Elegy, 2022
12 miniature dummies
Dummies: ca. 30 cm (height); table: 90 x 160 x 210 cm

Dominique Routhier: Beginning from your art project *The General's Stork*, could you elaborate on the context of this work and what is it essentially about?

Heba Y. Amin: In general, my art and research centres on questions of power in relation to technology and its role in visual representation. I've been investigating the correlation between the development of technology and the political implications of image production in the Middle East and Africa in the last 150 years or so. Broadly speaking, this is the thread that ties my body of work together, which matured in a meaningful way during the 2011 Egyptian revolution and the years that followed. This was a turning point, when social media and other technological platforms played a big role in allowing us to contextualise the uprisings and politics within a broader history, especially with the massive production of visual material.

In 2013, I started investigating a viral media story about a stork that was captured in southern Egypt and accused of espionage. The story was broadcast by multiple Western media outlets in a tone that, presumably, had something to do with their disapproval of Egyptian politics and the turn of events that had unfolded at that time. The so-called democratically elected leader of the Muslim brotherhood had been overthrown by a second wave of uprisings, and Egypt's revolution was exposing itself as a farce. The spy stork was seemingly instrumentalised to mock the deteriorating political situation.

However, suspicion to the extent of detaining a bird is indicative of something more deeply dysfunctional, and I was motivated to find its source. What I did not know is that it would lead me to uncover the complicated history of aerial imaging technologies and how Middle Eastern landscapes have served as the backdrop for the development of drone warfare since the late nineteenth century. If one considers the whole arc of this narrative and the context of how these technologies were developed, it is not so strange that a bird with an electronic device attached to its body would cause concern. *The General's Stork* is a project that brings these findings together and tells the story of how the bird's-eye view actively transformed and shaped the geopolitics of the Middle East in the last century.

DR: There's a related aspect of *The General's Stork*, which is poetically addressed in your video work *As Birds Flying* (2016), namely the question of the 'naturalization' of drone warfare (see fig. 1). The stork, obviously, functions discursively as a cipher for the paranoid age of drone warfare. But in your work there is a sense in which the saying that 'birds of a feather flock together' acquires an uncanny material truth, as for instance when you draw attention to the convergence of military and civilian drone engineering trends that model drones on actual, living birds. As a researcher working on these same topics, it can sometimes feel difficult to find a form that can adequately address these historical convergences. Is there a method to your work as an artist?

Fig 1. *As Birds Flying*, 2016
7'11", video still

HYA: Drone warfare, colonialism, occupation, and violence are not poetic; they are horrific things. But we need to find ways to relay our humanity and contextualise our contemporary conditions, and art has the power to reveal injustice in affective ways. My research as an artist is driven by visual content which, in many ways, allows me to confront otherwise difficult narratives. We need other ways of engaging with how we want our futures to look and spaces to nurture discourse on what we consider to be technological development and human progress, for example. Who wants to live in a world where machines of death simulate beautiful creatures to the point of confusion?

The short allegorical film *As Birds Flying* speaks to these issues of concern. The stork, of course, becomes the vehicle through which the paranoid age of drone warfare is confronted, but the film also seduces you with beautiful drone footage of what turns out to be the occupied Palestinian landscapes that storks migrate through. It takes its title from a Biblical prophecy from the Book of Isaiah. I made the connection after finding a particularly peculiar portrait of Lord Allenby with his pet marabou stork in his villa in Cairo (see fig. 2). Allenby was the British Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Egypt in the early twentieth century and is attributed with his successful capture of Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks in 1917. In keeping with British interests to expand political and economic control over the region as well as to 'restore' Palestine to an imagined biblical landscape, Allenby was inspired by the birds in this passage to justify an air assault and colonial take-over of Jerusalem.

Perhaps it is in the nuance of these absurd details that allows one to see history in other ways. Perhaps it will make you laugh before you dwell on your anger, but ultimately it attempts to shake what we understand to be the truth through assumed historiographies.

DR: Your narrative arc follows the historical metamorphoses from the bird into the drone (and vice versa), and through the example of Lord Allenby and British colonialism you highlight how new technologies are always embedded in broader cultural narratives. In this particular

Fig 2. *The General's Stork I*, 2020
80 x 100 cm, archival color print

case, part of the justification for the imperialist settler-mentality grew out of Christian religious narratives about divine and vengeful 'birds.' So in a sense, you are not merely describing 'cultural narratives' but exposing actual, historical frames of war?

HYA: We know that Lord Allenby was deeply religious and much of his actions were inspired by his Christian convictions. We also know that British colonialism was very much driven by religious ideology: in Palestine, a move towards 'British Restorationism' was supported by the idea that the second coming of Christ was only achievable if the British played a role in ensuring that the Holy Land belonged to Jews. There is no doubt that the imperialist settler-mentality grew out of religious narratives, among other motivations. More importantly, how do we expose these historical frameworks to better understand our contemporary context?

The amount of digital content being produced and the relatively new access to digitised historical archives allow us to revisit and reframe history. What I am particularly concerned with is the role that imaging technologies play in shaping ideology, particularly in relation to colonial warfare. The colonial context has, in many ways, been written out of the story of Western technological progress, and I think it is important to bring occupation back into that narrative.

DR: Part of your exhibited archive footage includes the first aerial photographs of Palestine and serves as a reminder, among other things, that the bird's-eye view is inextricable from the history of colonization. But more specifically, do you see present-day drone surveillance and new forms of 'machinic vision' as structurally embedded in Western universalist perceptions of space?

HYA: Imaging technologies from the nineteenth century were already being used to justify colonial land grab. Panoramic photography which emerged shortly after the invention of

the daguerreotype, for example, was utilised as a tool to visualise the vast scale of territory 'available' for occupation on the African continent. Depicting the land as a vast open territory was intended to act upon the desire for the openness of 'primitive' African landscapes where a new aesthetic of fantasy geographies was at the core of visualising the colonial project. German missionary and photographer Carl Hugo Hahn developed a technological device, a camera with a revolving panoramic lens, capable of photographing 180-degree landscapes for the purpose of visualising this expansive environment. This was intended as an invitation for Europeans to occupy 'empty' land.

The view of the world from above, however, introduced a new imagination of territory drawn from the fantasies of colonial ideology. The early twentieth century saw British military interests in aerial technologies which presented opportunities for land expansion in Europe's territories in Africa and the Middle East. Aerial images, in particular, played a significant role in the desire and fulfilment of Europe's vision of the modern nation-state.

DR: How so? By portraying the landscape in which ways?

HYA: In the context of Palestine, aerial images were used to frame the landscape as empty, human-less, and free for the taking. In this case, it was not only about relaying the primitiveness of landscape and the possibility of superimposing European fantasies on virgin territory. Palestine was of particular interest for its Biblical history, not a land with an existing modern people and society, and therefore depicted as such. The aerial photograph became an extension of utopian thinking, a future world mirroring European (Christian) ideology. Aerial photography was framed as a tool of scientific research, for surveying and imperial cataloguing; 'machinic vision' therefore came to represent progress as the bird's-eye view became a symbol of modernity. The narrative of religion combined with the 'evidentiary' nature of technology became almost impossible to question.

DR: So, do you see this colonial prehistory as embedded in the technical apparatus itself, or in the 'universalist' gaze that is constructed through these machines? I'm asking this because one thing I noticed in your works, and really found intriguing, was that you seem to be investigating 'vision' in this more fundamental, historically anchored sense. I mean, obviously, many contemporary artists work with visual representations and the question of what is seen and what is not seen – I'm thinking more specifically about artists such as Harun Farocki, Trevor Paglen, and Hito Steyerl here – but I get the feeling from your artworks like *Vision is one of the Senses* (2016) through to *The General's Stork* that you are perhaps investigating the question of visuality at a deeper level (see fig. 3)? Is that an objective of yours?

HYA: The colonial history is absolutely vital in contextualising the role of the technical apparatus. I look at how the earliest photographs of the region were extrapolated from a

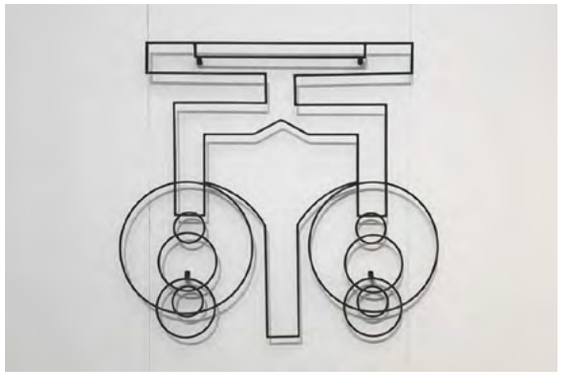

Fig 3. *Vision is One of the Senses*, 2016
110 x 120 x 6 cm, iron, powder coated

long tradition of the orientalist gaze. For example, only three months after the invention of the daguerreotype was gifted to the world, French artists rushed to North Africa to capture erotic images of North African women. Due to the inaccessibility of the North African female subject, European artists invented an idea of romance by photographing the native woman to fit their vision, their fabricated delusion. Their image, constructed by the dreamscapes of orientalist painting, was a tool of political propaganda for the colonial project. Sexualised representations of women came to represent the domination of territory; their exploited bodies merged with the idea of claiming land. Indeed, the technical apparatus emerged from this predatory context of seeing, except now it was validated through the technological lens.

Indeed, I am very much influenced by the artistic practice of Harun Farocki – as well as Trevor Paglen and Hito Steyerl – for their groundbreaking scholarship on 'machinic vision.' I found that it was also important for me to fundamentally understand how the history of vision has been, and continues to be, narrated through a Western 'universalist' perspective.

DR: So by going back in time, you are essentially contesting the historical construction of Western visuality?

HYA: Precisely. My research on early photography takes a closer look at scientific and philosophical developments on optics and vision dating back to tenth- and eleventh-century Arabic manuscripts. Until recently, these important treatises on optics were essentially written out of history. I discovered that many of the ideas that were attributed to the Renaissance era far preceded it, and that the knowledge that had already been produced and published by that time was usually not acknowledged. Until recently, a scholar like me was often not granted permissions to explore archives in European institutions, and now, with the efforts in digitising archives, many historical manuscripts are more easily available. While one still

has to have the right affiliations, with the right institutions and the right credentials in order to access archives, scholars from the Global South are suddenly privy to parts of their own histories that they've never had access to before.

As a result, the scholarship of the tenth-century Arab thinker and scientist Ibn al-Haytham, for example, is finding its way back into contemporary scholarly discourse. Ibn al-Haytham's groundbreaking manuscript, *The Book of Optics (Kitab al-Manazir)*, made significant scientific observations about the mechanics of vision and the philosophy of perception. His work was the first to explain vision as a function of the brain; he demonstrated vision by intromission of light rays to the eye rather than rays being emitted from the eye. Furthermore, his book contemplates the manipulative potential of perception at length. For me, this became a potent source for cultural critique.

DR: Tellingly, I wasn't familiar with al-Haytham's theories other than by your mentions of him as a source for your optical sculptures. It reminds me of how in the scholarly discourse sometimes referred to as visual studies, the term 'visuality' points to a 'social fact' (Hal Foster) rather than to the physical processes involved in seeing. An essential mediating component of this compound 'social fact' is, of course, technology.

In Dziga Vertov's groundbreaking film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), the technical apparatus, or the mechanical eye, appears as a world-making apparatus, 'freely' distributing its visual coordinates and creating a new world. Since Vertov, much of the Western avant-garde filmmaking tradition has reveled in the artistic affordances of new forms of machinic vision. Today, with the drone, Vertov's 'mechanical eye' literally reaches new heights and appears as something like the fulfilment of the avant-garde dream of technical progress. Given what we know, should we be more careful in assessing the 'mechanical eye's' so-called objective visual constructs, its alleged capacity for world-building and community-making?

HYA: I would argue that there is no such thing as the 'mechanical eye's' objective visual construct. Even Farocki's notion of 'operational images' – where machines speak to machines through 'images' – does not function on an objective level in so far as the logic of these technologies and the systems on which they are built stem from racially driven colonial constructs. The history of aerial photography is inherently linked to political cartography and a vertical power hierarchy that was, and continues to be, strategically enforced through the structuring of space and the policing of bodies from above. In that sense, it is very difficult to look at the development of these technologies and consider them in terms of world-building without recognising the military and corporate frameworks they serve. Automating visuality, or machine-led forms of image production, become an extension of a system that is already racially deterministic in nature. But it's not just about visuality and image-making, it's also about how the systematic weaponization of imaging technologies has become increasingly normalised through the

algorithmic apparatus, especially as we remove ourselves from the responsibility and complicity of image-making.

DR: This kind of 'genealogical' investigation of yours into vision and visuality seems to me a kind of corrective not just to contemporary art but also, more broadly, to the trajectory of European modern art as such. I mean, if we consider the lineage of avant-garde filmmakers from Vertov through to mid-century high modernists such as Lazlo Moholy-Nagy and other forerunners of Op-art, we find that, for all the intricate aesthetic explorations of the mechanics of vision, there is little to no interest in inquiring into the historicity of the Western image-making tradition and the material construction of the 'universal' gaze. Your 'optical sculptures' share an aesthetic affinity with these kinds of mid-century sculptures, but I assume that they are intended as a different kind of artistic intervention?

HYA: My optical sculptures portray the original scientific diagrams from Ibn al-Haytham's *Book of Optics*; they speak to that moment in history when we accurately understood the mechanics of vision. I would say that these sculptures are a critique of the material construction of the 'universal' gaze, and a general questioning of perception and knowledge. Whose framework of knowledge? Whose history?

DR: This reminds me of your series of self-portraits called *Portraits of Woman with Theodolite (I–III)* which show you posing with an intricate technical apparatus called a 'theodolite,' which as far as I can tell was originally used for land surveying purposes (see fig. 4)? But visually and aesthetically, these portraits come across as a détournement of some iconic portraits of avant-garde filmmakers posing with their camera. Could you tell me a little bit about the context of these self-portraits – and if and how they relate to questions of art historical 'representation'?

Fig. 4. *Portrait of Woman with Theodolite* Series, 2019

HYA: These images were made in the spirit of early studio portraiture where the display of technological objects as a representation of human progress was a common photographic theme. The triptych portrays a woman with a technological device *(Portrait of Woman with Theodolite I–II, 2019)* and a woman with the technological device in use *(Survey of German Landscapes by Night (New Morgenthau Plan) I*, 2019). I began to experiment with ways to articulate the power gap between observer and observed, and to make the embedded politics of tools of observation and image-making as transparent as possible.

In 2014, I embarked on a five-month road trip along contemporary migration routes from Africa to Europe with a surveying tool known as a theodolite. By flipping the power dynamics and positioning myself as a voyeur, I attempted to magnify the predatory frameworks of African landscapes that have been inscribed in dominant histories. Through the surveying and surveillance of contested territories, the dominant political powers embedded in the landscapes become visible through visual documentation. While the non-human subjects of my images are clearly contemporary, their aesthetics resemble early photographic techniques that regurgitate a colonial logic.

The project is again about the gaze: who is doing the gazing? What does it mean to be the voyeur, to adopt the male gaze? The European gaze? I took a performative approach in embodying the technologies, embodying the archives as a way to better understand the logic of the technical apparatus. By addressing the fundamental act of seeing, my work regards a confrontation of scopic regimes as imperative to a thorough reading of images.

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Dominique Routhier: "Bringing Colonialism into the Frame: A Conversation with Heba Y. Amin," in: *MAST. The Journal of Media Art Study and Theory* 3, 1 (2022), pp. 134–147: https://mast-nemla.org/archive/vol3-no1-2022/Bringing_Colonialism_into_the_Frame.pdf , last accessed 12 June 2022.

APPENDIX

When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter I, 2020

Following pages:
Courtesy of the Mosaic Rooms, London.

In October 2020, the Mosaic Rooms in London hosted *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes, Chapter I*, the first UK solo exhibition of artist Heba Y. Amin.

Curated by Anthony Downey, the exhibition presented a series of ongoing works that engaged with a number of issues and concerns, including the story of a migratory bird turned international spy, the emerging digital spaces that were instrumental in Egypt's revolution in 2011, and a critical survey of historical proposals to drain the Mediterranean Sea. In these contexts, Amin's research-based practice continued to propose speculative, often satirical, approaches to understanding the enduring impact that technology has on political and territorial realities.

The exhibition was accompanied by a series of online public events, organised by Amin and Downey, that investigated the regional politics of the Middle East, broader global concerns about surveillance, dictatorships, and the emergence of digital authoritarianism. Foregrounding the interdisciplinary research and digital practices that were explored throughout the exhibition, the public programme focused on the need for interdisciplinary methodologies that could operate from within the apparatuses of image production. The concepts explored in *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter I*, in particular its exploration of how digital technologies affects the construction of our historical consciousness and socio-political imagination, prefaced many of the considerations explored in the current exhibition, that is *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter II*.

Drawing on a true tale of how Egyptian authorities detained a migratory stork in 2013 and accused it of espionage, *The General's Stork*, for example, investigated the politics of aerial surveillance – against the backdrop of biblical prophecies, drone warfare, and colonial narratives – from a bird's-eye view. The work utilised film, performance, and archival research material to explore the extent to which Western military techniques of reconnaissance have determined the topographical quartering of the Middle East and, in turn, how paranoia can become so prevalent that a bird can be accused of spying.

In another extensive work, the artist referenced the staged elements of dictatorial modes of public address. Throughout *Operation Sunken Sea*, Amin revealed the historical contexts behind colonial megalomaniacal geo-engineering proposals to drain the Mediterranean Sea and, simultaneously, writes herself into this historical lineage by performatively adopting the persona of a quasi-dictator. Re-purposing the original proposals, as part of this work Amin broadcasts a speech, recorded live in Malta in 2018, in which she pitches a contemporary 'solution' to the so-called migration crisis by relocating the sea within the African continent.

Amin's ongoing multi-channel video installation *Project Speak2Tweet* utilised voice messages recorded by phone in response to the Egyptian government's countrywide Internet shutdown during the first days of the 2011 uprising. Juxtaposed with the abandoned urban structures that represent the long-lasting effects of corruption, the work highlights the extent to which advances in communication technologies are often disguised by their utopian promises of democratic expression.

A full listing of events can be accessed here:
https://www.wheniseethefuture.com/public-program/

Amin and Downey launched their book, *Heba Y. Amin: The General's Stork* (Sternberg Press, 2020), as part of the opening programme. See here: https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/the-generals-stork/


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Author's Biographies

Anthony Downey is an academic, author, and editor. He is Professor of Visual Culture in the Middle East and North Africa (Birmingham City University). He sits on the editorial boards of Third Text (Routledge), Journal of Digital War (Palgrave Macmillan), and Memory, Mind & Media (Cambridge University Press), respectively. He is the series editor for *Research/Practice* (Sternberg Press/MIT, 2019–ongoing). Recent and upcoming publications include *Unbearable States: Cultural Activism and Digital Research Methodologies in the Middle East* (forthcoming, 2023); *Nida Sinnokrot: Palestine is Not a Garden* (Sternberg Press and MIT, 2023); *Khalil Rabah: Falling Forward – Works 1995–2025* (Sharjah Art Foundation, 2022); *Topologies of Air: Shona Illingworth* (Sternberg Press and the Power Plant, 2021); and *Heba Y. Amin: The General's Stork* (Sternberg Press/MIT, 2020). In 2020 Downey curated *Heba Y. Amin: When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter I* (Mosaic Rooms, London).

Jürgen Kaumkötter, art historian and historian, Director of the Centre for Persecuted Arts in Solingen, is an expert in Holocaust art, art in exile and persecuted art. In 2005, he put together the exhibition *Art in Auschwitz 1940–1945* that was opened by the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the Centrum Judaicum in Berlin and for the first time acknowledged artefacts from the camp as autonomous art. His re-evaluation of Holocaust art received international recognition with the book *Der Tod hat nicht das letzte Wort. Kunst in der Katastrophe 1933–1945* (2015; *And Death shall have no Dominion. Art in the Holocaust 1933–1945*). His exhibitions and books often feature a dialogue between contemporary art and historical works, for example in *Himmel und Hölle* zwischen 1918–1989 (*Heaven and Hell 1918–1989*). In its review of the book, the Süddeutsche Zeitung said: "Books, letters, photos [have] the ability [to establish] an emotional connection with the observer. This phenomenon has been demonstrated with exemplary success. It would be no exaggeration to say that this opulent volume has already become the standard reference work."

Lotte Laub, curator and arts writer, joined Zilberman, Istanbul/Berlin in 2016 and is currently the director of the Berlin gallery. She obtained her PhD at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies at the Freie Universität, Berlin with her dissertation *Gestalten durch Verbergen*. Ghassan Salhabs melancholischer Blick auf Beirut in Film, Video und Dichtung (Revealing by Concealing. Ghassan Salhab's Melancholic Glance at Beirut in Film, Video and Poetry), published by Reichert Verlag in 2016. In 2010, she was a Visiting Doctoral Fellow at the Orient-Institut Beirut and in 2015, after completing her PhD, received an Honours Postdoc Fellowship from the Dahlem Research School at the FU Berlin. She worked previously at the Gropius Bau in Berlin and had lectureships at the FU Berlin.

Dominique Routhier is a cultural theorist and postdoctoral researcher currently employed at the University of Southern Denmark. His writings have appeared in Rethinking Marxism; Nordic Journal of Aesthetics; Boundary 2 online; and LA Review of Books, among other places. He is the author of a forthcoming book about the Situationist International (Verso, 2023).

Heba Y. Amin

b. Cairo, Egypt, 1980
Lives in Berlin

EDUCATION

2010-12 Post-Graduate Degree, Media Computing,
University of Applied Sciences Berlin (HTW), Germany
2009 MFA, University of Minnesota: Interactive Design/New Media Art
Certificate in New Media Art, Transart Institute, Berlin, Germany
2005 Post-Baccalaureate Certificate: Painting, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, MN, USA
2003 Apprenticeship in Painting, Macalester College, post-grad study
2002 Bachelor of Arts: Studio Art, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN, USA

CURRENT APPOINTMENTS

Professor of Digital and Time-Based Art, Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design, Germany
Doctorate Fellow, BGSMCS, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
Co-Founder, Black Athena Collective (artist collective)
Visual Arts Journal Curator, Mizna: SWANA Literature + Art, Minneapolis, MN
Faculty, AtWork program, Moleskine Foundation, Milan, Italy

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022 *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes: Chapter II*, Zilberman, Berlin, Germany
2020 *When I See the Future, I Close my Eyes*, Mosaic Rooms, London, UK
2019 *Fruit from Saturn*, Center for Persecuted Arts, Solingen, Germany
2018 *A Rectilinear Propagation of Thought*, Zilberman, Berlin, Germany
2017 *An Astronomical Determination of the Distance Between Two Cities,*
Zilberman, Istanbul, Turkey
The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid, Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin, Germany
2016 *The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid*, Zilberman, Istanbul, Turkey
2007 *Latitudes*, California Building Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, USA
2006 *Heba Amin*, Atwood Gallery, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota, USA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 *As Birds Flying*, Glasgow Short Film Festival, Scotland
From Where I Stand, Biennale für Aktuelle Fotografie, Mannheim, Germany
The Derailment of the Usual, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, The Netherlands
2021 *Friendship. Nature. Culture. 44 Jahre Daimler Art Collection.*
Werke der Sammlung 1920–2021, Daimler Contemporary, Berlin, Germany
Lost. In Between. Together, 22 Bienal de Arte Paiz, Guatemala City, Guatemala
The Refracted Body, Film Programme Liverpool Biennial, UK
2020 *A Wildness Distant*, Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery Columbia University, NYC, USA

Library of Land and Sea, 5th Istanbul Design Biennial, Turkey
Trembling Landscapes: Between Reality and Fiction, Eye Film Museum,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
To you belongs the gaze and the infinite link between things,
Quai Branly Museum, Paris, France
2019 *Tell me about yesterday tomorrow*, Munich Documentation
Centre for the History of National Socialism, Germany
Crossing Lines, Kunsthalle Osnabrück, Germany
Deep Sounding: History as Multiple Narratives. DAAD Gallery Berlin, Germany
The Edge of the Sea, Jugendstilsenteret og KUBE, Ålesund, Norway
Touch Me, Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, Stockholm, Sweden
Tomorrows fictions: spéculatives pour l'avenir Méditérranéen, Le Lieu Unique, Nantes, France
Climbing Through the Tide, B7L9 Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia
Still Burning, Varbergs Konsthalle, Sweden
2018 *Geographies of Imagination*, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany
Kunstpreis der Böttcherstrasse, Kunsthalle Bremen, Germany
African Metropolis, MAXXI, Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome, Italy
We don't need another hero, 10th Berlin Biennale, Germany
The General's Stork, Radio Reina Sophia, Madrid, Spain
Motherland in Art, Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Poland
The Island is what the sea surrounds / Dal Bahar Madwarha,
Valetta 2018, European Capital of Culture, Malta
2017 *Afrotopia*, 11th African Biennale of Photography, Bamako, Mali
Witness, Karachi Biennale KB17,, Pakistan
a good neighbor, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey
Deep Memory, Kalmar Art Museum, Kalmar, Sweden
Afriques Capitales, La Villette, Paris, France
How Much of This is Fiction, FACT, Liverpool, UK
As If – The Media Artist as Trickster, Framer Framed, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
2016 *Beton*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria
The City in the Blue Daylight, Dak'Art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal
The Earth is an Imperfect Ellipsoid, Marrakech Biennale Parallel Projects, Morocco
Making Use, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Poland
As Birds Flying/Kama Tohalleq al Teyour, Forum Expanded, 66th Berlinale, Germany
Fluidity, Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany
2015 *To What End?*, Camera Austria, Graz, Austria
2014 *Hopes and Impediments*, Prince Claus Fund Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Art of Peace, Artraker Award Exhibition, London, UK
A Time for Dreams, IV Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, Russia
What Do We Know When We Know Where Something Is?,
9th Forum Expanded, 64th Berlinale, Germany

SELECTED AWARDS

2021 Fondazione Merz "ad occhi chiusi…", winner
2020 Anni and Heinrich Sussmann Artist Award, winner
2019 Paulo Cunha E. Silva Prize, short-list
2018 Kunstpreis der Böttcherstrasse, short-list
2014 Artraker Artist Prize, short-list

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

The British Museum
Bundeskunstsammlung / The Federal Collection of Contemporary Art, Germany
KADIST
Daimler Art Collection
Private Collections

SELECTED RESIDENCIES & FELLOWSHIPS

2021 Artist in Residence, Audain Visual Artist-in-Residence,
School for the Contemporary Arts, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada
2019 Fellow, Field of Vision, First Look Media, NYC, USA
2017 Fellow, Digital Cultures Research Lab, Centre for Digital Cultures,
Leuphana University, Lüneburg, Germany
2016 Artist in Residence, Künstlerhaus Bethanie Berlin, Germany
2010–12 Fellow, DAAD Stipendium, University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, Germany
2009 Rhizome Commissions Recipient, New Museum, NYC, USA

SELECTED TALKS & PERFORMANCES

2021 Artist Talk, School of Culture and Communication, Aarhus University, Denmark
The General's Stork, Global Angst, Münich Spielfest, Germany
Decolonizing Art Narratives: Arab women Artists Today, in conversation with
MET curator Clare Davies, VCU Qatar
Transversal Orientations: Entangled Terrains, C-MAP seminar series, MOMA, NYC, USA
Spring Audain Visual Artist in Residence: Heba Y. Amin,
Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada
2020 *From a Changing World*, Keynote, European Cultural Foundation, The Netherlands
Artist Talk, Chennai Photo Biennale, India
Operation Sunken Sea, Münchner Kammerspiele Global Art Festival Munich, Germany
2019 *Cosmopolis #2: rethinking the human*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
Artist Talk: *Tell me about yesterday tomorrow*,
Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism, Munich, Germany
Artist Talk: *Hotspots: Migration and the Sea*, Akademie der Künste der Welt,
Cologne, Germany
Operation Sunken Sea, Mediterranean Facisms, University of Basel, Switzerland
Female Subjectivities and Technological Dystopias, Kunsthalle Wien, Austria
The General's Stork, Digital Earth, Khoj International Artists' Association, New Delhi, India
The General's Stork, Fondation Thalie/Goethe Institute, Brussels, Belgium
Operation Sunken Sea: Draining the Mediterranean, Konstfack Stockholm, Sweden
2017 Artist Talk: Cultural Subversion as Artistic Practice, Cosmopolis,
Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
The General's Stork, 15th Istanbul Biennial, Turkey
Producing Image Activism after the Arab Uprisings, Stockholm University, Sweden
2016 *The General's Stork*, Asia Contemporary Art Week,
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC, USA
Homeland is not a Series, Impakt Festival Utrecht, The Netherlands

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS AS AUTHOR

2021 "Egypt's 2011 Internet Shutdown: Digital Dissent and the Future of Public Memory –
Heba Y. Amin, Abdelkarim Mardini, and Adel Iskandar in Conversation, moderated by
Anthony Downey," in: *Camera Austria*, March 2021.
2020 Anthony Downey (ed.): *Heba Y. Amin: The General's Stork*,
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2018 Heba Y. Amin: "Autonomous Power of Resistance? On South-South Relations," in:
10 Years Zilberman, 2018 (print).
2017 Heba Y. Amin, Dawit L. Petros: "To Think and Rethink the Terms of History," in:
Medina: Au coeur de, Bamako, 2017 (print).
2016 Heba Y. Amin: "Towards a Spatial Imaginary: Walking Cabbages and Watermelons," in:
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hacked-an-award-winning-series/.
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Atom Elegy, 2022 (dummy photos): Wael Eskandar (pp. 51–73)

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